

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
DATE: 10TH JULY 2024
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE
AUTHOR: STEPHEN HULSE

SUBJECT: WHISTLEBLOWING ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with information about whistleblowing for 2023-24.

Recommended: That Members

[1] note the contents of the report.

Background

2. "Whistleblowing" is the term used to describe the raising of a concern by a worker who considers that there has been wrongdoing or malpractice by his employer or fellow workers and where it is in the public interest to do so. This could be:
 - a criminal offence, for example fraud;
 - someone's health and safety is in danger;
 - risk or actual damage to the environment;
 - a miscarriage of justice;
 - the Service is breaking the law, for example does not have the right insurance; or
 - it is believed that someone is covering up wrongdoing.
3. The legislation, initially introduced in 1998, is designed to reduce malpractice in organisations and to ensure individuals can report malpractice without fear of reprisals. Provided they satisfy certain conditions in the way they report the wrongdoing the law protects workers from dismissal or detriment. Employees, trainees, and agency workers are classed as workers.

Information

Whistleblowing Complaints

4. The Service has engaged an organisation called Safecall to provide an outsourced whistleblowing hotline. It enables reporting and is said to “allow employees to speak up and report their concerns to the highest levels of management.”
5. The Safecall service is promoted annually by the Health and Safety Manager, last in April 2024. The Article, that was contained in the staff newsletter “The Green” is attached to this report in **Appendix 1**.

Whistleblowing Activity

6. The Service has been contacted on three occasions by Safecall in 2023-24, however, the concerns raised did not meet the threshold for whistleblowing. An overview of concerns raised with Safecall is provided in **Appendix 2**.

Financial Implications

7. There is an annual charge for the Safecall reporting system and call handling. In 2023-24, this was £4,152.

Legal Implications

8. The arrangements to deal with whistleblowings seek to ensure compliance with the legislation and mitigate risks to the reputation of the Service and the Fire Authority.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. The arrangements are meant to minimise the risk of reprisals against those raising concerns and allow concerns about discriminatory practices to be raised internally and dealt with appropriately.

Environmental Implications

10. There are no environmental implications.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, HQ SADLER ROAD, WINSFORD

TEL 07776 297806

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

Appendix 1 – Safecall article 2024

If you have a sincere concern at work or are concerned about a wrongdoing then report it immediately to your line manager, or speak to a senior manager or contact Safecall on:

0800 915 1571 or report online at: www.safecall.co.uk/report

All calls are treated confidentially by Safecall, and you may remain anonymous if you wish.

Who are Safecall?

Safecall is a completely independent company that operates a confidential reporting service for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. It is available 24 hours a day and is staffed by highly skilled professional call handlers. Offices are based in the UK, and you can reach them 24/7 365 days of the year via the Freephone number or send a report via the website.

How does it work?

When you contact Safecall by telephone you will be asked by the call handler to explain your concern in as much detail as possible. During this time, the call handler will take notes and may ask you questions based on the account you give. Once complete, Safecall will send a written report to a senior manager.

If you choose to report the concern online by visiting the Safecall website, you will need to complete the online form, which once completed and submitted, Safecall will send a written report to a senior manager.

Can I remain anonymous?

Yes. It is acceptable to remain anonymous. Even if you make a mistake and accidentally tell Safecall your name they will not pass it on. Also, Safecall do not record any audio of the calls to help protect the identity of anonymous callers.

What can be reported?

The service is available to receive reports including, Fraud, Security, Health and Safety, Data Breaches, Bullying, Bribery, Corruption, Dishonesty, Harassment, Victimisation, or any other issue that you feel is unacceptable in the workplace.

Who will receive my report?

The report is initially sent to the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager who will then allocate the report to the most appropriate person in the Service to address.

Appendix 2 – Safecall events

First report

Call was made anonymously,

The Allegation

A delivery driver felt that they were spoken to in an unfriendly manner whilst at the Sadler Road Headquarters delivering a package.

The Service finding:

The individual receiving the package was made aware of the complaint. A discussion was held with their line manager about dealing with members of the public.

Outcome: Did not meet whistleblowing threshold.

Second Report

Call was made semi-anonymously,

The Allegation

The caller reported issues relating to safeguarding that could damage the reputation of the Service.

A concern was raised following a visit to a care home. These visits are normal and provide fire prevention and safety advice to residents and staff.

On this occasion the visit was unscheduled and unannounced. The caller was concerned in relation to approach taken and methods used to conduct the visit by the Watch manager which they deemed contravened Service Policy and put the Service at risk.

The Service finding:

Following an investigation into the events reported through the Safecall platform, the findings were:

- 1) No safeguarding issues were identified.
- 2) The caller was right to raise concerns as the approach to the visit was somewhat unorthodox, consequently the Service Performance Group have implemented further training for managers.

Outcome: Did not meet whistleblowing threshold.

Third report was generated via Phone on 01/09/2023 15:41

Call was made named.

The Allegation

During a counselling session it was suggested that a staff member had the traits of a Neurodiversity condition/s.

Through their medical practitioner they were put onto a waiting list to have the condition formally diagnosed; however, this could take up to two years.

Mistakenly the manager did not follow the appropriate approach for dealing with Neurodiverse issues from the Human resources team and/or EDI officer. Therefore, the manager applied incorrect solutions to work commitments.

The Service finding and outcome:

Manager was advised accordingly on best approach and methods to be undertaken. Meeting between the two parties resolved the issue and appropriate practices applied.

Outcome: Did not meet whistleblowing threshold.