

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Northumberland County Council

**Corporate Fraud Team**

# **Anti-Money Laundering Policy**

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 There have been significant changes to the legislation concerning money laundering which have broadened the definition of money laundering and increased the range of activities caught by the statutory framework.
- 1.2 As a result, the obligations now impact on certain areas of local authority business and require local authorities to establish internal procedures to prevent the use of their services for money laundering.

## **2 Scope of the Policy**

- 2.1 This Policy applies to all employees of the Council and aims to maintain the high standards of conduct which currently exist within the Council by preventing criminal activity through money laundering.
- 2.2 The Policy sets out the procedures which must be followed (for example the reporting of suspicions of money laundering activity) to enable the Council to comply with its legal obligations.
- 2.3 Further information is set out in the accompanying Guidance Note. Both the Policy and the Guidance Note sit alongside the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and its Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

## **3 What is Money Laundering?**

- 3.1 Under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, money laundering means:
- concealing, disguising, converting, transferring criminal property or removing it from the UK (section 327 of the Act);
  - entering into or becoming concerned in an arrangement which you know or suspect facilitates the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property by or on behalf of another person (section 328);
  - acquiring, using or possessing criminal property (section 329);
- 3.2 Potentially any employee could be caught by the money laundering provisions if they suspect money laundering and either become involved with it in some way and/or do nothing about it. The Guidance Note gives practical examples. This Policy sets out how any concerns should be raised.
- 3.3 Whilst the risk to the Council of contravening the legislation is low, it is extremely important that all employees are familiar with their legal responsibilities - serious criminal sanctions may be imposed for breaches of the legislation.

## **4 What are the Obligations on the Council?**

4.1 Organisations conducting “relevant business” must:

- appoint a Money Laundering Reporting Officer (“MLRO”) to receive disclosures from employees of money laundering activity (their own or anyone else’s);
- implement a procedure to enable the reporting of suspicions of money laundering;
- maintain client identification procedures in certain circumstances; and
- maintain record keeping procedures.

4.2 Not all of the Council’s business is “relevant” for the purposes of the legislation: it is mainly the accountancy and audit services carried out by Financial Services and the financial, company and property transactions undertaken by Legal Services.

4.3 However, the safest way to ensure compliance with the law is to apply them to all areas of work undertaken by the Council; therefore, all employees are required to comply with the reporting procedure set out in section 6 below.

4.4 The following sections of this Policy provide further detail about the requirements listed in paragraph 4.1.

## **5 The Money Laundering Reporting Officer**

5.1 The officer nominated to receive disclosures about money laundering activity within the Council is Mr Steven Mason (Chief Executive). He can be contacted as follows:

Mr Steven Mason  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall  
Morpeth  
NE61 2EF  
Telephone: 01670 622929

5.2 In the absence of the MLRO, Mrs Alison Elsdon (Director of Corporate Resources) is authorised to deputise for him and can be contacted at County Hall at the above address or telephone 01670 622168

## 6 Disclosure Procedure

### ***Reporting to the Money Laundering Reporting Officer***

- 6.1 Where you know or suspect that money laundering activity is taking/has taken place, or become concerned that your involvement in a matter may amount to a prohibited act under sections 327 – 329 of the Act, you must disclose this as soon as practicable to the MLRO. The disclosure should be within “hours” of the information coming to your attention, not weeks or months later.

### **SHOULD YOU NOT DO SO, THEN YOU MAY BE LIABLE TO PROSECUTION.**

- 6.2 Your disclosure should be made to the MLRO using the pro-forma report attached at Appendix 1. The report must include as much detail as possible, for example:

- Full details of the people involved (including yourself, if relevant), e.g. name, date of birth, address, company names, directorships, phone numbers, etc.
- Full details of the nature of their/your involvement - If you are concerned that your involvement in the transaction would amount to a prohibited act under sections 327 – 329 of the Act, then your report must include all relevant details, as you will need consent from the National Crime Agency (“NCA”), via the MLRO, to take any further part in the transaction - this is the case even if the client gives instructions for the matter to proceed before such consent is given. You should therefore make it clear in the report if such consent is required and clarify whether there are any deadlines for giving such consent e.g. a completion date or court deadline;
- The types of money laundering activity involved - if possible, cite the section number(s) under which the report is being made e.g. a principal money laundering offence under section 327 – 329 of the Act, or general reporting requirement under section 330 of the Act, or both;
- The dates of such activities, including whether the transactions have happened, are on-going or are imminent;
- Where they took place;
- How they were undertaken;
- The (likely) amount of money/assets involved;
- Why, exactly, you are suspicious – the MLRO will require full reasons along with any other available information to enable him to make a sound judgement as to whether there are reasonable grounds for knowledge or suspicion of money laundering and to enable him to prepare his report to the NCA, where appropriate. You should also enclose copies of any relevant supporting documentation.

- 6.3 Once you have reported the matter to the MLRO you must follow any directions he may give you. You must NOT make any further enquiries into the matter yourself, any necessary investigation will be undertaken by the NCA. Simply report your suspicions to the MLRO who will refer the matter on to the NCA if appropriate. All employees will be required to co-operate with the MLRO and the authorities during any subsequent money laundering investigation.
- 6.4 Similarly, at no time and under no circumstances should you voice any suspicions to the person(s) whom you suspect of money laundering, even if the NCA has given consent to a particular transaction proceeding, without the specific consent of the MLRO; otherwise you may commit a criminal offence of “tipping off” (see the Guidance Note for further details).
- 6.5 Do not, therefore, make any reference on a client file to a report having been made to the MLRO – should the client exercise their right to see the file, then such a note will obviously tip them off to the report having been made and may render you liable to prosecution. The MLRO will keep the appropriate records in a confidential manner.

***Consideration of the disclosure by the MLRO***

- 6.6 Upon receipt of a disclosure report, the MLRO must note the date of receipt on his section of the report and acknowledge receipt of it. He should also advise you of the time-scale within which he expects to respond to you.
- 6.7 The MLRO will consider the report and any other available internal information he thinks relevant e.g.:
- reviewing other transaction patterns and volumes;
  - the length of any business relationship involved;
  - the number of any one-off transactions and linked one-off transactions;
  - any identification evidence held and undertake such other reasonable inquiries he thinks appropriate in order to ensure that all available information is taken into account in deciding whether a report to the NCA is required (such enquiries being made in such a way as to avoid any appearance of tipping off those involved). The MLRO may also need to discuss the report with you.
- 6.8 Once the MLRO has evaluated the disclosure report and any other relevant information, he must make a timely determination as to whether:
- there is actual or suspected money laundering taking place; or
  - there are reasonable grounds to know or suspect that is the case; and
  - whether he needs to seek consent from the NCA for a particular transaction to proceed.

- 6.9 Where the MLRO does so conclude, then he must disclose the matter as soon as practicable to the NCA on their standard report form and in the prescribed manner, unless he has a reasonable excuse for non-disclosure to the NCA (for example, if you are a lawyer and you wish to claim legal professional privilege for not disclosing the information).
- 6.10 Where the MLRO suspects money laundering but has a reasonable excuse for nondisclosure, then he must note the report accordingly; he can then immediately give his consent for any ongoing or imminent transactions to proceed.
- 6.11 In cases where legal professional privilege may apply, the MLRO must liaise with the legal adviser to decide whether there is a reasonable excuse for not reporting the matter to the NCA.
- 6.12 Where consent is required from the NCA for a transaction to proceed, then the transaction(s) in question must not be undertaken or completed until the NCA has specifically given consent, or there is deemed consent through the expiration of the relevant time limits without objection from the NCA.
- 6.13 Where the MLRO concludes that there are no reasonable grounds to suspect money laundering then he shall mark the report accordingly and give his consent for any ongoing or imminent transaction(s) to proceed.
- 6.14 All disclosure reports referred to the MLRO and reports made by him to the NCA must be retained by the MLRO in a confidential file kept for that purpose, for a minimum of five years.
- 6.15 The MLRO commits a criminal offence if he knows or suspects, or has reasonable grounds to do so, through a disclosure being made to him, that another person is engaged in money laundering and he does not disclose this as soon as practicable to the NCA.
- 6.16 Further information on how to make a report to the NCA is available from <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/ukfiu/how-to-report-sars>

