

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Introduction

Forum members/volunteers are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within an organisation - however, they may not express their concerns as they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or the organisation or could result in unfavourable treatment. The Whistleblowing Policy encourages and enables parent volunteers / Forum members to raise serious concerns with Leeds PCF.

Policy statement

By encouraging a culture of openness, the organisation wants to encourage volunteers / Forum members to raise issues which concern them as they engage with the Forum. They may be worried that by reporting such issues they will be opening themselves up to detrimental treatment, or risking future involvement with the Forum, however, this is not the case. We would prefer that concerns are raised so that they can be dealt with.

This policy is designed to provide the opportunity for Forum members/volunteers to disclose relevant concerns and receive feedback on action taken, and reassure them that they are protected from dismissal from the forum, harassment, intimidation or other detrimental treatment. Provided that they are acting in good faith, it does not matter if they are mistaken.

Our commitment

The organisation is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty and accountability. With this commitment, volunteers / Forum members are encouraged to voice any concerns.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is providing a mechanism by which Forum members/volunteers who suspect or are aware of any serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation can voice their concerns internally without fear of reprisal or adverse consequence. By encouraging a culture of openness, the organisation is committed to addressing any malpractice that might arise within the Forum.

This policy applies to all volunteers / Forum members regardless of role and location. Failure to adhere to this and associated policies, will lead to disciplinary proceedings up to and including being removed from the steering committee or any other related functions of the Forum.

Malpractice

If there are matters which a volunteer/ Forum member thinks the organisation should know about, they should report it in line with this policy and procedure. By knowing about alleged malpractice at an early stage, the organisation stands a good chance of taking the necessary steps to safeguard the interests of the forum its volunteers / Forum members and the public.

The kinds of malpractice covered by this policy are:

- falsification of records
- inappropriate use of external funding
- possible fraud, theft or corruption
- a criminal offence or a breach of law that has been committed, is being committed, or is likely to be committed
- leaking confidential information in respect of organisational activities and/or records
- damage, or likely damage to the environment
- deliberately concealing information regarding any of the above matters. Not raising an issue on such activity is, in itself, the wrong thing to do.

Responsibilities

The Chair will ensure that:

- all volunteers / Forum members are made aware of this policy and the Whistleblowing Procedure they need to follow
- Support is given to volunteers / Forum members who report concerns under this policy.
- All volunteers / Forum members are encouraged to raise genuine concerns under this policy relating to instances of malpractice.

The organisation assures volunteers / Forum members that:

- If a concern is raised in good faith under this policy, volunteers / Forum members will not suffer any form of retribution, detrimental treatment or negative or adverse consequences as a result, even if they are mistaken. However, reasonably believe that the information that they have tends to show some malpractice
- The organisation will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect volunteers / Forum members when they raise a concern in good faith
- If a volunteer/ Forum member asks the organisation to keep their identity confidential, the organisation will not disclose their identity without the volunteer/ Forum member's consent. However, if they do not tell the organisation who they are, it may be much more difficult for the organisation to look into the matter, protect the volunteer / Forum member's position or to give them feedback.

Confidentiality

The organisation will maintain strictest confidentiality when dealing with any concerns raised.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

All whistleblowing disclosures will be treated as confidential. You should make it clear that you are making your disclosure within the terms of Leeds PCF's whistleblowing policy. This will ensure that the recipient of the disclosure will realise this and take the necessary action to investigate the disclosure and protect the whistleblower's identity. They will then get in touch with you to discuss your concern.

They will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us from giving you specific details of the investigation or the disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information of the investigation as confidential. While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy you can help us achieve this. The three stages are:

Stage 1 - Initial investigation

A colleague wishing to raise an issue should take this up either orally or in writing with the member of Leeds PCF they normally deal with. If that member is the person against whom the disclosure is made, the colleague may go immediately to Stage 2. The Leeds PCF member should investigate with the informant and document the facts surrounding the allegation. It should be made clear from the outset that the matter will be dealt with in confidence and that the informant will not suffer any detriment as a result of the disclosure being made. The investigation should take no longer than 10 working days.

Stage 2

If the issues are not investigated at Stage 1, or the matter is too serious or sensitive, the colleague may request that the matter be raised with one of the co-chairs of the Leeds PCF.

Exceptionally serious or sensitive matters

Where the volunteer deems the matter to be exceptionally serious, or sensitive they should go immediately to one of the co-chairs of Leeds PCF.

Stage 3

On completion of the investigation, consideration should be given to the next appropriate course of action. Where there is a case to answer in relation to the disclosure 'further action' may include disciplinary proceedings for one or more parties involved in the matter disclosed. This should be dealt with in line with the Disciplinary and Grievance Policy in the case of colleagues. The rights of the informant to confidentiality should remain protected where possible. The 'whistle-blower' will be informed where possible that action has been taken and the matter has been dealt with in accordance with Leeds PCF procedures. The co-chairs will be informed of all matters in relation to 'whistle-blowing' and any course of action decided upon. If the individual believes that the appropriate action has not been taken then they should report the matter to the Contact Adviser (Lisa Aldred who can be contacted at lisa.aldred@contact.org.uk or on 07421 451678).

Implemented: June 2023

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