

London Borough of Barnet

Whistleblowing Policy Statement 2021

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The London Borough of Barnet firmly believes in open and honest governance. It is the policy of this Council that all those who raise honest concerns about anything this Council does will be treated with respect, supported and protected from any adverse treatment. The Council is committed to being open, honest and accountable in all we do. We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness and probity, and the aims and objectives of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 1.2 The essence of a whistleblowing system is that workers (a worker is defined as an individual who undertakes work to do or to perform personally any work or service for another party, whether under a contract or not – and includes staff at all levels, those permanently employed, temporary staff, agency staff, contractors, non-executives, , consultants, or other partner or contracted organisations) should be able to by-pass their direct management line arrangements, as this may be the area about which their concerns arise. They should also be able to go outside the organisation if they feel the overall management is engaged in an improper course of action.
- 1.3 The role of the whistleblowing policy is to assist with the deterrent and detection of wrongdoing. The Policy explains how concerns should be raised and seeks to allay any fears whistle-blowers may have.
- 1.4 It is our policy **that any worker** may raise concerns within the Council (or, under certain circumstances, with a prescribed regulator or external body) without fear that they may be victimised, discriminated against or disadvantaged in any way as a result.
- 1.5 If any worker raises concerns under this policy, they are to be perceived as and treated as a witness and not as a complainant.
- 1.6 All concerns, regardless of their nature, raised under this procedure will be treated seriously and sensitively by experienced staff.
- 1.7 Workers are encouraged to report wrongdoing and have the right to be heard and taken seriously when they do so. The Council will take all reasonable steps to protect workers who make such disclosures from any detrimental action which may occur because of making the disclosure.
- 1.8 The Council neither tolerates improper conduct by its, workers, staff, members, or its partners or contractors, nor the taking of reprisals against those who come forward to disclose such conduct.
- 1.9 The Council recognises the value of both confidentiality and accountability in its core functions and fully supports the making of disclosures to reveal corrupt conduct, mismanagement of public resources, or conduct which involves risk to service users, public health and safety, or the environment.
- 1.10 This whistleblowing policy has been drawn up in conjunction with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The Act establishes a framework for responsible whistleblowing and is intended to encourage workers to report any concerns that they may have of improper conduct or malpractice or abuse within the Council or to any of its service users.
- 1.11 This policy is designed to complement normal communication channels between staff members, partners, contractors and management. All workers or workers are encouraged to continue to raise matters via their respective Line Managers, however we recognise that sometimes this is not appropriate or that workers or workers may feel more comfortable making disclosure of improper conduct using this procedure.

2. Scope

- 2.1 Whilst the Public Interest Disclosure Act lists specific times when formal protection must be granted to those who report suspicions of wrongdoing, it is our intention that any reports of wrongdoing which are made in the public interest will gain the reporter the protection set out in this policy.
- 2.2 Notwithstanding the previous paragraph, the policy does **not** cover reports about:
- Issues affecting you as an employee (these should be raised through the Council's relevant procedure such as Grievance Procedure)
 - Service requests or complaints from the public about Council services
 - Lobbying for or against Council policy
 - Trade union or staff consultation
 - Complaints about Members of the Council

3. Protection from reprisal

- 3.1 The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 give statutory protection for employees, workers and former workers who disclose information showing:
- a criminal offence;
 - breach of a legal obligation;
 - miscarriages of justice;
 - danger to health or safety;
 - damage to the environment; or
 - the deliberate concealment of information about any of the above.
- 3.2 The disclosure of this information must be in the public interest and must be made to either the Council, or in certain circumstances to prescribed persons such as HMRC, the Environment Agency or the Health and Safety Executive.
- 3.3 The legislation protects an employee from being dismissed, and protects employees/workers/former workers from being subjected to any detriment, on the grounds that they have disclosed information of the type outlined in paragraph 3.1 of this policy. In addition, the Council will treat any victimisation or harassment of an employee who has made the report under this procedure as a serious disciplinary offence – **harassment of a whistle-blower could amount to gross misconduct and may lead to dismissal without notice.**
- 3.4 An individual who victimises or harasses an employee who has made a protected disclosure can be personally liable in court for their actions.
- 3.5 No action will be taken against any person if a report has been made but is not confirmed by the investigation.
- 3.6 **Conversely, any person should not make a report, which they do not reasonably believe to be true, or which is malicious. Disciplinary proceedings may be taken against a member of staff who makes false allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain.**
- 3.7 If the worker making a report is already the subject of a related grievance disciplinary, capability, redundancy or other council procedures they will not necessarily be halted because of a whistleblowing allegation.

