



## **Whistle Blowing Policy**

(Updated 6 February 2023)

Wiltshire Host Families Ltd is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity, and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the Company to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances the line manager would be the appropriate person to be told).

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect in 1999, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Company has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the Company nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside the Company.

## When to Report Concerns

When to report concerns This policy is designed to deal with concerns raised in relation to specific issues which are in the public interest and detailed below. Only genuine concerns should be reported. Whistle blowing means a disclosure of information made by an employee, host family, student or external person where they reasonably believe that one or more of the following matters is happening now, took place in the past or is likely to happen in the future. This is a non-exhaustive list of examples:

- A criminal offence
- Fraud
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of an individual
- Damage to the environment
- A deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the above.
- We request that, where possible, you include the information below in your disclosure:
- An outline of the known or suspected wrongdoing

You can raise concerns by email, orally or in writing, stating that you are using the **Whistle Blowing Policy**. We request that, where possible, you include the information below in your disclosure:

- Details, to the best of your knowledge, about when, where and how it occurred
- A list of names of those suspected of being involved
- A list of names of anyone who may have relevant information
- Details of how you came to know about the situation
- What, if any, breaches of company policies or procedures have taken place
- The names of anyone you have discussed this incident with
- Your name and contact details - these will be kept confidential as far as is reasonably practicable
- The date and time of making the report.

## Safeguards

### Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of Wiltshire Host Families Ltd who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:

- in good faith
- in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below). It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case, malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

## **Confidentiality**

Wiltshire Host Families Ltd will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

## **Anonymous Allegations**

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of the Company. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

## **Untrue Allegations**

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

## **Procedures for Making a Disclosure**

On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible, to the appropriate designated safeguarding officer as follows:

- Complaints of malpractice will be investigated by The Safeguarding Officer – Gill Brindley alongside Val Rideout (Managing Director).

If there is evidence of criminal activity, then the investigating officer should inform the police. The Company will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder a formal police investigation.

## **Timescales**

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and / or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations. The investigating officer should ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating officer, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.

## Investigating Procedure

The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.
- The investigating officer should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals / bodies.
- A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement.
- The Managing Director will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate Company procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Managing director.

If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, the Company recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons (such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Audit Commission, or the utility regulators), or, where justified, elsewhere.