

Whistleblowing Policy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Beyond Housing is committed to ensuring that all its activities are lawful and that the highest possible standards of probity, openness and accountability are observed. A number of rules, regulations and procedures exist which are intended to promote high standards, enable employees, Board Directors and customers to express their concerns, and any problems to be investigated and rectified.
- 1.2 Employees are often the first to realise when something is wrong within an organisation but may not always voice their concerns. This might be because they fear reprisals or harassment or because they think speaking up is disloyal to colleagues or the organisation. When a problem arises, perceived or actual, Beyond Housing will always take it seriously and deal with it in a confidential manner. Anyone who comes forward in good faith has nothing to fear. These situations include, but are not limited to:
- Theft, fraud, corruption or malpractice
 - Actual or potential criminal offences
 - Failure to comply with a legal obligation – such as those relating to health & safety
 - Failure to deliver proper standards of service
 - Damaging personal conflicts at senior level
 - The sexual physical or psychological abuse of clients
 - Bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation in the workplace
 - Damage to the environment or
 - Anything else relating to unethical conduct.
- 1.3 Similarly, Board Directors, the public, our customers, partners, suppliers and contractors may feel they have information or dealings with the organisation that cause them concern but are unsure how to raise their concerns.

- 1.4 Employees are asked to contact their supervisor or manager for issues relating to dissatisfaction in the workplace or related matters, as these issues cannot be investigated in the scope of the whistleblowing.
- 1.5 A person who blows the whistle does not need to have firm evidence for expressing a suspicion. However, deliberate reporting of false or malicious information is forbidden. Abuse of the whistleblowing service is a serious disciplinary offence. .
- 1.6 Whistleblowing should not be used as a way of protesting against Beyond Housing's legitimate activities or policies of which an individual happens to disapprove. This policy provides a way in which concerns can be raised confidentially and investigated when other procedures are not sufficient or are inappropriate.

2.0 Objective

- 2.1. This policy aims to:
- Ensure that serious concerns are properly raised and addressed in the workplace
 - Outline the purpose of the whistleblower communication channel (WhistleB)
 - Demonstrate a culture of openness and accountability
 - Encourage the continuing delivery of a quality service
 - Help employees play their part and feel valued
 - Support and encourage a diverse workforce
 - Avoid public criticism and the need for crisis management and
 - Reassure employees, contractors, Board Directors, volunteers and involved residents with concerns that they will not be victimised for expressing their views.
- 2.2. Beyond Housing will:
- Investigate all legitimate concerns
 - Pursue fraud and serious abuse via our disciplinary procedures or through the courts if necessary and
 - Report thefts and fraud to the Police as appropriate
 - Remain committed to supporting colleagues who raise legitimate concerns
 - Treat it as disciplinary offence if any colleague discourages another from coming forward to express a concern
 - Deal severely with anyone who criticises, bullies, harasses or victimises an individual after a concern has been raised.

3.0 Definitions

- 3.1. **Whistleblowing:** The process whereby an individual reports suspected wrongdoing at work. Officially this is called 'making a disclosure in the public interest'.
- 3.2. **Whistleblower:** Someone who becomes aware of a serious problem, perceived or actual, in an organisation and raises the matter so that it may be investigated and, if necessary, corrected. Sometimes this may involve bringing the problem to a wider attention including within the public domain.

- 3.3. **Whistleblowing team:** a team of appointed individuals with the authority to handle whistleblowing cases and have access to messages received through the whistleblowing channel.
- 3.4. **WhistleB:** The WhistleB service offers a possibility to alert the organisation about suspicions of misconduct in confidence. It is an important tool for reducing risks and maintaining trust in Beyond Housing operations by enabling us to detect and act on possible misconduct at an early stage.

4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1. The **Board** and the **Audit and Risk Committee** have overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy complies with our legal and ethical obligations and that all those associated with Beyond Housing comply with it.
- 4.2. The Executive Team have overall responsibility for implementing this policy across the organisation.
- 4.3. The **Company Secretary** will deal with any queries on the interpretation of this policy and will regularly consider its suitability, adequacy and effectiveness.
- 4.4. The **Whistleblowing Team** have access to the messages received through the whistleblowing channel and have the authority to handle whistleblowing cases. When needed, individuals who can add expertise may be included in the investigation process. These people can access relevant data and are also bound to confidentiality.
- 4.5. The reporting of suspicions under this policy is the responsibility of all individuals. All those acting on behalf of Beyond Housing, and particularly employees, must ensure that they read, understand and comply with this policy.

5.0 Our commitment

- 5.1. The Board and Leadership team are committed to this policy. Under the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, if an individual raises a genuine concern under this policy they will not be at risk of compromising their position or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided that the disclosure is reasonably believed to be in the public interest, it does not matter if they are mistaken; of course this assurance will not apply to anyone who maliciously raises a matter that they know to be untrue.
- 5.2. Under the Equality Act, Beyond Housing will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone who raises a genuine concern. However, it is recognised that individuals may wish to do this in confidence. If an individual asks for their identity to be protected, Beyond Housing will not disclose it without their consent. If the situation arises where Beyond Housing cannot resolve the concern without revealing identities (for example, because evidence is required in a court of law), this will first be discussed with the individual concerned.