## **7 Client Identification Procedure**

- 7.1 Where the Council is carrying out relevant business (accountancy, audit and certain legal services) and:
- a. forms an ongoing business relationship with a client; or
  - b. undertakes a one-off transaction involving payment by or to the client of 15,000 Euro (approximately £11,000) or more;
  - c. undertakes a series of linked one-off transactions involving total payment by or to the client(s) of 15,000 Euro (approximately £11,000) or more; or
  - d. it is known or suspected that a one-off transaction (or a series of them) involves money laundering then this Client Identification Procedure must be followed before any business is undertaken for that client. Please note that unlike the reporting procedure, the client identification procedure is restricted to those operating relevant business, i.e., Financial Services and Legal Services.
- 7.2 In the above circumstances, employees in the relevant unit of the Council must obtain satisfactory evidence of the identity of the prospective client, as soon as practicable after instructions are received (unless evidence of the client has already been obtained). This applies to existing clients, as well as new ones, but identification evidence is not required for matters entered into prior to 1 March 2004.
- 7.3 Once instructions to provide relevant business have been received, and it has been established that any of paragraphs 7.1 (a) to (d) apply, evidence of identity should be obtained as follows.

### ***Internal clients:***

- 7.3.1 Appropriate evidence of identity for Council divisions will be signed, written instructions on Council headed notepaper or an email on the internal email system at the outset of a particular matter. Such correspondence should then be placed on the Council's client file along with a prominent note explaining which correspondence constitutes the evidence and where it is located.

### ***External Clients:***

- 7.3.2 For external clients of the Council, appropriate evidence of identity will be written instructions on the organisation's official letterhead at the outset of the matter or an email from the organisation's e-communication system. Such correspondence should then be placed on the Council's client file along with a prominent note explaining which correspondence constitutes the evidence and where it is located.

7.3.3 With instructions from new clients, or further instructions from a client not well known to you, you may wish to seek additional evidence of the identity of key individuals in the organisation and of the organisation itself: please see the Guidance Note for more information.

7.4 In all cases, the evidence should be retained for at least five years from the end of the business relationship or one-off transaction(s).

7.5 If satisfactory evidence of identity is not obtained at the outset of the matter then the business relationship or one off transaction(s) cannot proceed any further.

## 8.0 Record Keeping Procedures

8.1 Each section of the Council conducting relevant business must maintain records of:

- client identification evidence obtained; and;
- details of all relevant business transactions carried out for clients for at least five years.

This is so that they may be used as evidence in any subsequent investigation by the authorities into money laundering.

8.2 The precise nature of the records is not prescribed by law however they must be capable of providing an audit trail during any subsequent investigation, for example distinguishing the client and the relevant transaction and recording in what form any funds were received or paid. In practice, the divisions of the Council will be routinely making records of work carried out for clients in the course of normal business and these should suffice in this regard.

## 9.0 Conclusion

9.1 The legislative requirements concerning anti-money laundering procedures are lengthy and complex. This Policy has been written so as to enable the Council to meet the legal requirements in a way which is proportionate to the very low risk to the Council of contravening the legislation.

9.2 Should you have any concerns whatsoever regarding any transactions then you should contact the MLRO.



**APPENDIX 1 – Report of Suspected Money Laundering**

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Report to Money Laundering Reporting Officer  
re money laundering activity

To: Mr Steven Mason  
Northumberland County Council - Money Laundering Reporting Officer

From: .....  
[insert name of employee]

Division:..... Ext/Tel No:.....  
[insert post title and section]

**DETAILS OF SUSPECTED OFFENCE**

Name(s) and address(es) of person(s) involved:  
[if a company/public body please include details of nature of business]

Nature, value and timing of activity involved:  
[Please include full details e.g. what, when, where, how. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary]

Nature of suspicions regarding such activity:  
[Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary]

Has any investigation been undertaken (as far as you are aware)?

