

Part 5.5 - Whistleblowing Policy

1. Introduction

The Authority is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability and will not tolerate malpractice or wrongdoing.

The Authority is therefore committed to a policy for confidential reporting of concerns, “whistleblowing”, which seeks to protect individuals who make certain disclosures with regard to any instance of malpractice or wrongdoing and to investigate them in the public interest.

Whistleblowing is when a member of staff raises concerns about the activities of the organisation they work for which are ethically or legally questionable.

The aims of the policy are to:

- Provide for a culture of zero tolerance toward fraud, corruption and bribery.
- Encourage officers and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the Authority’s work to feel confident to come forward and voice those concerns.
- Provide ways for officers to raise concerns at an early stage and in the right way and enable them to get feedback on any action taken.
- Ensure that officers know what to do if they are not satisfied with actions taken.
- Provide re-assurance that officers who raise concerns in good faith can do so without fear of reprisals or victimisation.

This policy covers any wrongdoing relating to unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangerous working environments.

It is available for use by all Officers of the Authority and Officers of constituent councils providing services to the Authority, its committees, sub-committees and joint committees.

It is not to be used where other more appropriate procedures are available. There are existing procedures which enable officers to lodge a grievance relating to their conditions of employment, raise matters of harassment or to make a complaint. This policy covers concerns that fall outside the scope of these existing procedures.

The Authority will seek to ensure that its stance on whistleblowing is widely publicised and that officers have access to appropriate guidance.

This policy is also available for use by contractors. In this policy, “contractors” includes constituent councils providing services to the Authority, its committees, sub-committees and joint committees.

2. Whistleblowing Procedures for Officers

Officers are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within an authority. Normally Officers would be expected to raise any concerns initially with their line manager. However, they may feel that expressing their concerns would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Authority or may also fear harassment or victimisation. It may be easier to ignore these concerns than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

Whistleblowing is the process for raising a concern about suspected wrongdoing, especially in circumstances where the whistleblower feels forced to raise that concern outside the normal management reporting line. For instance, the whistleblower may be concerned about the actions of their own line management, or about the failure of their line management to act over suspected wrongdoing on the part of others.

The Whistleblowing policy encourages and enables officers and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the Authority's work or those engaged in work for the Authority to come forward and voice those concerns. It recognises that most cases will need to proceed on a confidential basis. At the same time, the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) provide protection from harassment and victimisation for officers who raise concerns in good faith.

3. Aims and scope of this Policy

This policy aims to:

- Make you feel confident to raise concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- Give you avenues to raise your concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.
- Guarantees that you receive a response to your concerns and ensures that you are aware of the process to follow if you are not satisfied.
- Reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation.

There are existing procedures in place if you have a grievance relating to your own employment or consider that you are being harassed due to your race or sex or age, or if you are concerned about health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as to other Officers. Indeed, you are under a legal obligation to report to your supervisor or manager any work situation which you consider to represent:

- a danger to the health and safety of yourself, fellow Officers or members of the public;
or
- a shortcoming in the Authority's arrangements for health and safety.

If you are reluctant to raise such health and safety concerns with your supervisor or manager, or if you have raised them and are concerned about the response, then arrangements exist for you to raise the health and safety concerns with the Head of Paid Service and/or with Health and Safety Representatives from the relevant trade union.

This policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of law;
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice;
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other Officers;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of public funds;
- fraud, corruption or bribery;
- sexual or physical abuse of clients;
- any attempt to prevent disclosure of any of the above, or
- other conduct which gives you cause for concern.

Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of your staff or members of the Authority or others acting on behalf of the Authority can be reported under this policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the Authority subscribes to; or
- is against the Authority's Standing Orders and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

This policy supplements and does not replace the corporate complaints procedure, or the grievance procedure and other procedures established to deal with aspects of harassment i.e. sexual, racial and age harassment, and with health and safety concerns.

4. Harassment or Victimisation

The Authority is committed to good practice and high standards and aims to be supportive of its Officers.

The Authority recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. However uncovering malpractice will be doing a service to the Authority. You will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Authority will fulfil its responsibility to ensure that you are not harassed, victimised or otherwise disadvantaged when you raise a concern. Any allegation concerning an Officer who engages in any form of victimisation or harassment against you as a result of your raising a concern will be the subject of a thorough investigation and disciplinary action will be taken if the case is proved.

Allegations by an Officer who is the subject of disciplinary investigations or proceedings concerning the conduct of those proceedings can only be raised through the disciplinary appeals procedures.

5. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence wherever possible and every effort will be made to preserve your anonymity if you so wish. You may need however to come forward as a witness, but if you wish to be supported by your trade union or another representative of your choice then this would be available to you.

6. Anonymous allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they will be considered so far as is possible or practicable by the Authority. Your trade union can act for you in this.

7. Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

8. How to raise a concern

If you are an officer of the Authority, as a first step, you should raise concerns with your immediate manager or their manager. This depends on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice, for example if you believe that your immediate manager or their managers are involved, you should approach the Monitoring Officer.

The manager receiving notification of concerns under this policy will inform the Monitoring Officer that a confidential report has been received and provide a copy. If the concern relates to financial irregularities or failures of financial controls the manager receiving the report must immediately notify the Chief Finance Officer.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. If you make a written report, please use the attached pro-forma. Reports should be sent to your immediate manager or their superior or to the appropriate Chief Officer and a copy sent to the Monitoring Officer.

If you are a contractor, as a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your manager, who will then inform the lead officer who is dealing with the particular contract. If you do not have a manager, you should raise your concerns direct with the lead officer. This depends on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that your manager or the lead officer is involved, you should approach the Monitoring Officer direct.

Otherwise, the lead officer receiving notification of concerns under this Policy will inform the Monitoring Officer that a confidential report has been received and provide a copy. If the concern relates to financial irregularities or failures of financial controls the lead officer receiving the report will also immediately notify the Chief Finance Officer.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. If you make a written report you should, if possible, make it using a similar report form to the attached pro-forma. A copy of any report you send to your manager or lead officer should also be sent to the Monitoring Officer for monitoring purposes.

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for the maintenance and operation of this policy and will monitor how the complaint is handled and ensure that the requirements of this policy are fulfilled.

The earlier you express the concern the easier it will be to take action.

Officers and Contractors can get confidential, independent advice from the charity Protect on 020 3117 2520 . Their website is at [Protect - Speak up stop harm - Protect - Speak up stop harm \(protect-advice.org.uk\)](https://protect-advice.org.uk)

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You can invite your trade union or professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

Concerns can also be raised through your trade union.

9. How the Authority will respond

The Authority will respond to your concerns, and it will be necessary to investigate your concerns but this is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Within **5 working days** of a concern being raised, you will be sent a written response:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it is proposed to deal with this matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling you whether any enquiries have been made; and
- supply you with information on staff support mechanisms.

The Monitoring Officer will be sent a copy of this response.

Where appropriate, matters raised may:

- Be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process.
- Be referred to the police or other statutory agencies.
- Be referred to the Authority's external auditor.

In order to protect individuals and those about whom concerns are raised, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

The amount of contact between the individual considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the investigating officers, will seek further information from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, and this can be off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a friend.

The Authority will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the Authority will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.

The Authority accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcomes of any investigation.

10. The Responsible Officer

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. That officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality) and may report as necessary to the Cabinet, but in such a way that your confidentiality will be preserved.

It is the responsibility of any manager/director who receives a whistleblowing report to provide the Monitoring Officer with:

- a copy of the original report immediately;
- the initial written response to the person raising the concern; and
- any further responses.

The Monitoring Officer must, as soon as possible, also be informed of the outcome(s) of any investigation and any actions instigated as a result.

11. How the matter can be taken further

This policy is intended to provide Officers and Contractors with an avenue within the Authority to raise concerns. The Authority hopes any whistleblower will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the confidential report, a request in writing for the investigation and outcome to be reviewed can be made to the Head of Paid Service. If you remain dissatisfied and want to take the matter outside of the Authority, advice is available from trade unions and local Citizens Advice Bureaux on the options that are available to you.

One possibility is that you may wish to rely on your rights under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This Act gives you protection from victimisation if you make certain disclosures of

information in the public interest. The provisions are quite complex and include a list of prescribed persons outside of the Combined Authority who can be contacted in certain circumstances (see [Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/whistleblowing-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies)). You should seek advice on the effect of the Act from the persons referred to above.

If you do take the matter outside of the Authority, you should ensure that you do not disclose information where you owe a duty of confidentiality to persons other than the Authority (e.g. service users) or where you would commit an offence by making disclosure. In order to ensure that you do not make any such disclosures it is advisable to check the position with the Monitoring Officer.

**POLICY FOR CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING OF CONCERNS
("WHISTLE BLOWING")**

REPORT FORM

The Authority is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees and others that we deal with who have concerns about any aspect of the Authority's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. If you wish to make a report, please use this pro-forma.

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1. Background and history of the concern (giving the relevant dates).

 2. The reasons why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

(Please attach additional sheets if necessary)

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3. You are encouraged to put your name to this report. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they will be considered so far as is possible by the Authority. If you feel able to, please give your name and details below.

Name:

Directorate (if applicable):

Address:

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Contact Telephone Number:..... Date

PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO YOUR MANAGER, OR ALTERNATIVELY TO THEIR MANAGER OR DIRECTOR AS APPROPRIATE. YOU MUST ALSO SEND A COPY OF THE COMPLETED FORM AT THE SAME TIME TO THE MONITORING OFFICER.