



Whistleblowing Policy

(including Child Protection and Financial Impropriety)

Girton Glebe Primary School

January 2016

History

Starting point		Model Policy
Approval	March 2012	Full Governors
Reviewed	January 2016	Full Governors

Section 1 – Introduction

These procedures have been developed to ensure that an internal mechanism exists for dealing with concerns raised by workers that are considered ‘protected disclosures’ under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and provide a systematic process to be followed when making and/or investigating such a disclosure.

Whilst it can be difficult to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of a colleague, workers must act to prevent the problem getting worse, to reduce potential risks to the health and safety of others, and to prevent themselves potentially being implicated.

The earlier a worker expresses a concern, the easier and sooner it is possible for the Council to take action.

We want workers to feel able to raise concerns **within** the Council without fear of reprisals, rather than overlooking a problem or discussing it with outsiders.

Raising a Concern

Workers are encouraged to raise concerns about the actions/behaviours of other Council workers, private contractors and/or elected members, where they think something is:

- unlawful; or
- against the Council’s Standing Orders or policies; or
- falls below established standard or practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

Concerns about the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults should be raised as quickly as possible as a failure to do so could result in a child, young person or vulnerable adult being placed at risk. It is not necessary to be completely sure about the concern – what is important is that concerns are raised that may need further investigation. It is important to remember that often it is the most vulnerable groups that are targeted by individuals who may seek to abuse those in their care. Therefore, these groups rely on responsible individuals to protect them and to safeguard their welfare.

Specific information about child protection whistle-blowing is given in Section 3.

Concerns about money laundering should be raised in accordance with specific guidance provided (see the Council’s Internal Audit web pages).

Section 2 - General Procedure

To Whom

Before blowing the whistle workers should use supervision sessions, team meetings and other opportunities to raise questions and seek clarification on issues that concern them.

Workers should raise concerns with their immediate manager or manager’s superior. Alternatively, depending on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues and who is involved, a worker may approach **Chris Meddle, Education Officer, on 01223 703564** who will be able to support the worker to the appropriate member of the local authority.

How

Concerns should be raised in writing and include:

- reference to the fact that it is a whistleblowing disclosure;

- the background and history of the concerns;
- names, dates and places (where possible); and
- the reasons why the worker is particularly concerned about the situation.

Sometimes concerns in relation to safeguarding can be minimised, especially when the reporter is not sure of what they may have observed. When considering whether to report a concern, individuals should remember that they may be 'right', and if they fail to report, a child or vulnerable adult may come to harm as a result.

Workers who feel unable to put the concern in writing, can telephone or meet the appropriate officer.

Representation

In some cases it may be appropriate for a worker to ask his/her trade union to raise a matter on his/her behalf.

Responding to a Concern

The action taken by the Council will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters* raised may:

- be investigated internally by an appropriate manager, e.g. H&S Adviser;
- be referred to the Police;
- be referred to the external Auditor; and/or
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

**All issues will be referred to the Corporate Director - People, Policy and Law for record keeping/monitoring purposes.*

Support and Protection

'Blowing the whistle' can be difficult and stressful. Managers will ensure that they do their best to protect the identity of the worker raising the concern and that he/she is not subjected to harassment or victimisation from others. Workers will be given the contact details of people who can offer support and advice, e.g. HR advisers, trade union representatives and will be offered access to the Staff Counselling Scheme.

The Council will do its best to protect a worker's identity when he/she raises a concern and does not want his/her name to be disclosed. However, if the concern raised needs to be addressed through another procedure, e.g. disciplinary procedure, the worker may be required to provide a signed statement as part of the evidence. Workers may be required to give evidence where legal proceedings arise.

In some circumstances the Council may have to disclose the identity of the worker without his/her consent, although this will be discussed with the worker first.

Initial Enquiries

In order to protect individuals and the Council, initial enquiries, (usually involving a meeting with the individual raising the concern), will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Normally concerns or allegations that raise issues that fall within the scope of other policies/procedures, (e.g. child protection, health & safety or discrimination issues), will be addressed under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved at this initial stage simply, by agreed action or an explanation regarding the concern, without the need for further investigation.

Investigation

The appropriate manager will investigate the concerns thoroughly, ensuring that a written acknowledgement can be provided **within ten working days**. A detailed response should follow **within 28 working days**, once the investigation has been concluded.

The detailed response should explain how the matter was investigated, conclusions drawn from the investigation, and whom to contact should the worker be unhappy with the response and wish to raise the matter externally.

If the investigation cannot be completed within the 28-day timescale above, the worker should receive a response that indicates:

- progress to date;
- how the matter is being dealt with; and
- how long it will take to provide a final response.

Copies of all correspondence should be sent to the relevant Head of HR for record keeping/monitoring purposes.

Untrue Allegations

If a worker makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against that worker. If, however, there is clear evidence that a worker has made malicious or vexatious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures.

Unfounded Allegations

Following investigation, if an allegation is confirmed as unfounded this should be notified to the worker who raised the concern, who will be informed that the Council deems the matter to be concluded and that it should not be raised again unless new evidence becomes available.

Records

The Council is required to monitor the number and types of whistleblowing cases, and the outcomes, including actions taken to resolve the issues raised. Therefore, managers must complete a Whistleblowing Cases Tracking Form for each case, and on a quarterly basis, send copies of all tracking forms to the relevant Head of HR for record keeping/monitoring purposes.

Further Advice

Further advice and assistance is available from the [Employee Relations Team](#) or your HR team.

Section 3 – Specific Guidance in Cases Involving Child Protection Concerns

This guidance is written for staff working with children and young people working in education settings and should be read in conjunction with Cambridgeshire LA's whistleblowing procedures (given above in Section 1 and 2)

Staff must acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or you may fear harassment or victimisation; these feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young person who is targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare.

Reasons for whistle blowing

- Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening
- To protect or reduce risks to others
- To prevent becoming implicated yourself

What stops people from whistle blowing

- Starting a chain of events which spirals
- Disrupting the work or project
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers
- Fear of not being believed

How to raise a concern

- You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier concern is expressed the easier and sooner it is possible for action to be taken
- Try to pinpoint what practice is concerning you and why
- Approach someone you trust and who you will believe will respond
- Make sure you get a satisfactory response – don't let matters rest
- Ideally you should put your concerns in writing
- A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but you will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern

What happens next

- You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries
- Your employer has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation
- No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and as raised in good faith
- Malicious allegations may be considered as a disciplinary offence

Self reporting

Staff have a responsibility to report any relevant changes of circumstance to their employer. These include any criminal investigations, convictions or warnings they may

become the subject of and/or if their own children become involved in any child protection related concern

There also may be occasions where a member of staff has a personal difficulty maybe a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. Staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff concerned.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children

Further advice and support

Full details of Cambridgeshire County Council's whistleblowing procedures can be obtained from the HR Department of the County Council.

It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from your line manager, your HR provider and/or your professional or trade union

"Absolutely without fail - challenge poor practice or performance. If you ignore or collude with poor practice it makes it harder to sound the alarm when things go wrong". With acknowledgement to Sounding the Alarm - Barnardos