[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please include details below:

Have you discussed your suspicions with anyone else?

[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please specify below, explaining why such discussion was necessary:

Have you consulted any supervisory body guidance re money laundering? (e.g. the Law Society)

[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please specify below:

Do you feel you have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the matter to the NCA? (e.g. are you a lawyer and wish to claim legal professional privilege?) [Please delete as appropriate]

Yes / No

If yes, please set out full details below:

Are you involved in a transaction which might be a prohibited act under sections 327-329 of the Act and which requires appropriate consent from the NCA?

[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please enclose details in the box below:

Please set out below any other information you feel is relevant:  
(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Please do not discuss the content of this report with anyone you believe to be involved in the suspected money laundering activity described. To do so may constitute a tipping off offence, which carries a maximum penalty of 5 years' imprisonment.

THE FOLLOWING PART OF THIS FORM IS FOR COMPLETION BY THE MONEY LAUNDERING REPORTING OFFICER

Date report received: .....

Date receipt of report acknowledged: .....

CONSIDERATION OF DISCLOSURE:

Action plan:

OUTCOME OF CONSIDERATION OF DISCLOSURE:

Are there reasonable grounds for suspecting money laundering activity?

If there are reasonable grounds for suspicion, will a report be made to the NCA?  
[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please confirm date of report to NCA:

.....  
and complete the box below:

Details of liaison with the NCA regarding the report:

Notice Period: ..... to .....

Moratorium Period: ..... to .....

Is consent required from the NCA to any on-going or imminent transactions which would otherwise be prohibited acts?  
[Please delete as appropriate] Yes / No

If yes, please confirm full details in the box below:

Date consent received from NCA:

.....

Date consent given by you to employee:

.....

If there are reasonable grounds to suspect money laundering, but you do not intend to report the matter to the NCA, please set out below the reason(s) for non-disclosure:

Date consent given by you to employee for any prohibited act transactions to proceed:

.....

Other relevant information:

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

THIS REPORT TO BE RETAINED FOR AT LEAST FIVE YEARS

## **APPENDIX 2 - Guidance Notes**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, legislation seeking to prevent the laundering of the proceeds of criminal activity was aimed at professionals in the financial and investment sector, however it was subsequently recognised that those involved in criminal conduct were able to “clean” the proceeds of crime through a wider range of businesses and professional activities.

New obligations in respect of money laundering were therefore imposed by the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Money Laundering Regulations 2003 (Subsequently replaced by the Money Laundering Regulations 2007) which broaden the definition of money laundering and increase the range of activities caught by the statutory control framework; in particular, the duty to report suspicions of money laundering is strengthened and criminal sanctions imposed for failure to do so.

As a result, certain areas of the Council’s business are now subject to the legislative controls and the Council is required, by law, to establish procedures designed to prevent the use of its services for money laundering. These procedures are set out in the accompanying Anti-Money Laundering Policy and all employees should be aware of the content.

This Guidance Note aims to provide further detail regarding the legal requirements and practical help in implementing the procedures.

### **THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

#### ***General***

The law requires those organisations in the regulated sector and conducting relevant business to:

- implement a procedure to require the reporting of suspicions of money laundering, including the appointment of a Money Laundering Reporting Officer (“MLRO”) to receive disclosures from their staff of money laundering activity (their own or anyone else’s);
- maintain certain client identification procedures; and
- maintain record keeping procedures.

