

Whistleblowing Policy – West of England Combined Authority and West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A Discloser is the person who is the whistle-blower.
- 1.2 This procedure outlines the process to follow for a Discloser when reporting a perceived wrongdoing within the Authority or LEP, including something they believe goes against the core values of Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Principles) and the Code of Conduct for Employees of the Authority or LEP Board Members and staff. The Standards in Public Life include the principles of; integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership and impartiality.
- 1.3 It is important that this procedure is followed when raising any concerns, to ensure that the matter is dealt with correctly.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 This document uses the following definitions:
 - Whistleblowing* - where an individual who has concerns about a danger, risk, contravention of rules or illegality provides useful information to address this. In doing so they are acting in the wider public interest, usually because it threatens others or impacts on public funds. By contrast, a grievance or private complaint is a dispute about the individual's own position and has no or very limited public interest.
 - The Authority* – West of England Combined Authority, incorporating the LEP
 - The LEP* – West of England Local Enterprise Partnership
 - Discloser* – this is the person who is the whistle-blower. They might be an employee, a LEP Board Member, a contractor, a third party or a member of the public.
 - Responsible Officer* - this is the person, appointed by the Authority, with overall responsibility for maintaining and operating this whistleblowing policy. They will maintain a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but will do so in a form that does not endanger confidentiality) and will report to senior decision makers as necessary. This is the Democratic Services Officer. If the concern relates to the Responsible Officer then the concern should be raised with the Head of Human Resources.
 - Relevant Concern* – something the Discloser has been asked to do, or is aware of, which they consider to be wrong-doing and is in the public interest.

3. Scope

- 3.1 The Authority and the LEP are committed to creating a work environment with the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In view of this commitment, we encourage Disclosers with serious concerns about the work of the Authority and/or the LEP to come forward and voice their concerns without fear of reprisal.
- 3.2 Disclosers should note that where the concern is one that might fall under the Authority's staff or work force policies on equality and diversity or harassment and bullying or other staff policies, they should consider using the reporting mechanisms for those other policies first.
- 3.3 The Authority has a pre-existing complaints procedure that in many cases will be more appropriate for third parties or members of the public to follow. Third parties or members of the public should review the separate confidential complaints procedure outlined in the Authority's complaints policy first before going through the whistleblowing process.
- 3.4 However, if a member of the public or third party believes that their complaint fits the description of a 'relevant concern' outlined below, they may report their concerns through the whistleblowing policy procedure.

4. Policy Statement

- 4.1 This policy aims to:
 - Encourage people to feel confident about raising serious concerns and to question and act upon their concerns without fear of victimisation or harassment;
 - Provide avenues for Disclosers to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
 - Allow Disclosers to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the Authority / LEP's response; and
 - Reassure all Disclosers, employees in particular who may have specific concerns about their position and employment status in the Authority or LEP, that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have made any disclosure in the public interest.

5. What is a relevant concern?

- 5.1 If a Discloser is asked to do something, or is aware of the actions of another, which they consider to be wrongdoing, they can raise it using this procedure. The Discloser must have a reasonable belief that raising the concern is in the public interest.
- 5.2 A Discloser may decide to raise a concern under the whistleblowing policy if they are aware of a situation that they feel:

- is against the Authority or LEP's procedures and protocols as set out in its code of conduct and individual LEP Assurance Framework;
- falls below established standards of practice the Authority or LEP subscribes to;
- amounts to improper conduct; or
- is an abuse of power for personal gain.

5.3 They types of matters regarded as a relevant concern for the purpose of this procedure include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Fraud or financial irregularity;
- Corruption, bribery or blackmail;
- Other Criminal offences;
- Failure to comply with a legal or regulatory duty or obligation;
- Miscarriage of justice;
- Endangering the health or safety of any individual;
- Endangering the environment;
- Improper use of authority; and
- Concealment of any of the above.

5.4 Disclosers should not raise malicious or vexatious concerns, nor should they raise knowingly untrue concerns. In addition, this procedure should not be used to raise concerns of a HR/personal nature, such as, complaints relating to a management decision or terms and conditions of employment. These matters should be dealt with using the relevant alternative procedure, for example, the LEP grievance procedure. Equally, this policy would not apply to matters of individual conscience where there is no suggestion of wrongdoing by the LEP but, for example, an employee or LEP Board Member is required to act in a way which conflicts with a deeply held personal belief.

6. Safeguards

6.1 The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1999) gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Authority believes that no member of staff should be at a disadvantage because they raise a legitimate concern.

6.2 The Authority will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect Disclosers when they raise a concern in the public interest.

7. Raising a concern

7.1 If a Discloser experiences something in the workplace which they consider a relevant concern, it is important that the concern is raised as early as possible. Proof is not required at this point – it is for the Authority or LEP to investigate. The Discloser must, however, have a reasonable belief that disclosing the information is in the public interest before raising a concern.

- 7.2 All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made to protect the Discloser's identity if they wish to remain anonymous. However, at the appropriate time, it is possible that the Discloser will need to come forward as a witness for the matter to progress.
- 7.3 It is important to follow the correct procedure when raising a whistleblowing concern. The following steps should be adhered to:
- a) It is important that the concern is raised with the person best placed to deal with the matter, in most cases this will be the Responsible Officer. However, the Discloser may want to raise the concern with someone they know and trust, such as their line manager who can raise it with the Responsible Officer on their behalf.
 - b) If it is suspected that the concern may implicate the line manager in some way, then it could be raised with a more senior manager in the line management chain.
 - c) If the Discloser is unable to raise a relevant concern with a line manager or a senior manager or feel that it has not been adequately addressed, it should be raised directly with the Responsible Officer.
 - d) Ultimately, the Discloser can raise their concern with the Authority / LEP Chief Executive.

