

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Age UK Buckinghamshire is committed to promoting and maintaining a culture of high standards of openness, honesty and respect within the workplace. In line with this commitment, it encourages employees, volunteers and members of the public with serious concerns to voice those concerns at an early stage without fear of recrimination.

The Policy will be reviewed every two years by the Board of Trustees or sooner if legislation, best practice or other circumstances dictate this is necessary. This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any stage.

Age UK Buckinghamshire will not tolerate anyone being prevented from voicing concerns or being mistreated because they have done so. Any suggestion of retaliation against individuals who voice concerns will be taken very seriously. It is important everyone feels safe and confident to raise any issues or concerns.

1. Aim

- 1.1 The aim of the policy is to help employees and volunteers raise serious concerns that they may have without fear of suffering negative consequences for having done so
- 1.2 The policy is to ensure that all employees and volunteers are aware of the whistleblowing (or speak up) process and the appropriate person to contact in the event of serious concerns within the workplace.
- 1.3 Members of the public may also have concerns which they wish to raise and details of how to raise those concerns are listed in section 5.

2. What is Whistleblowing?

- 2.1 You can speak up about anything that gets in the way of doing our work, where you are concerned that we have not done the right thing or gone about something in the right way.

Some examples that may fall under this policy include:

- You suspect that there has been a breach of the law, e.g., bribery, corruption, fraud, or the facilitation of tax evasion which is not being addressed.
 - You are worried that a person's personal interests have conflicted with their professional duties, e.g., where a contract has been awarded to an organisation which a person involved in the process has a personal connection to, and you are concerned this might not have been properly disclosed and considered.
 - You are concerned that someone has falsified (i.e., deliberately changed or left out) important information in a document.
- 2.2 Some issues may be appropriately considered under other policies or processes for example the Grievance or Safeguarding Policy. If you raise something under this policy that is better dealt with under another policy or process, we will redirect it. It's important that you do have a reasonable belief in the truth of what you raise, but you do not have to be certain.

This is **not** usually the right policy to use for:

- Concerns about treatment you have personally experienced in the course of your employment which is normally better dealt with under the respect at work or grievance policy.
- Concerns about safeguarding which should be raised under the safeguarding policy.

If you are in any doubt, please speak to your line manager or Head of Central Services as appropriate.

3. How employees raise a concern

- 3.1 In many cases you will be able to raise a confidential concern with your Line Manager in the first instance. This may be a verbal discussion or in writing. In the event that the individual feels that the Line Manager is not an appropriate person to talk to, they may take their concern to the CEO. If this is inappropriate, you should contact the Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees who is responsible for overseeing whistleblowing, Rdiprose@ageukbucks.org.uk
- 3.2 Where the individual remains unsure whether to use this procedure, they can obtain independent advice by contacting Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) on 020 3117 2520. They operate a confidential helpline and will advise you of the correct procedure in the circumstances.
- 3.3 All concerns will be investigated thoroughly and dealt with as appropriate. The Line Manager involved will ensure that the CEO is informed (unless the concern is about the CEO, in which case the Trustees will be informed). As a guide, investigations normally take around 30 days, but this will depend on the nature of the issue. You will be kept up to date from time to time, and will be advised of the outcome of the investigation (as far as appropriate recognising the need to balance considerations of confidentiality or other legal matters). In the event that the investigation is ongoing the individual will be kept informed of the next stages.
- 3.4 You may be asked to attend a meeting to discuss your concern in more detail. You can bring a colleague to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 3.5 The meeting will be exploratory depending on the nature of the concern and the Line Manager or CEO will make a formal note of the meeting, which is shared with the person who has raised the concern within agreed timeframes.
- 3.6 The person to whom the individual initially makes the disclosure will normally act as the main point of contact and be responsible for keeping the individual up to date on the outcome. If the disclosure falls more properly within other procedures, they will advise the individual of this.
- 3.7 We hope that you feel comfortable raising your concerns under this policy and we will aim to keep your concern confidential and only reveal your identity where necessary to those involved in the investigation.
- 3.8 We would always encourage you to use the options above, at least in the first instance.

However, there may be exceptional times when you feel it's most appropriate to raise an issue externally to a regulator or relevant professional body. In these instances, you may contact the following:

Charity Commission regulator - whistleblowing@charitycommission.gov.uk

Age UK National - 0800 678 1602

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) on 020 3117 2520.

- 3.9 Raising a concern about something you know to be false, or causing a detriment to those who have done the right thing by raising a concern may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

4. Protection and Support for Whistleblowers

- 4.1 We aim to encourage openness and support for those who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 4.2 We will protect anyone who raises a concern from suffering negative consequences or a detriment for having done so. It is important to emphasise that AUKB will also support and will not tolerate victimisation and intimidation of any individuals involved in the investigation including those who participate as witnesses.
- 4.3 We know that speaking up is not always easy, and depending on the issue, you may need advice and support. You can always ask for advice and support from Head of Central Services.

5. Reporting by Members of the Public

- 5.1 Whilst the majority of disclosures will be made by Employees or Volunteers, there is scope within the legislation for members of the public and those associated with Age UK Buckinghamshire to raise whistleblowing concerns. Members of the public may also feel that they wish to pursue a matter they feel is in the public interest. In these circumstances, the concern should be made directly to the CEO, Mark Russell at mrussell@ageukbucks.org.uk. In the event that you feel this is inappropriate, or you wish to escalate your concern, you should contact the Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees who is responsible for overseeing whistleblowing, Rdiprose@ageukbucks.org.uk

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