



Hilltop First School and Foundation Stage

Whistleblowing Policy

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1. Purpose and Aims

The Local Authority and Schools must aspire to the highest standards of quality, probity, openness and accountability in all its activities. In line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, this Policy aims to create an environment in which employees, parents, Governors and others working with RBWM, who have concerns about any aspect of the Council's or a School's work, feel encouraged to disclose information to an appropriate person within the Council or to an appropriate external body (as shown in the Contacts List at the end of this Policy). Raising concerns at work also applies to Governors, partners, contractors, consultants and agency staff working on School and Council premises.

Employees, because of their close proximity to Council practices, are often the first to identify areas or issues that may be of concern. However, they may be reluctant to express these concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues, the School or to the Council – and they may also be worried that they will be victimised or harassed as a result of their actions.

This Policy is designed to help create an environment in which employees and others feel they are able to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. By responding to and addressing concerns in the quickest possible time, RBWM aims to contain such matters within the Council. However, employees or others must be able to take matters further if they are dissatisfied with the Council's response.

2. Scope

The Council has a Shared Audit and Investigations Service, details of which are available on the RBWM website, which employees are encouraged to continue to use to identify and report problems or concerns, particularly in relation to financial or contractual irregularities.

This document is designed to sit alongside this information, together with the Council's Grievance Procedure (which enables employees to lodge a grievance relating to their employment) and the Dignity at Work Policy, which includes a procedure for dealing with claims of harassment.

Raising Concerns at Work is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of these three procedures and extends the range of issues that school employees are encouraged to report.

These concerns may be about acts that:

- are unlawful
- represent a risk to health and safety
- cause environmental damage
- infringe equal opportunities related legislation and / or Council policies, e.g. discriminatory behaviour
- amount to improper or unethical conduct, e.g. breach of a statutory code of conduct.
- are abuse of position
- involve fraud and deceit
- result in inappropriate use of school assets
- result in decision making for personal gain

3. Safeguarding of Children (see Appendix 1)

4. How to Raise a Concern

You may wish to discuss your concerns with a colleague first and may find it easier to raise the matter if more than one of you has had the same experience or concerns.

At any stage of the procedure, you may be accompanied by a friend, colleague, or a representative of your Trade Union or professional association.

- Employees should, if possible, raise a concern in the first instance with their Headteacher or Chair of Governors.
- Non-employees, e.g. agency workers, volunteers or parents of pupils, should raise a concern in the first instance with their contact within the School or Council, usually the person to whom they directly report.
- Governors should raise concerns with their Chair of Governors or Governor Services.

In some cases, the nature or sensitivity of the concern means that this may not always be appropriate. If a person feels they cannot raise their concern within the School, they are able to go directly to either the Council's Head of Resources & Organisational Development, the Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal) or the Head of Audit and Review. They may also do so if, having raised the concern within the School, they feel there has not been an appropriate response.

In the event of a concern being of an extreme and potentially serious nature, employees and others may raise it directly with Governor Services, Director of Children's Services or the Leader of the Council.

For all concerns in respect of any suspected financial irregularity, you must notify the RBWM Head of Finance and Head of Audit and Review immediately.

In circumstances where an individual feels that it is necessary to raise a concern with an independent body rather than raise it internally within the Council, they may call any of the External Contacts as shown at the end of this Policy.

5. Practice and Procedure

Concerns are better raised in writing but can be made orally, either by telephone or personal conversation; in either case it is essential to give as much information as possible so that reasonable grounds for the concern can be demonstrated.

The earlier the concern is raised, the greater the opportunity for the Council to take remedial action.

Advice and guidance on how matters of concern may be raised and pursued can be obtained from the RBWM Head of Resources & Organisational Development, the Head of Audit and Review or a Legal Officer.

6. How The School and Local Authority Will Respond

Once a concern is raised, the School / Local Authority will respond with an investigation by management. Further courses of action will vary, depending on the issue.

An appropriate School / Local Authority officer will make initial enquiries. There will be consultation, with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Director of Children's Services, Head of Resources & Organisational Development, Monitoring Officer, Head of Finance and Head of Audit and Review, as appropriate, to help decide if an investigation is required and if so, what form it should take.

An Investigation Officer will also be appointed in consultation with these officers.

As soon as possible and in any case within 10 working days of a concern being raised, the person handling the matter, e.g. the Headteacher, Head of Resources & Organisational Development, will write to the individual raising the concern acknowledging that it has been raised and indicating how, as far as possible, it will be dealt with. The individual will be kept informed of progress and will receive a full and final response, subject to any legal restraints.

