

Wellgate Primary School

CORPORATE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

1. Introduction

- The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees and others with concerns about any aspect of the Council's work have a duty to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy intends to support that duty and seeks to encourage and enable employees to raise concerns so that the Council can take prompt action.
- Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the Council. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Council. Indeed it may also be the case that employees are not aware how best to raise concerns. Employees should note that any concern raised through this Policy will be treated confidentially.
- This Policy also makes it clear that employees can raise legitimate concerns without fear of reprisals. It is human nature to be apprehensive about raising a concern and consequently employees may also fear harassment or victimisation for doing so. In these circumstances, staff often find it easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may be just a suspicion of wrongdoing. The Council is committed, as part of its overall ethical framework, to provide a process and procedure that encourages freedom of speech so that this does not happen.
- To ensure an effective framework for receiving and dealing with concerns this policy aims to :-
 - show who the policy applies to ;
 - describe what kind of activity should be reported through this mechanism ;
 - explain how an employee should raise a concern within the Council ;
 - provide safeguards to protect and support individuals raising concerns and those the subject of concerns ;
 - describe how the Council will respond to concerns brought to its attention ;
 - describe how employees will receive feedback on the action the Council has taken ; and
 - describe how an employee can take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the Council's response.

2. Who this Policy applies to

- The policy applies to all employees and members of the Council including those employees employed in locally managed schools. Employees of Council-owned companies, contractors employed by the Council and organisations receiving grant aid from the Council may also make use of the Council's arrangements where they wish to raise concerns relating to the Council, its members or officers.
- This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Code of Conduct for Employees. The Council's Code of Conduct for Employees states that there is a duty on individuals to report any suspicion or concern they may have that Council employees, Members or other individuals described in 2.1 above are involved in actual or potential fraudulent or corrupt activities (see Section 3). Once a concern has been raised the procedure within this policy must be followed. Failure to report a concern may also lead to further action being taken in exceptional circumstances.
- The provisions of this Policy are for those individuals referred to above. These arrangements are not directly available to members of the public. The Authority's complaints procedure should be used where a member of the public wishes to raise a concern.

3. What sort of activity should be reported ?

- It is impossible and inappropriate to try to provide an exhaustive list of activities that would constitute misconduct or malpractice, but broadly speaking, the Council would expect to receive concerns surrounding :-
 - a criminal offence, actual or potential ;
 - a failure to comply with a legal obligation ;
 - a miscarriage of justice ;
 - a misuse of Council money ;
 - an act that breaches the Council's Financial Regulations, Standing Orders or policies ;
 - the malpractice or mistreatment in dealing with a client of the Council ;
 - actions which endanger the health and safety of staff or the public ;
 - an abuse of power or position
 - actions which cause damage to the environment ;
 - improper conduct by an officer or Member ; or
 - any action intended to conceal any of the above.
- This Policy is not intended for disagreements with Council policy. However if you reasonably believe that in following a Council policy an action, as listed in paragraph 3.1 above, is likely to occur, you should of course report it.
- In the event of a dispute concerning an individuals own employment, employees are encouraged to use the provisions of other Council policies covering disciplinary, grievance, harassment and recruitment and selection procedures. Where the matter does not relate to your own employment position, it may be appropriate to use the provisions of the Whistleblowing Policy. Equally, where the actions of one employee is impacting on a number of others and directly or indirectly affecting the service being provided, it may be appropriate to address the concern adopting the Whistleblowing procedures.
- Although it is likely and often appropriate to start a formal investigation into matters raised, it is also possible that a more informal approach is recommended subject to the nature of the allegations made.
- It is important to note that all concerns raised are considered on an individual basis and it is therefore not appropriate to set out any firm or suggested rules for how a particular type of concern is best dealt with.

4. Whistleblowing Officers

- In order to provide employees with a recognised and consistent contact point, two Whistleblowing Officers have been designated. These are :-
 - Rob Winter, Assistant Executive Director of Finance (Internal Audit), Telephone No. 775788
 - Andrew Frosdick, Borough Secretary, Telephone No. 775799
- These officers will, as described in subsequent sections of this Policy, be the initial points of contact for employees who wish to use the Whistleblowing procedures. The Whistleblowing Officers will seek to assist an employee to raise a concern effectively.
- Subsequent changes in officers will be communicated accordingly.

