

Whistleblowing Policy

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1. Introduction

Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin (Age UK STW) is committed to open and honest communication and the highest possible standards of integrity. Part of meeting that commitment is to encourage employees, volunteers, trustees and others who have serious concerns to speak up. This may need to be on a confidential basis and Age UK STW wishes to emphasise that if someone does 'speak up' they can do so without fear of reprisals. Such policies are termed 'blowing the whistle' and this phrase is used throughout this statement but should be viewed as a positive action of speaking up.

Employees or volunteers may be the first to see that something is seriously wrong within Age UK STW. Such wrongdoings may relate to:

- Fraud and corruption.
- Discrimination.
- Abuse of vulnerable people.

It is the duty of employees or volunteers to speak up when they have serious concerns and it is the duty of Age UK STW to act on those concerns and protect and support employees and volunteers when they do. A failure to report a serious concern could be construed as collusion. Difficult as it may be to speak up, employees and volunteers should be aware of their special position and of their duty to make their concerns known.

This policy statement makes clear what employees and volunteers should do and what will happen as a result.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy statement is issued to employees and volunteers to advise specifically on blowing the whistle on wrongdoing. It should not be confused with the complaints procedure, (where you can complain about Age UK STW services), the grievance procedure (where you can complain about your own treatment as an employee) or the adult protection procedure (specifically relating to safeguarding vulnerable adults).

3. Serious Concerns

- 3.1 There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance about your own employment. This policy is intended to cover serious concerns outside the scope of those procedures.
- 3.2 A serious concern may be related to something that:
- Is unlawful.
 - Is against Age UK STW's Constitution, financial rules, contract rules or other policies.
 - Does not meet established standards or working practices.

- Amounts to improper conduct.

(Theft, bribery and corruption, discrimination, the abuse of children, vulnerable adults or staff are all the types of things which would fall into these categories).

4. Safeguards

4.1 Harassment and Victimisation

Age UK STW recognises that deciding to report a concern can be difficult, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for malpractice. Age UK STW will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

4.2 This does not mean that if you are already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, that those procedures will be halted as a result of your whistleblowing.

4.3 Confidentiality

Age UK STW will do its best to protect your identity when you raise a concern and do not want your name to be disclosed. It must, however, be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by you may be required as part of the evidence.

- The seriousness of the issues raised.
- The validity of the concern.
- The likelihood of confirming the allegations from other sources.

4.4 Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they will be considered at the discretion of Age UK STW. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would be:

- The seriousness of the issues raised.
- The validity of the concern.
- The likelihood of confirming the allegations from other sources.

4.5 Untrue Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. In such circumstances employees will be supported. If, however you make malicious or vexatious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against you, but the matter would be referred to the Chief Executive before any action is taken.

4.6 Support to You

Throughout and after this difficult process you will be given full support from senior management, your concerns will be taken seriously and Age UK STW will do all it can to help you.

5. How to raise a concern

- 5.1 As a first step you should normally raise concerns with your immediate Supervisor or Line Manager. This will depend, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the wrongdoing. If management is involved, you should approach the Chief Executive or if the Chief Executive is implicated the Chair of Trustees.
- 5.2 The earlier you express your concern the better and the easier it will be to take action. Concerns are better raised in writing. You should try to set out:
 - The background and history to your concern.
 - Dates and places where possible.
 - The reasons for your concerns.
- 5.3 Further advice and guidance on what to do can be found in the:
 - Guidance notes on the safeguarding of children, or vulnerable adults;
 - The Harassment and Bullying Policy.

6. How will Age UK STW respond?

- 6.1 The action taken will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

Be investigated within Age UK STW but independently of those directly involved by a party that is impartial/removed from the management situation and has no conflicting interests, nor are they likely to be a Witness, or otherwise likely to be too close to the allegation.
- 6.2 In order to protect individuals and Age UK STW, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. These will be made confidentially and every attempt made to protect the employee or volunteer. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (e.g. safeguarding children or vulnerable adults or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.
- 6.3. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.
- 6.4. Within 10 working days of a concern being received, we will write to you:

- Acknowledging that the concern has been received.
- Indicating how we propose to deal with the matter.
- Giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response.
- Telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made.
- Telling you whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not.

Remember – If you have any serious concerns it is your duty to tell us and our duty to protect and support you. If the matter relates to the abuse of vulnerable adults or children you have a legal duty to disclose this.