Rather than referring to organisations as a whole, relevant business is defined with reference to the nature of the activities undertaken. Some of the Council’s business is “relevant” for the purposes of the legislation:

- the provision by way of business of advice about the tax affairs of another person by a body corporate
- the provision by way of business of accountancy services by a body corporate

- the provision by way of business of audit services
- the provision by way of business of legal services by a body corporate which involves participation in a financial or real property transaction (whether by assisting in the planning or execution of any such transaction or otherwise by acting for, or on behalf of, a client in any such transaction);
- the provision by way of business of services in relation to the formation, operation or management of a company or a trust;

It is therefore mainly the accountancy and audit services carried out by Financial Services and certain financial, company and property transactions undertaken by Legal Services which will be formally subject to the internal procedures, more detail of which is contained later in this Guidance.

However, although the conduct of relevant business does not apply to the Council as a whole, all members of staff are required to comply with the Council's Anti-Money Laundering Policy in terms of reporting concerns re money laundering; this will ensure consistency throughout the organisation and avoid inadvertent offences being committed.

The client identification procedure is only required to be followed by those engaging in relevant business as defined above.

## **The Offences**

Under the legislation there are two main types of offences which may be committed:

- Money laundering offences
- Failure to report money laundering offences.

### ***Money Laundering Offences:***

Money laundering now goes beyond the transformation of the proceeds of crime into apparently legitimate money/assets: it now covers a range of activities (which do not necessarily need to involve money or laundering) regarding the proceeds of crime. It is technically defined as any act constituting an offence under sections 327 to 329 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 i.e.:

- concealing, disguising, converting, transferring criminal property or removing it from the UK (section 327);
- entering into or becoming concerned in an arrangement which a person knows or suspects facilitates the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property by or on behalf of another person (section 328);
- acquiring, using or possessing criminal property (unless there was adequate consideration) (section 329);

- an attempt, conspiracy or incitement to commit such an offence; or
- aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring such an offence.

“Criminal property” is widely defined: it is property representing a person’s benefit from criminal conduct where you know or suspect that that is the case. It includes all property (situated in the UK or abroad) real or personal, including money, and also includes an interest in land or a right in relation to property other than land.

It is likely that the law will treat you as knowing that which you do know or which is obvious, or which an honest and reasonable person would have known given the circumstances and the information you have. Consequently if you deliberately shut your mind to the obvious, this will not absolve you of your responsibilities under the legislation.

Although you do not need to have actual evidence that money laundering is taking place, mere speculation or gossip is unlikely to be sufficient to give rise to knowledge or suspicion that it is.

So the legislation now goes beyond major drug money laundering operations, terrorism and serious crime to cover the proceeds of potentially any crime, no matter how minor and irrespective of the size of the benefit gained. The case of P v P (8 October 2003) confirmed that “an illegally obtained sum of £10 is no less susceptible to the definition of criminal property than a sum of £1million. Parliament clearly intended this to be the case.”

The broad definition of money laundering means that potentially anybody (and therefore any Council employee, irrespective of what sort of Council business they are undertaking) could contravene the money laundering offences if they become aware of, or suspect the existence of criminal property, and continue to be involved in the matter without reporting their concerns.

The Council has appointed Mr Steven Mason, Chief Executive, as the Money Laundering Reporting Officer (or in his absence Mrs Alison Elsdon, Director of Corporate Resources) to receive reports from employees of suspected money laundering activity.

***Examples of money laundering activity:***

By way of example, consider the following hypothetical scenarios:

- a. a social worker is assessing a service user's finances to calculate how much they should pay towards the cost of care, and then goes on to arrange for services to be provided and charged for; or
- b. the Executive Director, Wellbeing & Community Health Services is appointed as Court of Protection receiver and is responsible for managing the service user's property and affairs; and in the course of which they become aware of, or suspect the existence of, criminal property.



In scenario (a) the social worker may commit an offence under section 328 by “being concerned in an arrangement” which they know/suspect “facilitates the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property” if he does not report his concerns; and in scenario (b) a similar offence may be committed along with an offence under section 329 of using or possessing criminal property. Any lawyer involved could also be guilty of an offence if he assists in the transaction.

Consider also the following hypothetical scenario: Social Services have convened a child protection case conference during the course of which it becomes clear that one of the parents is claiming benefits whilst working. Benefit fraud is a criminal offence, therefore the Social Services staff and any Council lawyer present would need to consider reporting their concerns to the MLRO, otherwise their involvement in the matter may amount to a breach of section 328.

Any person found guilty of a money laundering offence is liable to imprisonment (maximum of 14 years), a fine or both, however an offence is not committed if the suspected money laundering activity is reported to the MLRO and official permission obtained to continue in the transaction.

Defences are available if, for example, the person:

- makes an 'authorised disclosure' under section 338 to the NCA or MLRO and the NCA gives consent to continue with the transaction; such a disclosure will not be taken to breach any rule which would otherwise restrict that disclosure;
- intended to make such a disclosure but had a reasonable excuse for not doing so;
- re section 329, acquired, used or possessed the property for adequate consideration.

The Law Society Guidance states that this particular defence “...may also apply to the services provided by a solicitor. Crown Prosecution Service guidance for prosecutors ([www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk)) states that the defence will apply where professional advisers, such as solicitors or accountants, receive money for or on account of costs (whether from the client or from another person on the client's behalf). However, the fees charged must be reasonable in relation to the work carried out, or intended to be carried out, as the defence will not be available if the value of the work is significantly less than the money received for or on account of costs.”

### ***Possible signs of money laundering***

It is impossible to give a definitive list of ways in which to spot money laundering or how to decide whether to make a report to the MLRO. The following are types of risk factors which may, either alone or cumulatively with other factors, suggest the possibility of money laundering activity:

## **General**

- A new client;
- A secretive client: e.g., refuses to provide requested information without a reasonable explanation;
- Concerns about the honesty, integrity, identity or location of a client;
- Illogical third party transactions: unnecessary routing or receipt of funds from third parties or through third party accounts;
- Involvement of an unconnected third party without logical reason or explanation;
- Payment of a substantial sum in cash (over £10,000);
- Overpayments by a client;
- Absence of an obvious legitimate source of the funds;
- Movement of funds overseas, particularly to a higher risk country or tax haven;
- Where, without reasonable explanation, the size, nature and frequency of transactions or instructions (or the size, location or type of a client) is out of line with normal expectations;
- A transaction without obvious legitimate purpose or which appears uneconomic, inefficient or irrational;
- The cancellation or reversal of an earlier transaction;
- Requests for release of client account details other than in the normal course of business;
- Companies and trusts: extensive use of corporate structures and trusts in circumstances where the client's needs are inconsistent with the use of such structures;
- Poor business records or internal accounting controls;
- A previous transaction for the same client which has been, or should have been, reported to the MLRO;

## **Property Matters**

- Unusual property investment transactions if there is no apparent investment purpose or rationale;

- Instructions to receive and pay out money where there is no linked substantive property transaction involved (surrogate banking);
- Re property transactions, funds received for deposits or prior to completion from an unexpected source or where instructions are given for settlement funds to be paid to an unexpected destination;

Facts which tend to suggest that something odd is happening may be sufficient for a reasonable suspicion of money laundering to arise. In short, the money laundering offences apply to your own actions and to matters in which you become involved.

If you become aware that your involvement in a matter may amount to money laundering then you must discuss it with the MLRO and not take any further action until you have received, through the MLRO, the consent of the National Crime Agency (“NCA”). The failure to report money laundering obligations, referred to below, relate also to your knowledge or suspicions of others, through your work.

***Failure to report money laundering offences:***

In addition to the money laundering offences, the legislation sets out further offences of failure to report suspicions of money laundering activities. Such offences are committed where, in the course of conducting relevant business in the regulated sector, you know or suspect, or have reasonable grounds to do so (or should have known and suspected), that another person is engaged in money laundering and you do not disclose this as soon as is practicable to the MLRO.

