

Introduction

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable you and other employees to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. If you discover information that you feel shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the Company then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and in some cases, independently of your line manager. The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1999) gives legal protection against being dismissed or penalised as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns.

This policy is intended to assist you with guidance as to the circumstances under which such protection is available and the steps to be taken should you feel that a matter of public interest is at stake.

Although disclosure may be made to certain public authorities, the conditions under which this may be done in order for you to be protected are limited. The Company's policy is therefore that disclosures should be made in the first instance to the Company. As the Company does have a Whistleblowing Policy it reasonably expects you to use this policy rather than air your concerns or complaints outside the Company.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are 020 7404 6609.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and the Company may amend it at any time.

What are the qualifying disclosures?

Only certain kinds of disclosure qualify for protection and are therefore termed "qualifying disclosures". They are disclosures which, in your reasonable opinion tend to show one or more of the following:

- A criminal offence (including, but not limited to, insider dealing);
- The breach of a legal obligation;
- A miscarriage of justice;
- Danger to the health and safety of any individual;
- Damage to the environment;
- That information of the type set out above has been or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

If you become aware of any information of this nature which causes you concern, you may wish to raise the matter informally with your line manager and discuss with him/her the next steps which should be taken to bring the matter to the attention of senior management. If you prefer, you may disclose the information formally to your line manager, or to the appropriate level of management within the Company or the HR Department.

This policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases you should use the Grievance Procedure.

Are my disclosures confidential?

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.

We do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to the HR Department and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality.

Investigation and Outcome

Once you have raised a concern, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.

In some cases we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

If we conclude that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action.

If you are unhappy with the way in which your disclosure is received or dealt with, you should immediately raise that concern with your line manager or the HR Department.

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform the HR department immediately. If the matter is not remedied you should raise it formally using our Grievance Procedure.

You must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If you are involved in such conduct you may be subject to disciplinary action.