8. Information needed to raise a concern

- 8.1 When raising a concern under the procedure the Discloser should try to provide the following information:
- The background and reason behind the concern;
 - Whether they have already raised a concern with anyone and the response; and
 - Any relevant dates when actions related to the concern took place.
- 8.2 This information should demonstrate that there are reasonable grounds for the concern to be acted upon. It is important that matters are not investigated by the Discloser themselves.
- 8.3 If applicable, personal interests must be declared from the outset.

9. How the concern will be handled

- 9.1 All investigations will be conducted sensitively and as quickly as possible. While the Authority cannot guarantee that the outcome will be as the Discloser may wish, it will handle the matter fairly and in accordance with this procedure.
- 9.2 Once a concern has been raised with either the line manager or Responsible Officer, Senior Manager or Chief Executive, a meeting may be arranged with them to determine how the concern should be taken forward.

- 9.3 If the Disclosure relates specifically to the conduct of a member of Authority or LEP staff, advice will be sought from the Head of Human Resources.
- 9.4 The Authority or LEP may decide to take the matter forward by a number of methods, including:
- An internal inquiry or other formal investigation;
 - An internal or external audit;
 - Referring the matter to the police;
 - Referring the matter to another relevant authority for investigation.
- 9.5 Before a final decision is taken on how to proceed, or as part of the investigation, the Discloser may be asked to meet with those investigating their allegation.
- 9.6 If a meeting is arranged, the Discloser may wish to be accompanied by a trade union representative, colleague or friend. The person who accompanies the Discloser should not be involved or have a direct interest in the area of work to which the concern relates. The meeting can be conducted over the telephone rather than face to face.
- 9.7 Within 10 clear working days of a concern being raised, the Responsible Officer will write to the Discloser to:
- Acknowledge that the concern has been received;
 - Indicate how they propose to deal with the matter;
 - Give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
 - Tell the Discloser whether any initial investigation or enquiry has been made;
 - Tell the Discloser whether further investigation will be made, and if not, why not;
 - Tell the Discloser how frequently they will be kept up to date on progress of the investigation.
- 9.8 If necessary, the Authority or LEP will seek further information from the Discloser.
- 9.9 The Authority or LEP will confirm when the matter is concluded and, if appropriate, the outcome of the investigation, maintaining security and confidentiality for all parties as far as possible.
- 9.10 Throughout any investigation, the Discloser will still be expected to continue their duties/role as normal unless deemed inappropriate.

10. Confidentiality and Anonymity

- 10.1 The Authority / LEP always encourages potential Disclosers to speak up about potential serious wrongdoing in a way that they feel comfortable. The best way to raise a concern is to do so openly, as this makes it easier to investigate and provide feedback.
- 10.2 Any disclosures made under this procedure will be treated in a sensitive manner. However, it is recognised that the Discloser may want to raise a concern in

confidence, i.e. they may want to raise a concern on the basis that their name it is not revealed without their consent.

- 10.3 The Authority / LEP will respect any request for confidentiality as far as possible, restricting it to a 'need to know' basis. However, if the situation arises where it is not possible to resolve the concern without revealing the Discloser (for example in matters of criminal law), the Discloser will be advised before proceeding. The same considerations of confidentiality should be afforded to the recipient(s) at the centre of the concern, as far as appropriate.
- 10.4 Disclosers may choose to raise concerns anonymously, i.e. without providing their name at all. If this is the case, the investigation itself may serve to reveal the source of information. Disclosers are therefore encouraged, where possible to put their names to concerns raised. When anonymous concerns are raised, they will be treated as credible and investigated so far as possible.

11. Protection

- 11.1 If a concern is raised in the reasonable belief that it is in the public interest and procedures have been followed correctly, the Discloser raising the concern will be protected by the terms of this policy and, where applicable, by whistleblowing legislation. Where a Discloser has been victimised for raising a concern, appropriate action will be taken in line with the Authority's disciplinary policy.

12. Untrue Allegations

- 12.1 If a Discloser makes an allegation but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. However, if a malicious or vexatious allegation is made without good reason, an investigation may take place. Where the Discloser is an employee or a LEP Board Member or a contractor this may result in disciplinary or other action being taken.

13. How this matter can be taken forward if you are not satisfied

- 13.1 If you are either unable to raise the matter with the Authority or LEP, or you are dissatisfied with the action taken you may consider raising it with:

- The police;
- The relevant regulatory body or professional body;
- Your Trade Union;
- Your solicitor;
- Your Citizens Advice Bureau.

- 13.2 If your concern relates to the LEP rather than the Authority, you can also raise it with the Cities and Local Growth Unit in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, at the following email address: LEPPolicy@communities.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to: LEP Policy Deputy Director, Cities and Local Growth Unit, Fry Block, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF. You should clearly mark your email or letter as "Official - whistleblowing".

- 13.3 If a Discloser does take the matter outside the Authority or LEP, to an external body, they should ensure they do not disclose information that is confidential, for example, if you are an employee your contract of employment may set out expectations of you regarding what is confidential.

14. Feedback on Whistleblowing Policy

- 14.1 Any feedback or comments on this policy should be directed to the Authority's Responsible Officer.