

After the Tanner Report – compliance and change in culture could cost £10 million

The cost of acting on the findings of an inquiry into whistle-blowing and workplace culture at The City of Edinburgh Council is set to top £10 million over the next five years.

That is in addition to £1.37 million paid for two investigations by independent inquiry chair, Susanne Tanner, QC, who ruled that a senior social worker at the centre of abuse allegations was protected by an “old boys network” and called for “transformational change” to how allegations of misconduct are handled.



The first report into former senior social worker Sean Bell, who died whilst facing criminal charges in 2020, urged the council to review its sexual abuse policy to include situations with employees that arise outside the workplace and outside of work hours.

It also recommended setting up a dedicated independent investigation unit within the council to look into all allegations in relation to employees of a sexual nature, domestic abuse, physical violence, harassment or stalking.

In the second report, commissioned on the back of the initial findings, Ms Tanner said there is “not a universally positive, open, safe and supportive whistle-blowing and organisational culture for the raising of and responding to concerns of wrongdoing within The City of Edinburgh Council”.

She said “strides have been taken” since a new whistle-blowing policy was introduced in 2014, but stressed “not enough” had changed within the council.

However, in an employee survey carried out as part of the inquiry, nearly half said they had not seen an improvement

since 2015 in the council's culture for reporting serious concerns.

In total, 50 recommendations for improving workplace culture were made, and unanimously accepted by councillors in December.

It's now been revealed that over the next five years the council will spend £11.5 million on implementing the changes outlined in the reports.

The sum, which is an estimate the council says could change over time, will go towards hiring new staff specially trained to deal with serious allegations and other costs associated with taking forward the recommendations.

Furthermore, victims of Sean Bell will be compensated through the fund.

The council has grouped areas for improvement under five themes: "Policy Development and Review, Our Approach to Investigations, Training and Development, Systems and Processes and a Redress Scheme designed to compensate those who suffered as a consequence of the actions of Bell."

£1.5 million has been set aside for the rest of 2021/22, and £2.5 million is budgeted for each following year.

A report with a detailed breakdown of how this money will be spent will go before councillors next week.

Hugh Dunn, head of finance at The City of Edinburgh Council, said: "There's been extensive work and input between finance, HR colleagues and colleagues in legal services and corporate services generally.

"There's a full report going to council next week which will set out the detailed cost and breakdown of that regarding staff and other costs that'll be needed."

Council Leader, Cllr Adam McVey said: "I want to thank everyone who came forward to speak to the Inquiry and Review teams, including colleagues past and present. I know this has been a really difficult process for those affected but it is thanks to their testimonies that we are now in a position to implement these changes and deliver positive change.

"The culture of the Council has to be as positive, open, safe and supportive as it can be so that colleagues can feel confident in raising issues and that they will be properly investigated and responded to. Although there has been positive progress and improvements to the Council's whistleblowing and organisational culture in recent years, Ms Tanner has outlined more work to do.

"This implementation plan outlines the next steps we need to take to make sure the Council is in the very best position it can be to support our colleagues and continue to deliver the best services for the people of Edinburgh."

Depute Leader Cllr Cammy Day added: "Having gone through what has been an exceptionally difficult process, particularly for those who came forward so bravely, we now have a clear idea of the steps we need to take to drive forward meaningful change to the Council's whistleblowing and organisational culture. We must ensure that people can raise issues of concern, be confident they will be listened to and appropriate action is taken.

"This implementation plan outlines the challenges that lie ahead, both in terms of the financial commitment and level of resources required, but it's vital that we grasp this opportunity and continue working together to make further positive changes to our organisation."

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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