

1625 INDEPENDENT PEOPLE

Concerns at Work Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are committed to conducting our business with honesty and integrity, and we expect all colleagues to maintain high standards in accordance with our Policies and Procedures. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.
- 1.2 The aims of this policy are:
 - a) To encourage colleagues to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, that their confidentiality will be respected and that they will be supported as needed.
 - b) To provide colleagues with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
 - c) To reassure colleagues that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all individuals working at all levels of the organisation, including senior managers, officers, directors, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, apprentices, homeworkers, relief workers, part-time and fixed-term workers, casual and agency staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as **colleagues** in this policy).
- 1.4 This policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute and Public Concern at Work. It has been implemented following consultation with our recognised Trade Union.
- 1.5 This Policy will run alongside but is independent of other relevant Organisational policies and procedures, e.g. the Code of Conduct. We may change the contents of this document, including any time limits, according to organisational needs.
- 1.6 This document is for guidance only. It does not form part of your contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2. What is a concern?

- 2.1 To **report a concern** means to disclose information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- a) malpractice or ill treatment of a service user by a colleague;
- b) repeated ill treatment of a service user despite a complaint being made;
- c) criminal activity;
- d) miscarriages of justice¹;
- e) danger to health and safety;
- f) damage to the environment;
- g) failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- h) bribery;
- i) financial fraud or mismanagement;
- j) negligence;
- k) breach of our internal policies and procedures including our Code of Conduct;
- l) conduct likely to damage our reputation;
- m) unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- n) the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters;
- o) third party conduct.

2.2 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* or the *Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy* as appropriate.

2.3 If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from your line manager in the first instance or the Concerns at Work Officer thereafter, whose contact details are at the end of this policy.

3. Third party concerns

3.1 Raising concerns usually relate to the conduct of our colleagues, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as agencies, suppliers and service users. If in the course of your employment you come across a concern regarding the actions of a third party, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first. You should contact your line manager or one of the other individuals set out in the final section of this policy for guidance.

3.2 We will follow the process outlined in section 6, below, in dealing with your concern. This will also enable us to raise the concern with the third party directly rather than you doing so as an individual.

¹ A failure of a court or judicial system to attain the ends of justice, especially one that results in the conviction of an innocent person.

4. Protection and support for colleagues raising concerns

- 4.1 It is understandable that colleagues raising concerns are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support colleagues who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 4.2 Colleagues who come forward with a concern can be confident that this will not affect their career or their enjoyment of the job. This applies equally if you come forward in good faith with a concern which turns out later not to have been justified.
- 4.3 Colleagues must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. 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 Concerns at Work Officer immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our Grievance Procedure.
- 4.4 Colleagues must not threaten or retaliate against colleagues raising concerns in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action. Likewise, colleagues must not try to discourage others from coming forward to express concern. An attempt to do so will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

5. Raising a concern

- 5.1 Whilst we appreciate that it is not always easy to report a concern, particularly one which may relate to fraud or corruption, we do expect you to come forward with any concerns at an early stage, and before problems have a chance to become serious. We also urge you to provide as much specific information as possible to ensure the matter can be investigated thoroughly.
- 5.2 We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your line manager. If for some reason, this is not possible, you should speak to another manager. You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if you prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Concerns at Work Officer.
- 5.3 However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your line manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:

- a) The Concerns at Work Officer.
- b) The Chief Executive Officer.
- c) The Chair of the Board of 1625 Independent People.

5.4 Contact details are set out at the end of this policy.

5.5 We will liaise with you by appropriate means and if required, we will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. If attending a meeting, you may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

5.6 We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

5.7 If at the end of our investigation, we conclude that a false concern has been made maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the person who has raised those false concerns may be subject to disciplinary action.

6. Investigation and outcome

6.1 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.

6.2 In some cases, we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including colleagues 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.

6.3 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.

7. Confidentiality

7.1 We hope that colleagues will feel able to voice concerns openly under this policy. We cannot guarantee anonymity because serious allegations may

need to be disclosed to a third party, such as the police. Further, we would be unlikely to be able to investigate anonymous reports as we would require further information from you.

7.2 The persons involved in the investigation will maintain confidentiality throughout the investigation where possible but if you have concerns about possible reprisals if your identity is revealed, please talk to the person dealing with your concern. If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are also at the end of this policy.

8. External disclosures

8.1 The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. The internal disclosure is designed to assure colleagues of independence and seriousness with which an investigation will take place and there is no reason why any concern should be raised externally, unless you have exhausted all possible avenues to report the concern internally and the concern has not been addressed adequately.

8.2 External disclosure has consequences, which could endanger the organisation and its operations. We therefore 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 at the end of this policy.

9. If you are not satisfied

10.1 Whilst we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking; we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy, you can help us to achieve this.

10.2 If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled by the person with whom you originally raised your concern, you can raise it with one of the other key contacts in section 4.3. If you are still not satisfied you may contact our external auditors, whose details will vary depending on the nature of the concern and will be supplied in response to your request.

10. Responsibility for the success of this policy

- 10.3 The Strategic Leadership Team Plus (SLT+) has overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.
- 10.4 The Concerns at Work Officer has day-to-day operational responsibility for this policy and must ensure that all managers and other colleagues who may deal with concerns or investigations under this policy receive regular and appropriate training.
- 10.5 The Concerns at Work Officer, in conjunction with the SLT+ and the Trade Union should review this policy from a legal and operational perspective every three years.
- 10.6 All colleagues are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Colleagues are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to the Concerns at Work Officer.
- 10.7 We believe that any concern raised is a learning opportunity to prevent the same events re-occurring. As such, any concerns raised, and our subsequent investigations will be fed into our organisational learning.

Contacts

CONCERNS AT WORK OFFICER	Head of People 0117 317 8842 concerns@1625ip.co.uk
CEO	Dominic Wood 0117 317 8822 dom.wood@1625ip.co.uk
Chairman of the Board	Nick Hooper nickhooperassociates@gmail.com
Public Concern at Work (independent whistleblowing charity)	Helpline: (020) 7404 6609 E-mail: whistle@pcaw.co.uk Website: www.pcaw.co.uk