

Highland Council - Raising Concerns – Guidance Note

There may be times when you have concerns about the organisation or your personal experiences at work that you wish to raise. There are a number of routes you can take within the organisation or externally to do this depending on the issue you are raising. Initially you may wish to discuss issues with your line manager or your Trade Union representative, but should you wish to take things forward more formally there are 2 key policies you can use, and both offer internal and external routes to raise your concerns.

It is important that you consider the best route for you as outlined below to afford you support and legal protection if whistleblowing, however you should at all times be mindful of the [Employee Code of Conduct](#) and ensure that you meet its requirements and there is specific reference to making public statements and the Whistleblowing Policy on page 10 of the code under 'Your Rights as an Employee'.

Whistleblowing

The aim of this policy is to encourage employees and workers¹ to raise any serious concerns they have with confidence that they will not be harassed or victimised for doing so. Workers include those who work closely for the Council such as agency staff and key contractors. You have legal protection under Whistleblowing legislation provided you raise issues in good faith, and you are also protected against harassment or bullying in raising concerns. More detail is available at <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing> Whistleblowing is defined in legislation in relation to malpractice and wrongdoing falling into one or more of the following categories:

- Criminal offences
- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Miscarriage of justice
- Health and safety danger of an individual
- Damage to the environment
- Deliberate attempt to cover up of any of the above

(Examples: fraud; breach of financial or procurement regulations; corruption; bribery; dishonesty; criminal activity or creating or ignoring risks to health, safety or the environment)

Whistleblowing does not cover:

- Less serious matters where an employee should raise these with their line manager and follow the organisational hierarchy for escalating concerns.
- An employee's concerns about their employment which should be addressed in accordance with the relevant HR policy for example bullying and harassment (see below) or [Grievance Policy](#).

If you are considering whistleblowing, it is important that you read the [Whistleblowing Policy](#) and comply with its requirements. You may also wish to take advice. This can be undertaken internally by contacting the [Corporate Fraud Team](#) for confidential advice or externally by contacting [Protect](#) (formerly known as Public Concern at Work) on 020 3117 2520. If you are a member of a Trade Union, you can also contact your trade union representative for advice.

¹ Workers are those who work closely for the Council such as agency staff and key contractors.

If you feel that you cannot report your concern within the Council and decide to blow the whistle to a prescribed person you must make sure that you have chosen, the correct person or body (prescribed person) for your issue. Further information can be found on the UK Government website at [prescribed persons](#). The most likely external contact is Audit Scotland and contact information is outlined below:

Audit Scotland
102 West Port
Edinburgh
EH3 9DN Tel: 0131 625 1500
Email: correspondence@audit-scotland.gov.uk
Website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/contact-us/whistleblowing

Bullying and Harassment

The Highland Council takes bullying and harassment of staff very seriously and has a [Bullying and Harassment at Work](#) policy. There is also a detailed [Guide to Dealing with Bullying and Harassment](#).

Bullying and Harassment Contacts have been identified and trained as initial points of contact to listen and discuss incidents and allegations, outline options and support available as appropriate in a confidential manner. Information can be found in the policy document. In addition, internal support can be sought from Line Managers and the HR team.

Employees may wish to seek informal advice from their Line Manager, [Bullying and Harassment Contact](#), Trade Union Representative or a colleague. Where a concern is raised directly to a manager, they should address the issue promptly and informally where possible. Employees can use the informal or formal processes to resolve a complaint as outlined in the policy and guidance.

Note that NHS staff working for the Council have a separate policy and processes available to them at <https://workforce.nhs.scot/policies/bullying-and-harassment-policy-overview/>

External support services are also available and outlined below to help employees get the appropriate advice:

- National Bullying Helpline & Website This helpline is run by Volunteers and is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday on 0845 22 55 787.
www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk
- TUC (Trades Union Congress) <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-guidance/bullying-violence-and-harassment>
- ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) ACAS has published a leaflet and handbook on harassment in the workplace which provide advice and guidance on what employers and workers should expect from each other:
www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=794.
- HSE (Health and Safety Executive) with information, research, case studies and access to the HSE Management Standards. www.hse.gov.uk/violence
- Direct Gov. Directgov is the website of the UK government for its citizens, providing information and online services for the public all in one place
<https://www.gov.uk/workplace-bullying-and-harassment>
- Stonewall - Stonewall is an organisation dedicated to supporting lesbian, gay, bi and trans people. <https://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk/> Info line: 08000 50 2020
- Citizens Advice Bureau – [bullying and harassment](#)

- Scottish Government - NHS confidential advice and information line
<https://www.gov.scot/collections/nhs-confidential-advice-and-information-line/>