4. Oversight of Policy

- 4.1 Members shall have oversight of this policy. This function is delegated to the Audit Committee. The Constitution requires the Audit Committee to approve this policy and recommend its application across the Council.
- 4.2 The Audit Committee shall receive a report on whistleblowing referral numbers (and where appropriate summary information / outcomes) by officers every three months. This report will form part of the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team Quarterly update / Annual report.
- 4.3 The report shall be produced by the Director of Assurance and presented to the Audit Committee (or to such other committee as the full Council shall nominate). The report must not contain any information that identifies whistle-blowers, nor may it identify specific allegations until all associated investigations are completed.
- 4.4 Following that report, the Audit Committee may make such recommendations as they deem necessary relating to the policy and may give such directions as they deem necessary to ensure that the Council's policy is followed.
- 4.5 Members recognise that it would not be proper for them to be seen to have any influence on outcomes. Their function is, with reference to the reports, to satisfy themselves that the policy is robust and that it is being followed by all officers involved in this area of work. To protect them from any wrongful allegations, members **are not** able to direct investigations or be given details of on-going investigations. However, it is acknowledged that there may be some instances where it is appropriate and necessary to share some details with relevant members, however this will be at the discretion of the Director of Assurance and/or other relevant Statutory Officers.

5. Adoption of Policy and Amendments

- 5.1 This policy was adopted by The London Borough of Barnet July 2021. It replaces any previous policy.
- 5.2 The Director of Assurance is instructed to make any changes that are necessary to this and any associated documents to ensure that they comply with changes to primary legislation and with codes of practice. Changes to the policy made under this section must be reported to members in the next quarterly report.

Making a Whistleblowing report

If you wish to raise any concerns there is a dedicated confidential whistleblowing phone line **020 8359 6123** to leave a message and an appropriate officer will call you back.

Alternatively, the phone line will be answered in person by an appropriate officer during the hours of midday - 2pm on Mondays.

Or, there is a dedicated email address **whistleblowing@barnet.gov.uk** that you can use.

There are a number of dedicated **Whistleblowing Reporting Officers** that may deal with your report. These are: **Director of Assurance, Monitoring Officer, Chief Executive** (or designated deputy), **Section 151 Officer** (Director of Resources), **Head of Counter Fraud Operations, Head of Internal Audit** or the **Head of Governance**.

Alternatively, if the matter you wish to report does fall within the remit of our Whistleblowing Policy but specifically concerns **Fraud** or **the Safeguarding of a Child, Young Person or an Adult** please make your report as directed below. These matters are considered whistleblowing and merit the protections granted under the policy but there is a designated process better suited to raising these issues:

- **Fraud** - To report a fraud, visit www.barnet.gov.uk/anti-fraud or call our **fraud hotline on 020 8359 2007**.
- **Children and Young People** - Contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team on **020 8359 4066** if you are concerned about a child or young person in Barnet and provide as much information as you can.
Outside of these hours, care and welfare concerns about children and young people that need an immediate response should be reported to the Emergency Duty team on **020 8359 2000**.
- **Adult Social Care** - contact Social Care Direct
- Tel: 020 8359 5000 (9am- 5pm, Mon to Fri), or 020 8359 2000 (out of hours)
- Email: socialcaredirect@barnet.gov.uk

Or the police on 101. If the danger is immediate, always call the police on 999.

Additionally, both workers and residents or members of the public also have the option to contact **Protect**, the whistleblowing charity, for advice and support:

- www.protect-advice.org.uk
- **020 3117 2520**