In relation to allegations of fraud and corruption in respect of the Governors and the Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive will lead the process and will appoint an appropriate Investigating Officer, in liaison with the Headteacher, Monitoring Officer, Head of Finance and Head of Audit and Review. For cases involving Governors, the outcome of the investigation will be reported to the appropriate body.

Any decision to refer a matter to the Police will be taken by the Head of Finance, in consultation with the School, Director of Children's Services, Monitoring Officer, Head of Audit and Review and the Head of Resources & Organisational Development, as appropriate. The Council will normally wish the Police to be made aware of, and investigate independently, those offenders where financial impropriety is discovered. A Corporate Crime Protocol is in the process of being developed to speed up the process of logging a crime and to provide the Police with good quality evidence.

Depending on the nature of the allegation, the Investigating Officer will normally work closely with the School and the Director of Children's Services to ensure that all allegations are thoroughly investigated and reported upon.

The Investigating Officer will:

- deal promptly with the matter
- record all evidence received
- ensure that all evidence is sound and adequately supported
- ensure security of all evidence collected
- contact other agencies such as Police
- notify the Council's Insurance and Risk Manager, if applicable, who in turn will notify the RBWM insurers
- assist management to implement Council disciplinary procedures, where appropriate

The processes outlined above will also apply to Governors.

The Council's disciplinary procedures will be used to facilitate a thorough investigation of any allegations of improper behaviour by employees.

7. Safeguards

Harassment or Victimation

The Council recognises that it can be difficult to report a concern, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the potential malpractice. The Council will not tolerate harassment or victimisation of the person who has raised the issue and will take serious disciplinary action against individuals who perpetrate such harassment.

Confidentiality

Wherever practical and possible, the Council will protect the identity of those raising a concern if they do not wish their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated, however, that the process of investigation may reveal the source of information and a statement may also be required as part of the evidence. Advice and support will be provided where this is the case and disclosure of your identity will not be done without your consent unless legally required to do so.

Anyone may approach the Authority confidentially if they so wish and as long as their allegation appears to have been raised honestly and in the public interest, their wish for confidentiality will be supported.

This approach is further supported by decisions of the courts, who have recognised in certain circumstances the identity of persons who have made allegations or given information to the public and other bodies should not be revealed (in the course of legal proceedings, for example). They recognise that disclosure could discourage others from making allegations or giving information to the proper authorities.

Anonymous Allegations

Individuals raising concerns are strongly encouraged to put their name to any allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, and will only be considered if the Monitoring Officer advises that the allegation demonstrates sufficient cause to take the matter further.

Untrue Allegations

If someone makes an allegation in the public interest and it is not confirmed by an investigation, no action will be taken against the person who has made the report. If, however, an individual makes an allegation, which is subsequently shown to be malicious or vexatious, serious disciplinary action is likely to be taken against them.

8. How the Matter can be taken Further

This Policy is intended to provide all School employees and others with an effective process for raising concerns within RBWM. The Council hopes that those using this process will be satisfied with the way their concerns are treated and any investigations that may be carried out. However, if they are not satisfied and feel they want to take the matter outside the Council, then either the Head of Resources & Organisational Development or the Monitoring Officer will provide advice as to other options.

9. Responsibility of officers / monitoring office

The Head of Resources & Organisational Development and the Monitoring Officer have overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Policy.

The Head of Audit and Review should be notified of all concerns raised through this Policy. All concerns raised and the outcomes (in a form which respects the individual's confidentiality) will be maintained by the Head of Resources & Organisational Development.

An annual report on this Policy will be presented to the Audit and Performance Review Panel.

10. Contacts

Internal

Headteacher	01753 863502 (main school number)
Chair of Governors	01753 863502 (main school number)

If it is not appropriate to contact the school then please contact the Chair via Governor Services – see below)

Governor Services	07775 704002
Director of Children's Services	07799 866594
RBWM Corporate Services Switchboard	01628 683800

External

The National Audit Office Whistleblowing Hotline	020 7798 7999
NUT Advice Line	0345 811 8111
Protect (Whistleblowing Charity)	020 3117 2520

11. Publicity

This Policy should be publicised to the widest possible audience so that all internal and external parties related to the School are aware of its existence in the event they have a legitimate concern or complaint.

Appendix 1: Safeguarding of Children

This policy also covers Whistleblowing in order to safeguard children.

All staff, governors and visitors to the school have a responsibility to Whistleblow if they have any concerns about the safeguarding of children.

Any concerns should be directed to the Designated Senior Person, Lynn Bima, Headteacher or the Deputy Designated Senior Person, Juliet Wright.

All staff have access to a 'Something's Not Quite Right' pro-forma which can be completed and handed to the Designated or Deputy Designated Senior Person.

The school has a number of 'think the unthinkable' signs displayed in the building which include information about what to do if they have a concern.