

WHISTLEBLOWING

2020 Annual Report



November 2020

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The matters raised in this report are only those that came to our attention during the course of our work – there may be weaknesses in governance, risk management and the system of internal control that we are not aware of because they did not form part of our work programme, were excluded from the scope of individual audit engagements or were not brought to our attention. The opinion is based solely the work undertaken as part of the agreed internal audit plan.

Introduction

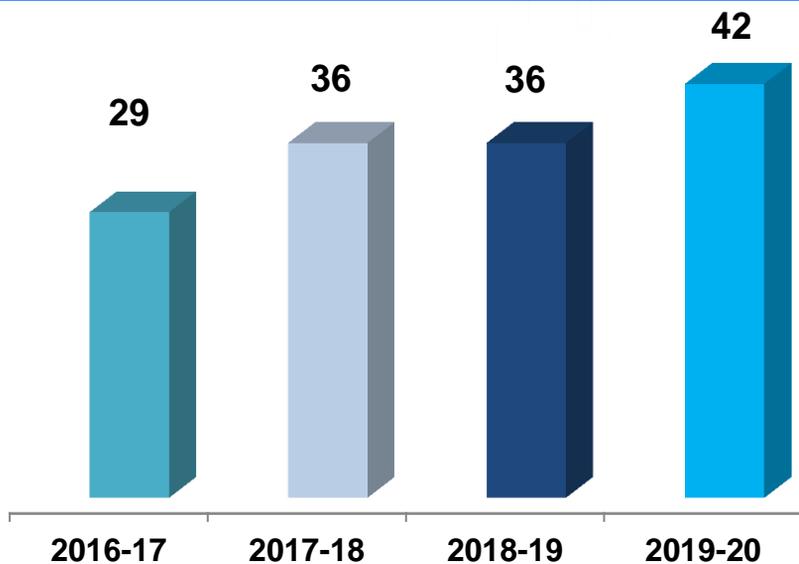
Key Messages

The Annual Whistleblowing Report provides assurance to the Audit Committee on the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for whistleblowing. The report provides information and analysis of whistleblowing activity in 2019/20. Whistleblowing is a key element in the Council's governance arrangements and Lincolnshire County Council are committed to the principles of honesty, openness and accountability.

42

LCC Whistleblowing calls during 2019/20

This represents an increase of 16%



Whistleblowing calls received during the last 4 years show a clear upward trend. We are pleased to identify this as it demonstrates that callers have confidence in the process.

66%

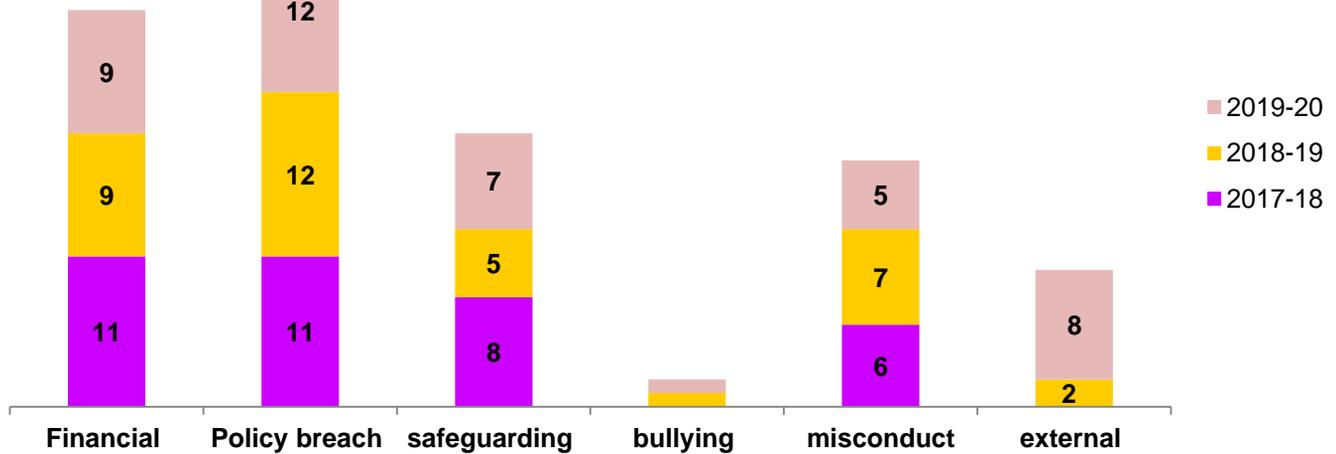
We are also pleased to report that 66% of those reporting whistleblowing concerns in 2019/20 waived their right to anonymity. The figure for 2018/19 was 55% so this shows a significant increase.

We believe this also demonstrates confidence as whistleblowers feel protected from reprisals and that their concerns will be dealt professionally and sensitively.

