

Whistleblower Policy

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Whistleblowing (Worker Concerns) Policy Statement

This Policy Statement and accompanying Procedure applies to all paid and unpaid workers.

It is not intended to work in conflict with the existing Grievance Policy and Procedure. Since the raising of a bona fide concern is to be considered separately to the raising of a grievance, there is no conflict. This statement facilitates a clear understanding about the nature of a ‘concern’, rather than a ‘grievance’.

This policy has been produced according to the requirements of both the Protected Disclosure Act 1998 and the U.K. Human Rights Act 1998. Regular reviews will ensure that the advice and recommendations offered within this policy and the procedure remain best practice in the light of amendment to legislation and the emergence of new legal precedents.

Your Safety

4Sight Vision Support is committed to ensuring that all workers may raise a concern without fear of retaliation or victimisation. All concerns raised in the ways recommended will be dealt with transparently and may be investigated in confidence if that is your wish.

Workers may be assured that, providing that a concern is raised in good faith, it will not matter should it later be shown to be mistaken. However, any concern raised vexatiously, maliciously or frivolously may lead to disciplinary action being taken. Workers may also find themselves needing to answer concerns raised by another worker.

In all events, workers will have the right to reply, to have access to all pertinent information, and have rights of appeal throughout all the processes.

Your Confidence

4Sight Vision Support will not tolerate the harassment or the victimisation of any worker who raises a genuine concern. As it is recognised that workers may still prefer to raise a concern in confidence, it will be possible to do so without us disclosing your identity.

It may not be possible to investigate as thoroughly whilst maintaining absolute confidentiality, however, as other workers may need to add information during the process.

If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing a worker's identity (for instance where evidence must be given in court) we will discuss with the worker how and when we might proceed.

In the event that a worker raises a concern anonymously, we will investigate it. It may be much more difficult to do that satisfactorily, to protect the worker's position or to give feedback under such circumstances.

Nature of a Concern

A protected disclosure, i.e. a concern that may be raised by a worker with the confidence that he or she will receive the full protection of the organisation and the benefits of current legislation, may be clarified as being:

- about an act of unlawful administration but **not** of maladministration
- about an act of malpractice
- about an abusive act made against a vulnerable person, made with coercion, or made against a person unable to resist or to reject it
- an illegal act or the wilful cover-up of an illegal act
- the taking of bribes or incentives (not including performance related incentives through salary)
- the wilful wastage of resources
- the destruction of information or other resources

Process of Investigation

The recommended process for the raising of a concern in the workplace is fully explained within the accompanying Whistleblowing Procedure. In most cases a worker should be able to raise a concern in the manner indicated, via the Chief Executive or one of the Trustees.

It is fully recognised that a worker may feel unable to follow this process, for instance where it may be later shown that victimisation would follow or where a cover-up would ensue. Where this is the case, the worker is recommended to report a concern externally to the properly appointed agency.

Where one cannot be identified, contact should be made with Public Concern at Work, the independent agency that deals free of charge with worker concerns.

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY (CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING)

1. What is Whistleblowing?

In this policy 'Whistleblowing' means the reporting by employees of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act within the Charity.

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

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong. 'Whistleblowing' is viewed by the Charity as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the Charity's efficiency and long-term success. It is not disloyal to colleagues or the Charity to speak up. The Charity is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service and the highest possible ethical standards in public life and in all of its practices. To help achieve these standards it encourages freedom of speech.

If you are considering raising a concern you should read this Policy first. It explains:

- the type of issues that can be raised
- how the person raising a concern will be protected from victimisation and harassment
- how to raise a concern, and
- what the Charity will do

If you are unsure whether to use this Policy or want independent advice at any stage, you may contact the independent charity **Public Concern at Work** on **020 7404**

6609. Their advisers can give you free confidential advice on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

2. What is the aim of the Policy and when does it apply?

2.1. Aims of the Policy

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

It is also intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns **within** the Charity 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.

2.2. Scope of this Policy

This Policy is intended to enable those who become aware of wrongdoing in the Charity 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 member has a concern about services provided to him/her, it should be raised as a complaint to the Charity.

2.3. Who can raise a concern under this Policy?

The Policy applies to all:

- Employees, Volunteers, Members and Trustees of 4Sight Vision Support.
- Employees of contractors working for the Charity, for example, agency staff, builders and drivers.
- Employees of suppliers.
- Those providing services under a contract or other agreement with the Charity in their own premises.

2.4. What should be reported?

Any serious concerns that you have about service provision or the conduct of members of the Charity or others acting on behalf of the Charity that:

- make you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards;
- are not in keeping with the Charity's vision, values 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,
- possible fraud and corruption,
- neglect or abuse of clients, or
- other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

3. Protecting the Whistleblower

3.1. 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 for the Charity 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. The Charity cannot promise not to act against such an employee, but the fact that they came forward may be taken into account.

3.2. Harassment or Victimisation

The Charity is committed to good practice and high standards and to being supportive of its employees.

The Charity recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make and 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.

3.3. Support to you

Throughout this process:

- you will be given full support from senior management,
- your concerns will be taken seriously, and
- the Charity will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation.

If appropriate, the Charity will consider temporarily re-deploying you for the period of the investigation.

For those who are not 4Sight Vision Support employees, the Charity will endeavour to provide appropriate advice and support wherever possible.

3.4. 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. (See Harassment and Bullying Policy)

3.5. 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 the Charity. 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.

3.6. 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, the Charity 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.

4. Raising a Concern

4.1. Who should you raise your concern with?

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,
- The Chief Executive on **01243 828555**

The address for correspondence is **Bradbury Centre, 36 Victoria Drive, Bogor Regis, Po21 2TE.**

If, exceptionally, the concern is about the Chief Executive of the Charity your concern should be raised with the Chairman of Trustees who will decide how the investigation will proceed. This may include external investigation.

If you are unsure who to contact you may call the independent charity **Public Concern at Work** on **0207 404 6609** for advice.

4.2. 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 the Charity 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 a colleague to be present for support during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

5. What the Charity will do

The Charity 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 the Charity 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 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 the County Charity 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, a colleague may accompany you in support.

The Charity 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, the Charity 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.

6. The Responsible Officer

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Policy.

7. How the Matter can be Taken Further

This Policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the Charity to raise concerns. The Charity hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Charity, there are the following alternatives:

- the police,
- other relevant bodies prescribed by legislation – Public Concern at Work will be able to advise you who you can contact.

If you raise concerns **outside** the Charity, you should ensure that it is to one of these prescribed contacts. A public disclosure to anyone else could take you outside the protection of the Public Interest Disclosure Act and of this Policy.

You should not disclose information that is confidential to the Charity or to anyone else, such as a client or contractor of the Charity, except to those included in the list of prescribed contacts.

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

The Chief Executive of 4Sight Vision Support will maintain a register containing all concerns that are brought to their attention. All management staff allocated to look into a concern must ensure the Chief Executive is provided with sufficient details for the register.

The Chief Executive will review the register and produce a report for 4Sight Vision Support Board. The report will include a summary of the concerns raised, to which department they related, the post to which the concerns related (if not confidential) and any lessons learned. The report will not include any employee names. The aim of this is to ensure that:

- the Charity and/or the relevant department learns from mistakes and does not repeat them, and
- to instil a consistency of approach across the Charity

The register together with the annual reports will be available for inspection by internal and external audit, after removing any confidential details.