The Council’s Anti-Money Laundering Policy makes it clear that all members of staff should report any concerns they may have of money laundering activity, irrespective of their area of work and whether it is relevant business for purposes of the legislation.

If you know or suspect, through the course of your work, that anyone is involved in any sort of criminal conduct then it is highly likely, given the wide definition of money laundering, that the client is also engaged in money laundering and a report to the MLRO will be required.

As explained earlier, the value involved in the offence is irrelevant. If, for example, you reasonably suspect that someone has falsified their expenses claim, even if just by £1, then you would need to report that to the MLRO.

There are various defences, for example where you have a reasonable excuse for nondisclosure (e.g. a lawyer may be able to claim legal professional privilege for not disclosing the information) or you did not know or suspect that money was being laundered and had not been provided by the Council with appropriate training.

Given the very low risk to the Council of money laundering, this Guidance Note will provide sufficient training for most members of staff, although further guidance may be issued from time to time and targeted training provided to those staff more directly affected by the legislation.

You must still report your concerns, even if you believe someone else has already reported their suspicions of the same money laundering activity.

Such disclosures to the MLRO will be protected in that they will not be taken to breach any restriction on the disclosure of information.

If you are in any doubt as to whether or not to file a report with the MLRO then you should err on the side of caution and do so – remember, failure to report may render you liable to prosecution (for which the maximum penalty is an unlimited fine, five years' imprisonment, or both). The MLRO will not refer the matter on to the NCA if there is no need.

### ***Tipping off offences***

Where you suspect money laundering and report it to the MLRO, be very careful what you say to others afterwards: you may commit a further offence of “tipping off” (section 333) if, knowing a disclosure has been made, you make a disclosure which is likely to prejudice any investigation which might be conducted.

For example, a lawyer who reports his suspicions of a money laundering offence by a client to the MLRO, may commit a tipping off offence if he then reports his disclosure to that client. However, preliminary enquiries of a client to obtain more information (e.g. confirm their identity, clarify the source of funds) will not amount to tipping off unless you know or suspect that a report has been made.

Even if you have not reported the matter to the MLRO, if you know or suspect that such a disclosure has been made and you mention it to someone else, this could amount to a tipping off offence. Be very careful what you say and to whom in these circumstances.

### ***Prejudicing an Investigation offence***

If you know or suspect that an appropriate officer is, or is about to be, conducting a money laundering investigation and you make a disclosure to a third party that is likely to prejudice the investigation, then you commit an offence.

Any person found guilty of a tipping off or prejudicing an investigation offence is liable to imprisonment (maximum 5 years), a fine or both.

However, defences are available for both such offences, for example:

- the person did not know or suspect that the disclosure was likely to be prejudicial; or
- he is a professional legal adviser and the disclosure was:
  - to any person in connection with legal proceedings (existing or contemplated);

- but NOT where the information was given with the intention of furthering a criminal purpose.

### ***Consideration of disclosure report by MLRO***

Where the MLRO receives a disclosure from a member of staff and concludes that there is actual/suspected money laundering taking place, or there are reasonable grounds to suspect so, then he must make a report as soon as practicable to the NCA on their standard report form and in the prescribed manner, unless he has a reasonable excuse for non-disclosure.

Where relevant, the MLRO will also need to request appropriate consent from the NCA for any acts/transactions, which would otherwise amount to prohibited acts under section 327 – 329 of the 2002 Act, to proceed.

The MLRO may receive appropriate consent from the NCA in the following ways:

- specific consent;
- no refusal of consent during the notice period (seven working days starting with the first working day after the MLRO makes the disclosure); or
- refusal of consent during the notice period but the moratorium period has expired (31 days starting with the day on which the MLRO receives notice of refusal of consent).

The MLRO commits a criminal offence under section 331 of the Act if he knows or suspects (or has reasonable grounds to do so) through a disclosure being made to him, that another person is engaged in money laundering and he does not disclose this as soon as practicable to the NCA.

### ***Relevant Guidance***

When considering any offence under the legislation, the Court will consider whether you followed any relevant guidance approved by the Treasury, a supervisory authority, or any other appropriate body which includes, for example, the Law Society, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and other such bodies. Such guidance is available for lawyers and accountants by their respective professional bodies.

### ***Internal Procedures***

As mentioned earlier, the Money Laundering Regulations 2007 impose specific obligations on those carrying out relevant business, requiring them to:

- obtain sufficient knowledge to ascertain the true identity of clients in certain circumstances, by maintaining client identification procedures;
- ensure record keeping procedures (e.g. for evidence of identity obtained, details of transactions undertaken, for at least 5 years afterwards).

These procedures are contained in the Anti-Money Laundering Policy and further explanation of them is given below. Only those staff dealing with relevant business need comply with these procedures.

### ***Client Identification Procedure***

Where the Council is carrying out relevant business (accountancy, audit and certain legal services) and:

- a. forms an ongoing business relationship with a client; or
- b. undertakes a one-off transaction involving payment by or to the client of 15,000 Euro (approximately £11,000) or more; or
- c. undertakes a series of linked one-off transactions involving total payment by or to the client(s) of 15,000 Euro (approximately £11,000) or more; or
- d. it is known or suspected that a one-off transaction (or a series of them) involves money laundering;

then the Client Identification Procedure must be followed before any business is undertaken for that client.

Where the client is acting or appears to be acting for someone else, reasonable steps must also be taken to establish the identity of that other person (although this is unlikely to be relevant to the Council).

The law states that particular care must be taken when the client is not physically present when being identified: this is always likely to be the case for the Council, given that its relevant business can only be undertaken for other local authorities and designated public bodies (not individuals) and therefore instructions will usually be given in writing.

There are a limited number of exceptions where identification evidence does not need to be obtained, however these are unlikely to ever be relevant to the Council, given that it can only act for other public authorities and designated public bodies.

### ***Satisfactory evidence of identity***

Satisfactory evidence is that which:

- is capable of establishing, to the satisfaction of the person receiving it, that the client is who they claim to be; and
- does in fact do so.

General guidance on the money laundering legislation suggests that fairly rigorous identification checks should be made: for example, in relation to an organisation, that evidence should be obtained as to the identity of key individuals within the organization along with evidence of the identity of the business entity and its activity.

You will see, however, that the Council's Client Identification Procedure provides for only the most basic of identity checks – signed, written instructions on the organisation in question's headed paper at the outset of a particular matter. This is not because client identification is not important, but because of the need to introduce a procedure which is workable, appropriate to the nature of the Council as an organisation and proportionate to the risk to the Council of money laundering, which has been assessed as extremely low.

The following factors suggest a minimum level client identification procedure for the Council (in practice Financial Services and Legal Services) is appropriate:

***For internal clients:***

- we all work for the same organisation and therefore have detailed awareness of individuals and their location through previous dealings;

***For external clients:***

- the Council, as a matter of law can only provide services to local authorities and designated public bodies;
- they are therefore heavily regulated by their very nature;
- most are repeat clients, well known to us in terms of people and the business address;

***Generally:***

- We know most of our clients;
- We are not in private practice and are therefore subject to public sector controls;
- We are not large, city firms of lawyers and accountants, with international client bases.

Such signed, written instructions on headed paper should enable us to have confidence in accepting instructions from a known client. If, however, you are undertaking work for a new client, then you may also wish to seek additional evidence, for example:

- checking the organisation's website to confirm the business address;
- attending the client at their business address;

- asking the key contact officer to provide evidence of their personal identity and position within the organisation; for example signed, written confirmation from their Head of Service or Chair of the relevant organisation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the nature of what the Council does and who it can provide services for, instances of suspected money laundering are unlikely to arise very often, if at all; however we must be mindful of the legislative requirements, as failure to comply with them may render individuals liable to prosecution.

Please take prompt and proper action if you have any suspicions and feel free to consult the MLRO at any time should you be concerned regarding a matter.