5. How to Raise a Concern

- The Council through the provisions of this Policy, encourages employees to raise concerns as early as possible to make it easier to take effective action. Normally and preferably, employees should raise concerns within their own section or department. This could be with the employees own line manager, another senior officer or Assistant or Executive Director. In certain instances this may not be appropriate because of the seriousness or sensitivity of the issues involved or indeed the involvement of certain persons in the alleged wrongdoing.

- Where an employee feels it is appropriate to raise a concern outside their normal management arrangements, one of the Whistleblowing Officers (see paragraph 4.1 above) should be contacted. Should an employee wish to speak to a female officer this can be arranged through the Whistleblowing Officers (clearly where both Whistleblowing Officers are male).
- Notwithstanding the provisions of this Policy, the Council's Financial Regulations require actual or potential breaches to be reported to the Director of Finance. However this requirement should not prevent or deter employees from raising concerns through the whistleblowing procedures.
- When reporting a concern, employees are urged to carefully consider who, given the nature of the concern, they should report it to.
- When raising a concern employees are encouraged to set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates, places and amounts where possible, and the reason for their concern. Absolute proof is not required as long as you can demonstrate reasonable grounds for the allegation. It is more important that concerns are raised than how they are raised.
- There are a number of ways and facilities through which employees can raise a concern if they feel it is not appropriate to inform a manager within their section or department :-
 - contacting the Whistleblowing Officers by telephone (there is a voicemail facility if unanswered) :- Rob Winter, Assistant Executive Director of Finance (Internal Audit) Telephone (01226) 775788 Andrew Frosdick, Borough Secretary - Telephone (01226) 775799
 - using the dedicated 24 hour Whistleblowing hotline - 0800 138 2939
 - writing in to the Whistleblowing Officers using a dedicated P.O. Box :- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council P.O. Box 320, Barnsley, S70 2YL
 - e-mailing one of the Whistleblowing Officers :- WBO1RWinter (internal) WBO1RWinter@barnsley.gov.uk (external) WBO2AFrosdick (internal) WBO2AFrosdick@barnsley.gov.uk (external)
- The Council recognises that employees may wish to seek advice from their trade union and indeed may invite their trade union (or professional association) to raise a matter on their behalf.
- **Anonymous Allegations** Employees are encouraged to give their name when raising a concern. If an employee chooses to raise a concern anonymously it will be taken further at the discretion of the designated Whistleblowing Officers in liaison with the appropriate senior officers and the Chief Executive and Director of Finance as necessary. In exercising this discretion, certain factors will be taken into account. These are :-
 - the seriousness of the issues raised ;
 - the credibility of the concern ; and
 - the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

6. Safeguards

- **Harassment or Victimisation** The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal. The Council will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take the appropriate action to attempt to protect employees who raise a concern in good faith. However, this does not mean that if an employee raising a concern is already the subject of other employment procedures e.g. disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will be halted or suspended.
- The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties that the employee(s) may experience as a result of raising a concern. An employee might, as a last resort, be required to give evidence in Court or in disciplinary hearings. The Council will advise and support the employee about this, if necessary, to reduce any anxiety they may have.
- **Confidentiality** The Council will do its best to protect the identity of an employee who raises a concern and does not want his or her name to be disclosed to colleagues and / or the person(s) under investigation. Where an investigation takes place, the investigating officers will not disclose your identity unless they are required to do so. This might happen if a formal, written statement is needed as evidence for example or where the matter is referred to a

third party such as the Police for investigation. In no circumstances will the employee's identity be revealed before he or she is consulted.

- ***Untrue or Malicious Allegations*** The Council's intention in having a Whistleblowing Policy is to encourage employees to raise legitimate concerns. Consequently if an employee makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. Where, however, an employee is shown to have made malicious or vexatious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken.

