

# The Vineyard School Whistleblowing Policy

(How to express concerns about conduct at work)



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b><u>GENERAL GUIDANCE</u></b>	
□ Policy statement	3
□ Definitions	4
□ Who is covered by the Procedure	4
<b><u>OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU</u></b>	
□ Your Protection and your Confidence	5
□ Anonymous Concerns	
<b><u>WHAT YOU SHOULD DO</u></b>	
□ The Normal Procedure	5
□ Taking it Further	
□ Referral outside the Council	
<b><u>ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE</u></b>	
□ Role of Trade Unions and independent advice	7
<b><u>THE PROCESS EXPLAINED</u></b>	
□ How the Council will deal with the matter	7
□ If you are dissatisfied	8
<b><u>IN SUMMARY</u></b>	
□ Do and Don't	9
<b><u>MANAGER'S GUIDE</u></b>	
□ The Manager's Role	10
□ What you should do	11
□ Do and Don't	11
<b><u>CORPORATE RECORDING, MONITORING AND REVIEW</u></b>	
□ Recording, monitoring and Review	12
<b><u>Appendices 1, 2</u></b>	
□ How to Raise Concerns	13
□ List of named persons	14

## General Guidance

The Vineyard School has adopted Richmond Council's Whistleblowing policy. Where appropriate, you may substitute "Governing Body" for Council and "Headteacher" for line manager, so a concern should normally be raised with either the Headteacher or a Governor. However, if for some reason, this first step is inappropriate, then the concern should be raised at a senior Council level.

## Policy Statement

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service, including honesty, openness and accountability, and recognises that employees have an important role to play in achieving this goal.

Any of us may at one time or another have concerns about what is happening at work. Often these concerns are easily resolved. However, where your concern involves, for example, a danger to the public or colleagues, illegal practice, misconduct or financial malpractice, it can be difficult to know what to do.

You may be worried about raising such an issue, perhaps feeling it's none of your business or that it's only a suspicion. You may feel that raising the matter would be disloyal to colleagues, to managers or to the Council. You may have already said something but found that you have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what, if anything, to do next.

The Council has introduced this policy to enable everyone to blow the whistle safely when appropriate so that such issues are raised at an early stage and in the right way. The Council welcomes your genuine concerns and is committed to dealing responsibly, openly and professionally with them. Without your help, we cannot deliver a safe service and protect the interests of the public, staff and the Council. If something is troubling you which you think should be looked into do not wait for proof raise the issue using this procedure.

If, however, you are aggrieved about issues relating to your employment, please use the Grievance Procedure.

### Purpose of this Policy

The purpose is to:

- Encourage the Whistleblower to feel confident in raising concerns
- Provide the Whistleblower with a confidential method of raising concerns
- Ensure the Whistleblower receives a response to their concerns and if not satisfied, is aware of how to take the matter further
- Reassure the Whistleblower they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for Whistleblowing in good faith

**This Whistleblowing procedure is primarily for concerns where the interests of others or of the Council are at risk.**

## This policy forms part of the Code of Conduct for Council Employees

### Definitions

Richmond upon Thames has a range of policies and procedures, which deal with standards of behaviour at work; they cover, for example, discipline, grievance, discrimination, harassment and bullying, and recruitment and selection. Staff are encouraged to use these procedures when appropriate.

This policy is a means to deal with serious or sensitive concerns about matters such as the following:

- Fraud or financial irregularity
- Corruption, bribery or blackmail
- Failure to comply with legal or regularity duty or obligation
- Malpractice or abuse of a client including improper discrimination or relationships with clients
- A miscarriage of justice.
- Endangering the health and safety of any individual or individuals.
- Endangering the environment.
- Unethical or improper conduct or conduct which breaches Council policies or falls below the standards which the Council subscribes to e.g. breach of codes of conduct or Financial Regulations/Contract Standing Orders.
- Serious maladministration arising from the deliberate commission of improper conduct.
- Showing undue favour over a contractual matter or to a job applicant
- Concealment of any of the above

The policy does **NOT** apply to the following:

- Relationships between employees, their managers and the Council for which harassment, bullying and other dispute procedures are more appropriate
- Concerns or complaints by members of the public to which the Corporate Complaints Procedure would apply
- Concerns or complaints about the behaviour of Members of the Council (Councillors) to which the Members Code of Conduct would apply

### Who is covered by the Procedure?

- An employee of the Council
- Agency staff, trainees and self-employed staff employed on Council work
- The staff of Council contractors employed on Council work
- Partner agencies (including the health authority and voluntary sector groups undertaking work on behalf of or in conjunction with the Council
- The School Governing Body

## Our Commitment to You

### 1. Your Protection

The Council is committed to this policy. If you raise a genuine concern in accordance with this policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided you are acting in good faith (honestly), it does not matter if you are mistaken or if there is an innocent explanation for your concerns. You will not be asked to provide proof. Of course, this assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know is untrue. Disciplinary action will be taken against employees who knowingly make false allegations.

### 2. Your Confidence

The Council will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. If you are anxious you can ask to talk to someone in private and if you ask us not to disclose your identity, we will consider this carefully with you first. Your identity may need to be shared with other senior officers and/or Members during the investigation, but you will be told if this is the case. If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity (for instance because your evidence is needed in a disciplinary procedure or in court), we will discuss with you whether and how we can proceed.

### 3. Anonymous Concerns

If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for your concern to be investigated and for us to protect your position or give you feedback. Accordingly, while we will consider anonymous reports, we cannot use this policy to investigate concerns raised anonymously.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

### 1. The Normal Procedure

These notes explain what you need to know and the steps you should take if you have any concerns. The procedure is in addition to that outlined in Standards in the Code of Conduct. Also see **Appendix 1** "How to Raise Concerns".

The Council encourages the Whistleblower to raise their concerns internally in the first instance. This allows the relevant officers to properly investigate those concerns and take relevant action where necessary.

- As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your line manager, Head of Service or Director (subject to Point 2)

The initial disclosure should be made:

- Wherever possible, in writing
- Otherwise orally, by telephone or face to face in a meeting with your line manager, Head of Service or one of the officers listed above

You should provide as much supporting evidence as possible. The earlier the concern is expressed and the more information you can provide, the easier it is to investigate and for appropriate action to be taken.

Where a disclosure is made under the Whistleblowing Policy, full details of the allegations will be recorded and passed to the Council's Monitoring Officer (of their Deputy) who will pass this on to a Designated Officer for assessment.

Where you make a disclosure, you are encouraged to give details of your identity. Anonymous disclosures are more difficult to investigate. Where you do provide your identity, this information will not be passed to the Monitoring Officer without your express consent.

The Council acknowledges the difficulties in raising concerns and as such, a trade union representative or work colleague may raise the matter on your behalf (where you are the Whistleblower), accompany you when making the allegation or may accompany you in meetings where the allegation/s is discussed.

## **2. Taking it Further**

If these steps have been followed but have not worked or you feel the matter is so serious that you cannot discuss it with any of the above, please contact one of the following:

- The Council's Monitoring Officer, Paul Evans, Interim Head of Legal & Electoral Services, on 020 85453338
- The Joint Heads of Internal Audit & Risk Management Alix Wilson on 020 8891 7291 or Diana Neaves on 020 8891 7248
- The Chief Executive on 020 8891 7167
- The Chair of the Audit Committee (contact the Committee Clerk on 020 8891 7156)
- If your concerns involve potential fraud or criminal activities the Council's Fraud Line on 0800 389 9795

## **3. Referral outside the Council**

While we hope this policy gives you the reassurance you need to raise such matters internally, we recognise that there may be circumstances where you can properly report matters to outside bodies, such as regulators or the police. Public Concern at Work, or, if applicable, your union, will be able to advise you on such an option and on the circumstances in which you may be able to contact an outside body safely including:

The Health and Safety Executive  
The Audit Commission  
The Environment Agency  
The Serious Fraud Office  
HM Revenue and Customs  
The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
The Charity Commission  
The Information Commissioner

The Council stresses that you should raise concerns internally first, but the law also provides for you to make a wider disclosure (which could include to the police or an MP) **if, and only if:**

- The matter is exceptionally serious
- You are reasonably afraid that you would be victimised
- You believed reasonably that there would be a cover up and there is no prescribed person, or

- The matter was raised internally or with a prescribed person but was not dealt with properly.

## ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

### 1. Role of Trade Unions

The Council recognises that employees may wish to seek advice and to be represented by their trade union officers when using the provisions of this policy. A number of Trade Unions have issued guidance on 'whistleblowing', and the Council acknowledges and endorses the role trade union officers play in this area. You may contact the Staff Side Secretary on 020 8891 7286 for initial advice and how to contact recognised Trade Union representatives.

Alternatively details of other Unions can be obtained from Human Resources on 020 8891 7091 or 020 8891 7268.

### 2. Independent Advice

You may also wish to contact Public Concern at Work (<http://www.pcaw.co.uk/>), a charity working in this area which can provide free and confidential advice, telephone 020 7404 6609, or e-mail [helpline@pcaw.co.uk](mailto:helpline@pcaw.co.uk).

## THE PROCESS EXPLAINED

### 1. How the Council will deal with the matter

Once you have told us of your concern, it will be reported to the Council's Monitoring Officer who will refer the case to a Designated Officer for assessment. This officer may be the officer to whom you made the original disclosure and will be required to maintain full confidentiality. The Designated officer will make an initial assessment as to what action should be taken. This may involve an informal review, an internal inquiry or a full investigation.

The initial assessment may identify the need to involve third parties, such as other members of staff, Internal Audit, External Audit, Legal and Electoral Services, Human Resources or the Police. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (e.g. child protection, health and safety or discrimination issues), will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

The Designated officer will offer to interview you in confidence no later than **3 weeks** after receipt of the disclosure and referral from the Monitoring Officer. You may be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or work colleague. An interview may not be necessary if the designated officer was the officer to whom the initial disclosure was made.

The purpose of the interview is for the designated officer to obtain as much information from you as possible and to consult you on the further steps which could be taken

**Within 4 weeks** of the interview, or **4 weeks of the initial disclosure** where an interview does not take place, and after consultation with the Monitoring Officer (or their Deputy), the Designated officer will determine their recommendations as to the further steps to be taken. These may include:

- A report to the Police or other appropriate authority;

- Investigation by the Internal Audit and its Corporate Anti-Fraud Team (this will be the usual course where there are allegations of financial irregularities or corruption).
- A full investigation either internally by the Council or externally e.g. by the Council's auditors or by investigators appointed by the Council;
- Action under the Council's grievance, disciplinary, harassment and bullying or complaints procedures;
- Referral for consideration under other specific procedures (e.g. child protection);
- No further action (see below).

The Designated officer may recommend that no further action is taken based on the following:

- Where they are satisfied that there has been no malpractice
- If they determine that the disclosure was not made in good faith i.e. that the disclosure was wilfully malicious. In this situation, the case may be referred for disciplinary action
- If the matter concerned is already the subject of legal proceedings, has been referred to the police or other public authority
- If the matter is already, has been or should be the subject of proceedings under one of the Council's other procedures relating to staff

The Designated officer's recommendations will be made to the Council's Monitoring Officer who will decide whether or not they agree with them. Any recommendations will be made without revealing your identity (as Whistleblower) except in exceptional circumstances (see below).

Once it has been agreed what further steps (if any) should be taken, the Designated officer will inform you of the decision and where no further action is proposed, reasons for this decision will be made to you in writing.

Subject to legal constraints, you will be informed of the outcome of any investigations however, you will not be provided with specific details of any disciplinary action, which will remain confidential to the individual(s) concerned.

Any document, report or recommendation prepared by the Designated Officer in relation to your disclosure will not identify you unless:

- You have consented to this in writing
- There are grounds to believe you have acted maliciously
- Where the Designated officer is under a legal obligation to do so
- Where the information is already in the public domain
- On a strictly confidential basis to a professionally qualified solicitor for the purpose of obtaining legal advice

The Designated Officer will ensure that all information in relation to your disclosure is kept securely and access to it is restricted.

## **2. If you are dissatisfied**

While the Council cannot guarantee to respond to your report in the way in which you might wish, we will handle the matter fairly and properly. By using this procedure you will help us to achieve this. If you are dissatisfied with the response you can raise the matter with the other levels and bodies set out in the Policy.



## IN SUMMARY

### DO

- Make an immediate note of concerns which fall within the scope of this policy
- Note all relevant details, such as what was said, the date, time and names of the people involved
- Let someone know about your suspicions. See 'Taking it Further' page 5
- Deal with the matter quickly. Any delay may allow the problem to continue or worsen

### DON'T

- Do nothing.
- Be afraid of raising concerns.
- Approach or accuse individuals directly.
- Try to investigate the matter yourself.

**IF IN DOUBT – RAISE IT!**

# **Manager's Guide to the Whistleblowing Policy**

## **The Manager's Role**

It is the Manager's responsibility to ensure that employees are made aware of the policy (which can be found on the The Vineyard School's website and on the shared google drive for staff) and they are given an opportunity to raise any questions about its operation. The policy also applies to agency staff, others working for the Council and volunteers, who must all be made aware that the policy is also available to them.

All concerns must be looked into and the employee(s) told the outcome. Where a concern is raised directly with you and it is not appropriately dealt with through other Council policies or procedures, you must report the disclosure to the Council's Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer will decide who will be the designated officer responsible for dealing with the disclosure. This may be you as you were in receipt of the original disclosure however the Monitoring Officer may decide that an independent officer may be more appropriate depending on the nature of the concern.

Where you are the designated officer, you must interview the employee (Whistleblower) within 3 weeks of receipt of the disclosure and referral from the Monitoring Officer. Where you were both in receipt of the original disclosure and given responsibility by the Monitoring Officer as Designated officer, you may already have undertaken an interview when the disclosure was first made. You may decide that a further interview is not required.

The purpose of the interview will be for you to obtain as much information from the Whistleblower as possible and to consult them on the further steps which could be taken

Within 4 weeks of the interview, or 4 weeks of the initial disclosure where an interview does not take place, and after consultation with the Monitoring Officer (or their Deputy) you will make recommendations as to the further steps to be taken and notify the Whistleblower accordingly. Where no further action is to be taken, you must inform the Whistleblower of this decision in writing.

As designated officer, you will be responsible for informing the Whistleblower of the outcome of any investigations or further action taken. Any information provided to the Whistleblower may be subject to legal constraints and therefore must be agreed in advance with the Monitoring Officer (or Deputy),

This Policy is based on the view that openness and accountability is the ideal. However, where circumstances make it necessary, the matter may need to be dealt with under terms of strict confidentiality. This could include not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so.

If the decision is made to take formal disciplinary action against the subject, they must be informed of the complaint against them.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Make sure you are aware of the procedure to follow:

- Where a concern is raised (and cannot be dealt with appropriately through another Council policy or procedure), it must be reported to the Monitoring Officer
- All concerns should be recorded, including the date the concern was raised, dates of interviews with employees, who was present at each interview and the action agreed
- The records should be kept safely and securely; they may be required for disciplinary action or criminal investigation
- Should any criminal activity or fraud be suspected, the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Management, the Monitoring Officer (Paul Evans) and Head of HR must be informed in order to decide at what stage the Police should be involved
- The Chief Executive would also expect to be alerted

Action must be taken to protect the employee raising the concern from acts of recrimination. Officers should not wait for victimisation to take place before taking such action.

## IN SUMMARY

### DO

Be responsive to staff concerns  
Note all details  
Evaluate the allegation objectively  
Advise the appropriate officer  
Deal with the matter promptly

### DON'T

Ridicule suspicions raised by staff  
Approach or accuse any individuals directly  
Convey your suspicions to anyone other than those with the proper authority  
Try to investigate the matter yourself.

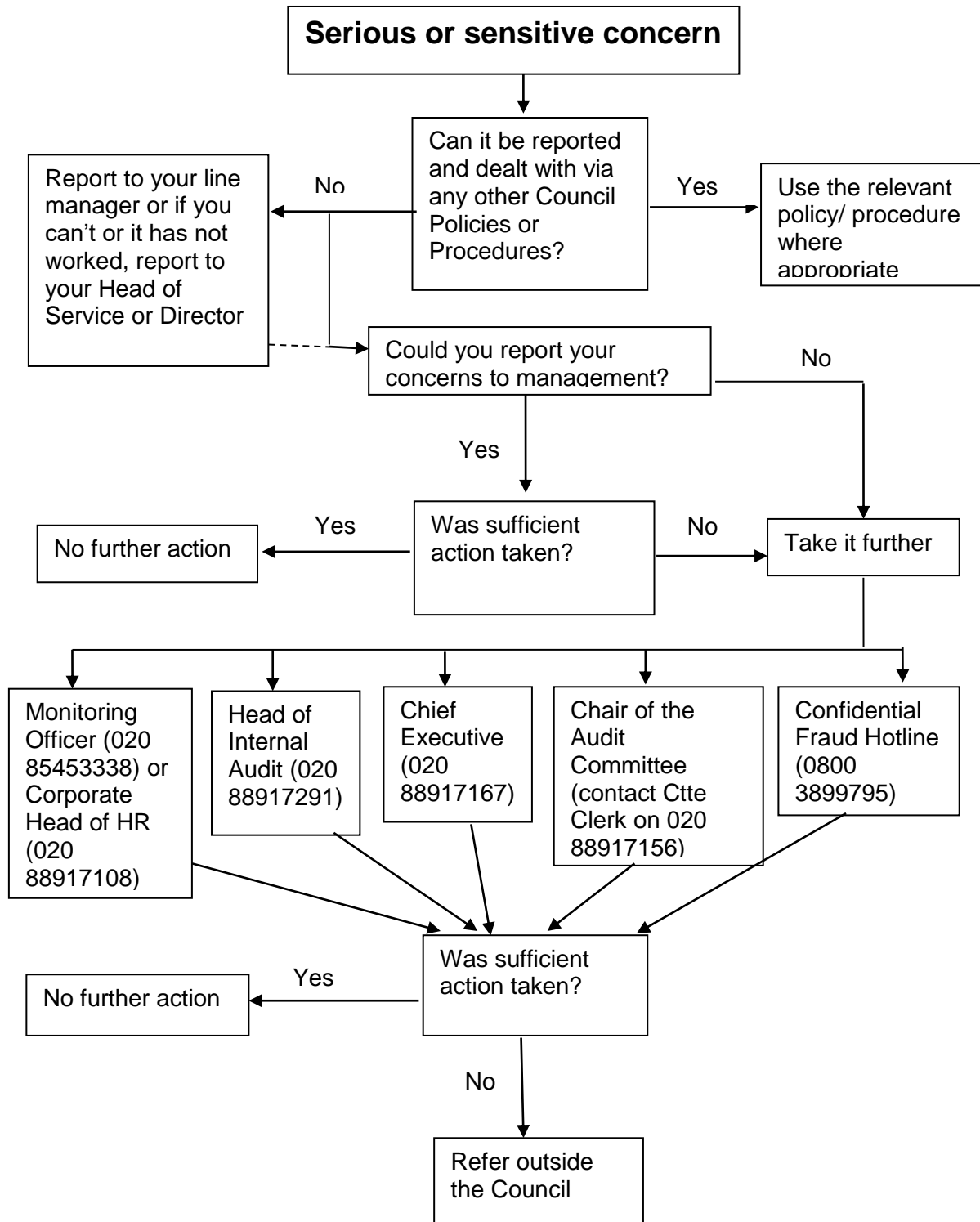
## **Corporate, Recording, Monitoring and Review of Whistleblowing**

The Monitoring Officer will maintain a Corporate Register containing all concerns that are brought to their attention. Managers looking into the concern must ensure that the Monitoring Officer is provided with sufficient details of the concerns for the Corporate Register.

The Monitoring Officer will review the Corporate Register and produce an Annual Report to the Chief Executive and any other relevant member/ officer forum. The report will not mention any employees, only the concerns raised, the number of such concerns, the Directorate they related to and highlighting any subsequent outcome(s).

The Policy will be reviewed annually by the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Corporate Head of Human Resources and the Joint Heads of Audit.

How to Raise Concerns





## THE VINEYARD SCHOOL

### Appendix 2

#### List of Named Persons (for Whistleblowing Reporting)

It is the school's duty to make all governors, school employees, agency staff, and volunteers aware of the whistleblowing policy.

It is also the school's duty to ensure that you have read and understood the whistleblowing policy, and that you are aware of the procedures in place in the event you need to raise concerns about what is happening at work - for example, a possible danger to the public or colleagues, illegal practice, misconduct, persistent breaches of regulations, or financial malpractice.

The following people have been designated as the named persons to whom you should report your concerns:

In the first instance, contact one of the following people:

Name	Position	Contact Details
Frances Bracegirdle	Headteacher	020 8948 0195 headteacher@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk
Charlotte Axbey	Assistant Headteacher Inclusion Lead	020 8948 0195 caxbey@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk
Alice McArdle	Assistant Headteacher Director of Learning KS1	020 8979 2770 amcardle@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk
Laura Reilly	Assistant Headteacher Director of Learning KS2	020 8979 3019 lreilly@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk

Should you feel unhappy about the way your concerns have been handled and would like to take the matter further, contact one of the following people:

Name	Position	Contact Details
Antony Cook	Chair of Governors	<a href="mailto:acook@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk">acook@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk</a>
Kirsty MacEachen	Vice Chair of Governors	<a href="mailto:kmaceachen@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk">kmaceachen@vineyard.richmond.sch.uk</a>