- 5.3. If an individual does not give their name when raising a concern it will be much more difficult to look into the matter or provide feedback. Accordingly, whilst Beyond Housing may consider anonymous reports, this policy is not well suited to dealing with concerns raised in this manner.
- 5.4. If individuals do not come forward when they are aware of a serious malpractice, they may, in some circumstances, be seen as colluding in that practice.

6.0 Reporting

6.1 Why does whistleblowing matter?

- 6.1.1 In almost all cases of serious problems, organisations would have been better off with full information at an early stage. When problems go undetected they can lead on to bigger issues and cover ups, etc. However inconvenient or embarrassing as such revelations may appear to be at the time, the earlier they are detected the easier it is to deal with the situation.
- 6.1.2 Employees are usually the first to know when something is going seriously wrong – be it a major fraud or theft or something which is likely to cause danger or distress to tenants, customers or other members of the public. If there is a culture of ‘turning a blind eye’ or discouraging ‘sneaks’ then this means that the alarm is not sounded on such malpractice or that it may be leaked anonymously. The result is that Beyond Housing management does not get the chance to take action before the real damage is done.

6.2 Dealing with concerns

- 6.2.1 If a concern is raised, it will be looked at to assess initially what action should be taken. This may involve an internal enquiry or a more formal investigation. The person who has raised the concern will be advised who is handling the matter, how they can contact them and whether their further assistance may be needed. If they request it, Beyond Housing will write summarising their concern and how it will be handled.
- 6.2.2 When an individual raises a concern, they may be asked how they think the matter might best be resolved. If they have any personal interest in the matter they should inform Beyond Housing of this at the outset. For employees and Board Directors, if the concern falls more properly within the performance and absence management policy, this will be communicated.
- 6.2.3 Whilst the purpose of this policy is to enable Beyond Housing to investigate possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, feedback will be given where possible. If requested by the individual raising the concern, Beyond Housing’s response will be confirmed in writing. It should be noted, however, that there may be circumstances under which Beyond Housing may not be able to disclose the precise action that has been taken; for example, where this would infringe a duty of confidence to someone else.

6.3 Independent advice

- 6.3.1 If an individual is unsure whether to use this policy or if they need independent advice at any stage, they may contact the whistleblowing charity '**Protect – speak up, stop harm**' on 020 7404 6609 who will provide free confidential advice at any stage about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.
- 6.3.2 The 'Public Concern at Work' approach is that, whenever possible, the people in charge of the organisation should have a chance to investigate the matter themselves. This is usually the quickest and most effective way to remove any danger of malpractice and the way which causes the least risk to the person making the concern. They do, however, acknowledge that it is sometimes necessary to raise the concern outside an organisation.
- 6.3.3 Those individuals who are members of a trade union may also seek advice from their union representatives if they wish to do so.

6.4 **External contacts**

- 6.4.1 Whilst the Group intends that this policy gives individuals the reassurance to raise matters internally, it is recognised that there may be circumstances where they can properly report them to outside bodies, such as regulators or the Police. Public Concern at Work and, if applicable, an employee's union will be able to advise on such an option and on the circumstances in which they may be able to contact an outside body safely.

6.5 **Satisfaction with the outcome**

- 6.5.1 If an individual raising a concern is dissatisfied with the Beyond Housing's response, they can go to the other levels and bodies referred to within this policy.
- 6.5.2 Whilst Beyond Housing cannot guarantee that they will respond to all matters raised in the way that individuals may wish, they will handle the matter fairly and properly. By using this policy, individuals will help Beyond Housing to achieve this.

7.0 **Whistleblower protection**

7.1 **Whistleblower protection in the case of non-anonymous whistleblowing**

- 7.1.1 A person expressing genuine suspicion or misgiving according to these guidelines will not be at risk of losing their job or suffering any form sanctions or personal disadvantages as a result. It does not matter if the whistleblower is mistaken, provided that they are acting in good faith.
- 7.1.2 Subject to considerations of the privacy of those against whom allegations have been made, and any other issues of confidentiality, a non-anonymous whistleblower will be kept informed of the outcomes of the investigation into the allegations.
- 7.1.3 In cases of alleged criminal offences, the whistleblower will be informed that their identity may need to be disclosed during judicial proceedings.

7.2 Protection of a person specified in a whistleblower message

- 7.2.1 The rights of the individuals submitting the message or specified in a whistleblower message are subject to the relevant data protection laws. Those affected will be entitled to the right to access data relating to themselves and should the information be incorrect, incomplete, or out of date to require amendments or deletion of data.

7.3 Deletion of data

- 7.3.1 Personal data included in a whistleblowing messages and investigation documentation is deleted when the investigation is complete, with the exception of when personal data must be maintained according to other applicable laws. Permanent deletion is carried out 30 days after completion of the investigation. Investigation documentation and whistleblower messages that are archived should be anonymised under GDPR; they should not include personal data through which persons can be directly or indirectly identified.

8.0 Consultation

- 8.1 Future reviews of the Whistleblowing policy will incorporate consultation with board, senior management, and involved customers.
- 8.2 Our approach to whistleblowing is communicated to all employees, board, volunteers and involved residents through this policy and associated procedures.

9.0 Review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years or in response to changes in legislation or good practice, whichever is the sooner.

Version No	Revision Date	Reason for Revision
02	Dec 2021	Policy revised to incorporate new software solutions. Full review.