

# NORTHERN VISIONS WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

In this policy 'Whistle blowing' means the reporting by employees of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act within Northern Visions.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage employees and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Northern Visions' work to come forward and voice those concerns.

'Whistleblowing' is viewed by Northern Visions as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the Northern Visions' long-term success. Northern Visions is committed to achieving the highest possible ethical standards in public life and in all of its practices. To help achieve these standards it encourages freedom of speech.

## Aims of the Policy

The Policy is designed to ensure that you can raise your concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice within Northern Visions without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination, disadvantage or dismissal.

It is also intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns **within** Northern Visions rather than ignoring a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

This Policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns at the earliest opportunity and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have made any disclosure in good faith.

## Scope

This Policy is intended to enable those who become aware of wrongdoing in Northern Visions affecting some other person or service, to report their concerns at the earliest opportunity so that they can be properly investigated.

The Whistle Blowing Policy is not intended to replace existing procedures:

- If your concern relates to your own treatment as an employee, you should raise it under the existing grievance or harassment procedures
- If a client has a concern about services provided to him/her, it should be raised as a complaint to the Chairperson

The Policy applies to all:

- employees of Northern Visions
- employees of contractors working for Northern Visions, for example, agency staff, freelance workers
- employees of suppliers
- those providing services under a contract or other agreement with Northern Visions in their own premises
- volunteers

You should report:

Any serious concerns that you have about service provision or the conduct of those acting on behalf of Northern Visions that:

- make you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards;
- are not in keeping with the Northern Visions' Constitution and policies;
- fall below established standards of practice; or
- are improper behaviour.

These might relate to:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law (a criminal offence has been committed or failing to comply with any other legal obligation)
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- racial, sexual, disability or other discrimination
- health and safety of the public and/or other employees
- damage to the environment
- unauthorised use of public funds or other assets
- possible fraud and corruption
- neglect or abuse of clients, or
- other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

## **Your legal rights**

This policy has been written to take account of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 which protects workers making disclosures about certain matters of concern, when those disclosures are made in accordance with the Act's provisions and in the public interest.

The Act makes it unlawful Northern Visions to dismiss anyone or allow them to be victimised on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

Rarely, a case might arise where it is the employee that has participated in the action causing concern. In such a case it is in the employee's interest to come into the open as soon as possible. Northern Visions cannot promise not to act against such an employee, but the fact that they came forward may be taken into account.

## **Harassment or Victimisation**

Northern Visions is committed to good practice and high standards and to being supportive of you as an employee.

Northern Visions recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you honestly and reasonably believe what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer, your colleagues and those for whom you are providing a service.

Northern Visions will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of a whistleblower (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under the disciplinary rules and procedure.

## **Support**

Throughout this process:

- you will be given full support from senior management
- your concerns will be taken seriously, and
- Northern Visions will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation
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If appropriate, Northern Visions will consider temporarily re-deploying you for the period of the investigation.

## **Confidentiality**

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if that is your wish. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of your disclosure without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered advice and support.

## **Anonymous Allegations**

This Policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for us to protect your position or to give you feedback. This policy is not ideally suited to concerns raised anonymously.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they may be considered at the discretion of Northern Visions. In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised
- the credibility of the concern, and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources

## **Untrue Allegations**

If you make an allegation in good faith and reasonably believing it to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, Northern Visions will recognise your concern and you have nothing to fear, if however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, appropriate action that could include disciplinary action, may be taken.

## **Raising a Concern**

This will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the wrongdoing. You should normally raise concerns with:

- Your Line Manager
- Northern Visions Chairperson
- Programmes Director.
- A member of the Board of Directors

## **How to raise a concern**

You may raise your concern by telephone, in person or in writing. The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is to take action. You will need to provide the following information:

- the nature of your concern and why you believe it to be true
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates)

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of your suspicion, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that you have a genuine concern relating to suspected wrongdoing or malpractice within Northern Visions and there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present for support during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

Northern Visions will respond to your concerns as quickly as possible. Do not forget that testing your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The overriding principle for Northern Visions will be the public interest. In order to be fair to all employees, including those who may be wrongly or mistakenly accused, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The investigation may need to be carried out under terms of strict confidentiality, i.e. by not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. In certain cases however, such as allegations of ill treatment of others, suspension from work may have to be considered immediately. Protection of others is paramount in all cases.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary/grievance process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor
- be referred and put through established child protection/abuse procedures
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person investigating your concern will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how Northern Visions proposes to deal with the matter
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between you and the officers considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of your information. It is likely that you will be interviewed to ensure that your disclosure is fully understood.

Any meeting can be arranged away from your workplace, if you wish, and a union or professional association representative or a friend may accompany you in support.

Northern Visions will do what it can to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are asked to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, Northern Visions will arrange for you to receive appropriate advice and support.

You need to be assured that your disclosure has been properly addressed. Unless there are any legal reasons why this cannot be done, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

This Policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within Northern Visions to raise concerns. Northern Visions hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and you feel it is right to take the matter outside Northern Visions you may take the matter up with

- your trade union
- the police
- other relevant bodies prescribed by legislation

If you raise concerns **outside** Northern Visions you should be aware that a public disclosure to anyone else could take you outside the protection of the Public Interest Disclosure Act and of this Policy.

This Policy **does not** prevent you from taking your own legal advice.

This policy is reviewed annually.

June 2020  
Chairperson