



# Whistleblowing Policy



# Scope of Policy

This policy sets out how employees, board members, stakeholders, consultants, sub-contractors, partners and any other agencies can raise any serious concerns they may have about any aspect of the Group's work on a confidential basis without any fear of reprisal. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Group's Code of Conduct.

## Applicability

The policy applies to all employees, board members, stakeholders, consultants, sub-contractors, partners and any other agencies of Platform Housing Limited.



# 1. Policy Statement

1.1 Platform Housing Group is committed to the highest standards of quality, probity, openness and accountability. The Group operates within the country's laws and regulations and expects all employees, board members, stakeholders, consultants, sub-contractors, partners and any other agency to do the same.

1.2 An individual or external body may wish to raise issues/concerns on a confidential basis and the Group guarantees that they may do so without fear of reprisal or victimisation, as long as any concerns are expressed in good faith, even if they are ultimately unfounded.

## 2. Definition

2.1 For the purpose of this policy, whistleblowing is defined as the act of an employee, board member, stakeholder, consultant, sub-contractor, partner or any other agency raising a concern about misconduct within the Group. It can also be defined as giving information about any illegal and/or underhand practices.

Examples of misconduct or illegal practices may fall into one or more of the following categories (although the list is not exhaustive):-

- Fraud, corruption and malpractice, or criminal activity.
- Failure to adhere to safe working practices.
- Abuse or neglect of vulnerable people.
- Failure to deliver proper standards of service.
- Bullying, discrimination or victimisation in the workplace.
- Breaches of the Group's policies, procedures, rules and regulations.
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation.
- Damage to the environment.
- Failure to comply with, or a breach of, the Regulatory Framework for the social housing sector, the NHF Excellence in Standards of Conduct guidelines or the Group Code of Conduct.
- Deliberate concealment and/or distortion of information relating to any of the above.



## 3. Legal Requirements

- 3.1 The Group, in line with the legal requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1999, offers a framework of protection against victimisation or dismissal for individuals who 'blow the whistle' on any criminal behaviour or wrongdoing (as outlined above).

# 4. Reporting of Concerns

- 4.1 The Group is aware that it is never easy to report a concern, particularly one which may relate to fraud or corruption, and especially where the concern relates to a colleague (or colleagues), an employee's own line manager, or another senior employee. The Group strongly urges anyone with a serious concern to report the matter at an early stage and before any problem becomes more serious.
- 4.2 Specifically, all employees are required to raise their concerns immediately if they become aware of:
- The breaking or proposed breaking of any law or regulation by an employee at PHG;
  - Group procedure or policy being deliberately broken;
  - Any serious wrong doing (in line with examples given at 2.1);
  - Any matter which may lead to the harm of an employee, tenant, customer, member of the public, contractor, the environment; and,
  - Any possibility or suggestion that one of the above has occurred and is being covered up.
- 4.4 The Group will do everything it can to respect confidentiality and anonymity if an individual requests it, though there may be instances when anonymity cannot be guaranteed (e.g. if a concern led to Police enquiries and a prosecution of the alleged offender(s), and the whistleblower may be required to give evidence in Court).
- 4.5 The Group will take all reasonable steps to support concerned employees who report a concern in good faith, and ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that they do not suffer intimidation in the workplace. The career of the person reporting a concern will also not suffer any harm or hindrance, neither will a person who is subject to whistleblowing and subsequently no case found against him/her.
- 4.6 The Group may take disciplinary action against any employee who tries to discourage another or others from reporting a genuine concern; the same approach will be taken with any employee who criticises or victimises an employee who has reported a concern or against an employee who makes a vexatious claim of whistleblowing.
- 4.7 Any employee who is found to have maliciously raised an allegation will be subject to the Group's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. An employee who fails to raise a concern when reasonably aware or certain of an occurrence outlined in clause 4.2, may be regarded with as an accessory and action may be taken against them under the Group's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.



# 5. The Whistleblowing Process

- 5.1 Employees who wish to raise concerns should contact the Group Chief Executive making it clear that they are reporting the concern under the Whistleblowing Policy. If the concern is about the Group Chief Executive then they should contact the Executive Director (Corporate Resources) or the Governance and Compliance Director.

## 6. What Happens after a Concern is Reported

- 6.1 All concerns raised under the terms of the Whistleblowing Policy will be confidentially referred to the Group Chair and Group Audit and Risk Committee Chair immediately (unless he/she is connected to the concern). The Group Chief Executive will inform the Executive Team of any allegations raised as necessary and appropriate.
- 6.2 In the event that the Group Chief Executive is involved in any allegations under the Whistleblowing Policy, the Group Chair and Group Audit and Risk Committee Chair will be informed and consultation shall take place with other board members as appropriate.
- 6.3 It is the responsibility of the Group Chair to inform Board Directors of any allegations made under the Whistleblowing Policy.
- 6.4 The Governance and Compliance Director will oversee the investigation of any disclosures raised as appropriate. The investigation will be carried out by someone independent of the parties concerned and, if necessary, an external investigator will be appointed.
- 6.5 If a significant breach of legal or regulatory requirements is alleged, the Regulator for Social Housing (or other appropriate regulator, e.g. the Charity Commission) will be informed.
- 6.6 The Group understands that there is a need to be fair to the individual reporting the concern, but that no action will be taken against any other party involved until the investigation is completed.
- 6.7 The result of any investigation will be considered by the Group Audit and Risk Committee, together with the action to be taken to rectify the position and to avoid any recurrence. Where Homes England, or other appropriate regulator, has not been involved in the investigation, and the investigation concludes that a significant breach of legal or regulatory requirements has occurred or is likely to have occurred, the Group will notify them at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.8 Once the matter has been concluded, the Group Chief Executive (or Executive Director (Corporate Resources)/Governance and Compliance Director as appropriate) will notify the individual who had raised the concern that this is the case. Dependent upon the circumstances and confidential nature of the situation, the individual may not be advised of the detail of the outcome of the investigation.





# 7. Equality and Diversity

7.1 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history, as referred to in our relevant Group policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly.

7.2 An equality impact assessment has been conducted which indicates no negative impact on any person with a protected characteristic as a result of implementing this policy.

## 8. Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 The Whistleblowing Policy will be reviewed every two years or in line with changes to legislation and/or best practice, whichever is earlier.

## 9. Associated Documents/Policies

- 9.1 List of documents/associated policies/publications:-
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
  - Grievance Policy and Procedure
  - NHF Excellence in Standards of Conduct
  - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policies
  - Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy
  - Probity Policy
  - Code of Conduct for Employees
  - Code of Conduct for Board Members

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