

# CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING CODE

## 1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1 The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects workers who speak out in the public interest about fraudulent, criminal or dangerous activities, wrong doings or malpractice at work.
- 1.2 Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within an organisation. However, they may not express their concerns because they fear harassment or victimisation. They may also feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the organisation. In these circumstances, it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.
- 1.3 The Council 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 serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.
- 1.4 This Code makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This Confidential Reporting Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns **within** the Council rather than overlooking a problem or "blowing the whistle" outside. It is also designed to protect employees from malicious allegations.
- 1.5 The Code applies to all employees and those contractors working for the Council on Council premises, for example, agency staff, builders, drivers and cleaners. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the Council in their own premises, for example, care homes.
- 1.6 These procedures are in addition to the Council's Complaints Procedures and other statutory reporting procedures applying to some departments. You are responsible for making service users aware of the existence of these procedures.

## 2. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS CODE

- 2.1 This Code aims to:
  - encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
  - provide an avenue for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
  - make sure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied

- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.
- 2.2 There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment. The Confidential Reporting Code is intended to cover major 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 employees
  - damage to the environment
  - the unauthorised use of public funds
  - possible fraud and corruption
  - sexual or physical abuse of clients, or
  - other unethical conduct.
- 2.3 Therefore, you can report any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of officers or members of the Council or others acting on behalf of the Council under the Confidential Reporting Code. This may be about something that:
- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards you experience or the standards you believe the Council subscribes to; or
  - is against the Council's Constitution and policies; or
  - falls below established standards of practice; or
  - amounts to improper conduct.
- 2.4 This Code does **not** replace the corporate Complaints Procedure.

### **3 HARASSMENT OR VICTIMISATION**

- 3.1 The Council is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.
- 3.2 The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.
- 3.3 The Council will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation, including informal pressures, and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.
- 3.4 Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

#### **4. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 4.1 All concerns will be treated in confidence and we will make every effort not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

#### **5. ANONYMOUS ALLEGATIONS**

- 5.1 This Code encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible.
- 5.2 Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Council.
- 5.3 In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include the:
- seriousness of the issues raised
  - credibility of the concern
  - likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

#### **6. UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS**

- 6.1 If you voice suspicion in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you.
- 6.2 If the investigation concludes that you have fabricated the allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

#### **7. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN**

- 7.1 As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate manager, Headteacher or their superior. This depends however on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that management is involved, you should approach the Chief Executive, the Director of Corporate Services, the Director of Finance or the Head of Audit.
- 7.2 If you are in any doubt about how to raise a concern, you should consult your trade union who will be able to advise you how to proceed.
- 7.3 Concerns may be raised orally or in writing. If you wish to make a written report you should use the following format:
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates if possible)
  - the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.
- 7.4 The earlier you express the concern, the easier it is to take action.

- 7.5 Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.
- 7.6 You can get advice/guidance on how to pursue matters of concern from:
- Ray Cowlshaw, Chief Executive Tel 255364
  - Michael Foote, Director of Corporate Services Tel 255448
  - Paul Dransfield, Director of Finance Tel 256263
  - Richard Boneham, Head of Audit Tel 255688
- 7.7 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.
- 7.8 You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.
- 7.9 Whichever officer you decide to approach, the officer responsible for this Code is the Council's Monitoring Officer, the Director of Corporate Services.

## **8. HOW THE COUNCIL WILL RESPOND**

- 8.1 The Council will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.
- 8.2 Where appropriate, the matters raised may:
- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
  - be referred to the Police
  - be referred to the external auditor
  - form the subject of an independent inquiry
  - be referred to the Standards Board if a member is the subject of the allegation.
- 8.3 In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle which the Council will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, such as child protection or discrimination issues, will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.
- 8.4 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.

- 8.5 Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Director of Corporate Services, or one of the other officers mentioned in paragraph 7.5 where appropriate, will write to you:
- acknowledging that the concern has been received
  - indicating how he proposes to deal with the matter
  - giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
  - telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
  - supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms
  - telling you whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not.
- 8.6 The amount of contact between the officers 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 Council will seek further information from you.
- 8.7 Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a union, or professional association representative, or a friend.
- 8.8 The Council will take all practical steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience either at the time, or in the future as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure and will arrange for someone to attend for support if you have not arranged your own support.
- 8.9 The Council 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 outcome of any investigation.

## **9. THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICER**

- 9.1 The Director of Corporate Services, as Monitoring Officer, has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Code. He maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes, in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality, and will report as necessary to the Council.
- 9.2 The Monitoring Officer, the Director of Corporate Services, has a statutory duty to take action where the Council is involved in maladministration or illegality. The Chief Legal Officer is the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

## **10. HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER**

10.1 This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the Council to raise concerns. The Council hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Council, the following are possible contact points:

- the external auditor
- your trade union
- your local Citizens Advice Bureau
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the Police.

10.2 If you do take the matter outside the Council, you should make sure that you do not disclose confidential information. Check with the contact point about that.