7. How the Council will Respond

- The action taken by the Council will depend on the nature of the concern. In order to protect individuals and the Council, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection, disciplinary or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. The matters raised will be investigated internally to establish basic facts. At that stage a decision will be made on whether :-
 - to complete the investigation internally ; or
 - to refer the matter to the Authority's External Auditor ; or
 - to refer the matter directly to the Police ; or
 - to organise an independent inquiry ; or
 - take no action.
- Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.
- ***Feedback to Employees raising a concern*** The Council will inform the employee who raised the concern where possible within ten working days of a concern being received either in writing or by other means as appropriate :-
 - acknowledging that the concern has been received ;
 - indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter ;
 - stating whether any initial enquiries have been made ; and
 - stating if further investigations will take place, and if not, giving reasons.
- The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the employee(s) who raised the concern will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. Initial contact with the employee(s) may be outside of the work place to protect their identity and, if necessary and mutually acceptable, subsequent meetings may be held away from work and / or outside normal working hours.
- When any meeting is arranged, the employee(s) who raised the concern may be accompanied by a Trade Union or professional association representative, colleague or other representative of their choice as long as that person is not involved in the concern being discussed.
- The Council accepts an employee who raised a concern may need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, he / she will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.
- It is recognised that instances may arise where a concern has been raised but not proven, that results in the whistleblower and accused resuming a working relationship together. This in turn may give rise to concerns of potential victimisation or harassment. Where this is the case, reference should be made to the Council's existing personnel procedures.

8. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

- This Act became Law on 2nd July 1999. Its purpose is to protect employees from victimisation as a result of raising a concern in good faith. It does this by affording protection to employees who raise concerns in accordance with certain criteria. Similarly the Act also describes where protection will not be available when a disclosure is made in certain ways.
- ***Protected Disclosures*** Protection will be afforded to an employee where the concern is made in good faith and has been raised in the first instance within the Council or to a Solicitor in the process of obtaining legal advice. Any concern raised in good faith to one of the

Whistleblowing Officers or to an employees own management will, all things being equal, qualify as a protected disclosure. Other circumstances where protection through the Act is applicable are where a disclosure is made :-

- to a prescribed Regulatory Body (i.e. Health and Safety Executive) ; or
 - to a wider audience (press, MP etc.) if made internally first or to a prescribed Regulatory Body. Protection would also be afforded albeit in exceptional circumstances, where the employee raised a concern outside the Authority where they have a real and reasonable fear that they would suffer victimisation or that the information would be concealed or indeed the matter is exceptionally serious. In the event of an employee being dismissed or victimised, the Act allows that employee the right to compensation at an employment tribunal.
- **Unprotected Disclosures** Simply speaking, any disclosure not meeting the criteria for protection will be unprotected. This means for example that an employee making a malicious disclosure or one made hastily to the media will not be protected.
 - This Act is a complicated piece of legislation. General advice is available from the Authority's Legal Services Section of the Borough Secretary's Department. Employees are however encouraged to seek specific advice from their Trade Union or own solicitor.
 - The provisions of the 1998 Act address the implications that an employee may otherwise face under their contract of employment from making a disclosure. Employees should also be aware that any person about whom a disclosure is made may have rights under the common law of defamation if that disclosure contains anything that is not accurate. However the common law defence of defamation will normally apply where any person in making a disclosure that is not accurate acts in good faith and without malice. Again, any specific legal advice as to an employees own position should be obtained independently.

9. How The Matter Can Be Taken Further

- This policy is intended to provide employees with an avenue to raise concerns within the Council and be satisfied with the Council's response. However, should an employee feel dissatisfied with the Council's response, and feels it is right to take the matter outside the Council, they can do so. Contact can be made through one of the following contact points :-
 - the Authority's External Auditors (Sarah Howard, Partner, RSM Robson Rhodes - 0113 225 4000) ;
 - the relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisation ;
 - Public Concern at Work (who can be contacted on 020 7404 6609) ;
 - Trade Union ;
 - a Solicitor, or
 - the Police.
- It should be remembered that failing to raise the matter within the Council first may result in the disclosure being unprotected within the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- Employees who are in any doubt regarding the provisions of the Policy should contact their Personnel Section. Advice as to whether or how a matter should be raised, should be sought by contacting one of the Whistleblowing Officers.

10. Trade Unions

- This Policy has been endorsed by the Trade Unions.

11. The Responsible Officer

- The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

Signed Chair of Governors

Signed Head teacher

Revised and adopted by the Governing Body:

Reviewed: