

## Whistleblowing Policy

### Introduction

Employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors at one time or another may have concerns about what is happening at their work at Southend Adult Community College. Usually these concerns are easily resolved by speaking to their manager without using a formal process. Southend Adult Community College has introduced this Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure to enable employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors to raise more serious concerns.

This Whistleblowing Policy cannot be used by employees who have a grievance regarding their own employment, who should use the Grievance processes, or by members of the public, who should use the Complaints processes.

Southend Adult Community College is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we encourage employees, workers and contractors with serious concerns about any aspect of their work to come forward and voice their concerns. Southend Adult Community College would rather they raise the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for proof. It is recognised that certain cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. This Whistleblowing Policy makes it clear that such concerns can be raised without fear of reprisals.

This Whistleblowing Policy is not intended for initial reporting of minor lapses of standards, inaction or incidents. If, however, employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors have something more serious that is troubling them which they have discussed with their manager but feel that they have not been taken seriously, or due to the sensitivity of the matter feel they cannot raise their concerns within their service, then they should use this Whistleblowing Policy.

### Legislative Background

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects workers making disclosures about certain matters of concern, where those disclosures are made in accordance with the Act's provisions. The 1998 Act is incorporated into the Employment Rights Act 1996, which also protects employees who take action over, or raise concerns about health and safety at work.

### 'Whistleblowing' Definition

Any serious concerns that employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of staff at Southend Adult Community College or others acting on behalf of the college can be reported under the Whistleblowing Policy. These may include:

- a criminal offence

- fraud & corruption, including bribery
- failure to comply with legislation
- failure to comply with good practice, especially where this endangers children and/or vulnerable adults
- disclosure relating to miscarriage of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees damage or danger to the environment
- sexual, physical, emotional or psychological abuse of learners
- failure to comply with the Employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractor Code of Conduct
- theft of Southend Adult Community College property and assets
- failure to comply with the rules on gifts and hospitality
- serious mismanagement or failure to manage
- continuing inappropriate conduct or behaviour or performance by any employee which has been reported to a relevant manager, especially harassment or bullying or discriminatory behaviour. This may include, but not be confined to, actions considered to be based upon the race, gender, disability, age, religion/belief or sexual orientation of the victim
- a cover up of, or failure to report, any of the above.

### **Commitment of Southend Adult Community College**

Southend Adult Community College is committed to considering the concerns of employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors and will take actions as appropriate in line with the Whistleblowing Procedure attached to this policy.

### **Safeguarding**

- Harassment or victimisation  
The college recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. Southend Adult Community College will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors when they raise a concern in good faith.
- Confidentiality  
Southend Adult Community College recognises that employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors may nonetheless want to raise a concern in confidence under this Whistleblowing Policy. If an employee, worker or contractor asks the college to protect their identity, the college will do its best not to disclose it without their consent. If the situation arises where the college is not able to resolve the concern without revealing the employee, worker or contractor's identity (for instance because their evidence is needed in court), we will discuss with them whether and how we can proceed.
- Anonymous allegations

This Whistleblowing Policy encourages employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors to put their name to their allegation. Concerns raised anonymously are much less powerful but they will be considered at the discretion of Southend Adult Community College.

In exercising the discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
  - the credibility of the concern
  - the likelihood of confirming the allegation.
- Untrue allegations  
If an employee makes an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation no action will be taken against them. If however, an employee makes a malicious or vexatious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

The college will treat any harassment or victimisation as a serious disciplinary offence to be dealt with under the Discipline and Dismissal at Work Policy.

This does not mean that if employees are already the subject of disciplinary, redundancy or other procedures that those procedures will be halted as a result of their whistleblowing.

### **The Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services is the Monitoring Officer for Southend Adult Community College.

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

The Counter Fraud Team maintains a record of concerns raised under the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure and the outcomes of any investigation undertaken on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, who will report if necessary to the Standards Committee. This is done in a form that does not endanger employee, worker or contractor confidentiality.

The Monitoring Officer will consult with such other appropriate college staff as he or she considers necessary and may arrange for any investigation to be conducted and dealt with in such manner as he or she decides.

### **Scope of the Policy**

- This Whistleblowing Policy applies to all employees, workers and contractors working for Southend Adult Community College, for example agency workers, builders, drivers etc. to enable them to raise serious concerns.
- This Whistleblowing Policy cannot be used by employees who have a grievance regarding their own employment, who should use the Grievance processes, or by

members of the public, who should use Southend Adult Community College complaints processes.

### Delegation

- All managers are authorised to discuss and act upon employees concerns about what is happening at work without using the formal process of the Whistleblowing Policy.
- Southend Borough Council's Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal & Democratic Services), Corporate Directors, Heads of Service and the Head of Internal Audit are authorised to act (in conjunction with the Counter Fraud Team) upon serious concerns raised under the Whistleblowing Policy, in accordance with the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.
- All concerns raised under this Whistleblowing Policy will be notified to the Counter Fraud Team.
- All concerns raised under this Whistleblowing Policy regarding financial issues will also be notified to the Head of Internal Audit.

### How to Raise a Concern

Employees who raise concerns that fall within the scope of other college procedures will not be dealt with under this Whistleblowing Procedure, but will be advised on the appropriate procedure to use. Such employees will still receive protection as detailed in the Whistleblowing Policy.

Employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors should normally raise concerns with their immediate manager, without needing to use the Whistleblowing Policy. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the malpractice.

Where a concern is serious or where it is a concern about the line manager, or having made a report they believe that their manager has failed to take appropriate action, the employee, worker or contractor should contact:

- **the Counter Fraud Team on 01702 215254 or via [counterfraud@southend.gov.uk](mailto:counterfraud@southend.gov.uk) or**
- **the Council's Confidential Report Line on 01702 215215**

Concerns should be raised in writing, clearly marked "**Whistleblowing, Counter Fraud Team**" and placed in an envelope marked "**Staff in Confidence**". The background and history of the concern (giving names, dates, and place where possible), and the reasons for the concern should be set out.

The earlier employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors express a concern, the easier it is to take action. Employees may invite a trade union representative or work colleague to raise a matter on their behalf.

All concerns raised under this Whistleblowing Policy regarding financial issues will also be notified to the Head of Internal Audit.

### **How the College will respond**

Once an employee, worker or contractor has raised their concern under the Whistleblowing Policy with Counter Fraud Team, initial enquiries will be made to decide if an investigation is appropriate and if so what form the investigation should take.

The employee, worker or contractor will be advised of the following:

- who is considering the issue
- how that person can be contacted
- whether their further assistance may be needed.

The senior officer responsible for considering the issue will write to the employee, worker or contractor summarising their concern and setting out how the college proposes to handle it, if requested to do so. The employee, worker or contractor will also be requested to state any personal interest they may have in the matter.

The overriding principle which Southend Adult Community College will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

The action taken by Southend Adult Community College will depend on the nature of the concern and may:

- be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation
- be investigated internally
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

The amount of contact between the employee, worker or contractor and the officers investigating the concerns will depend on the concerns raised, but the college may need to seek further information from the employee, worker or contractor. Any meetings may be arranged on or off site and an employee may be accompanied by a friend, union or professional body representative.

While the purpose of this Whistleblowing Policy is to enable Southend Adult Community College to investigate possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, they will provide as much feedback to the employee, worker or contractor as they properly can. If requested, confirmation of the response may be provided in writing. It may not, however, be possible to advise the precise action that will be taken where this

would infringe a duty of confidence owed by Southend Adult Community College to someone else.

### **How a concern can be taken further**

The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to provide employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors with the reassurance they may need to raise concerns internally and that they will be satisfied with any action taken.

However, if they are not, and feel that it is appropriate to take the matter outside the college or if they feel unable to raise their concerns internally, the college would rather they raised the matter with an appropriate regulator than not at all. The following are possible contact points:

- Local Council Member.
- The designated independent organisation (independent charity “Public Concern at Work” which provides a confidential helpline 020 7404 6609).
- The Audit Commission.
- The employee's trade union.
- Local Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The Police.
- Relevant professional bodies, regulatory or other organisations.

**If employees, governors, volunteers, workers or contractors take their concerns outside Southend Adult Community College they should take care not to disclose any confidential information.**