Disclosures

The nature of concerns reported have generally remained consistent during 2019/20. We have identified a small increase in safeguarding referrals although nothing too significant and no prevalent patterns to these reports. Fraud (financial) and policy breach referrals are unchanged on the previous years reports and we have noted a slight fall in misconduct reports. It is pleasing that bullying and harassment referrals remain low in keeping with cases recorded in the last few years. The number of external issues reported have increased although there is no pattern recognised and most resulted in no further action.

Type of concerns raised

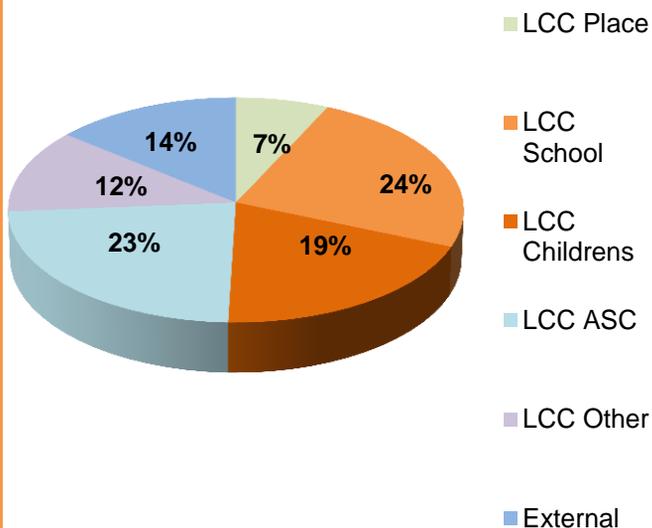


The Counter Fraud and Investigation Team operate the whistleblowing facility on behalf of all Lincolnshire councils and other external agencies.

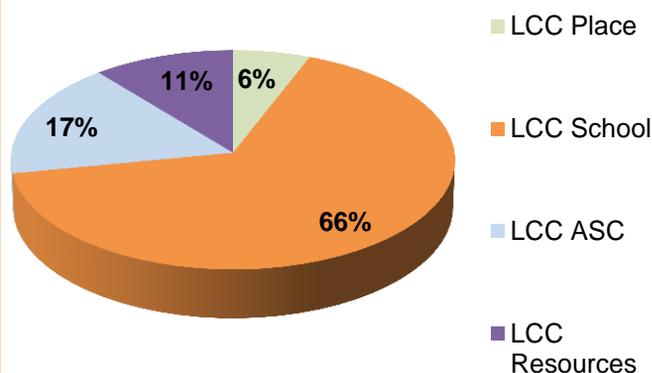
131 reports were made in 2019/20 in comparison with 113 (16% increase) in the previous year. This correlates with the LCC only contacts. Referral numbers remain high and we believe this demonstrates that our promotion of reporting methods is effective.

Disclosures

2019/20 LCC Disclosures by Director area



2018/19 LCC Disclosures by Director area



The charts show that the largest proportion of reports relate to Schools and the wider Children’s Services area – this trend has continued over several years and is not surprising given the number of schools within the county. The overall percentage has fallen quite markedly during the period – from 66% to 43% and we have a strong and proactive relationship with management in Children’s Services which allows these issues to be investigated and addressed.

Contacts regarding Adult Care continue to be the next most prevalent area – again this is expected and can relate to a range of different areas. There has been an increase in this director area from 6 to 10 so we will continue to monitor reports received accordingly and plan to work with Adult Care management to respond with organisational learning.

Other areas such as Place remained quite static in terms of reports received. As noted on Page 3, we received several reports regarding external parties and these were referred to the relevant agencies for follow up. We identified no concerning patterns or trends from these type of reports.

Resolutions

The majority of reports (22) were resolved through referral to management to address. Management are well placed to tackle minor issues and prompt action was taken without the need for formal investigation. There was a marked difference in outcomes and resolution of cases in 2019/20. A further 8 cases were resolved by other agencies (outside the council).

In the previous year, it was necessary to refer 22 (61%) reports to the Counter Fraud and Investigation Team for follow up. This fell to 12 referrals in the last year. The explanation for this could be that numerous calls were received on one case in 2018/19 and this may have skewed the results.

12 cases referred to CFIT

3 cases

Progressed to full investigations

9 cases

completed after preliminary enquiries

Outcomes

4

Management Action

3

Independent investigation

12

No further action

2

Advice given

Most of the cases referred required no further action. However, all referrals are treated seriously and work is always completed to find a resolution where required. Only 3 reached investigation with a further 4 cases being resolved through management action.

We have regularly promoted use of the whistleblowing line throughout the year and this was supported by a communication from the Chief Executive in March 2020 encouraging use where individuals had concerns to raise.