

Whistle-blowing Policy, May 2014



Introduction

Woodcraft Folk is committed to the highest standards of openness, honesty and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable members and staff of the Woodcraft Folk to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1999) gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. Woodcraft Folk has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members or staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or misconduct. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the Woodcraft Folk nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures.

Once the whistle-blowing procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect volunteer members and staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside Woodcraft Folk.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy is designed to enable members and staff of the Woodcraft Folk to raise concerns internally and at a high level and to disclose information which the individual believes shows malpractice or misconduct. This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to other procedures e.g. disciplinary. These concerns could include:

- Financial malpractice or misconduct or fraud
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Risks to the safety of children and young people
- Criminal activity
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

3. Safeguards

3.1 Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those members and employees of the Woodcraft Folk who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:

- In good faith
- In the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or misconduct and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below).

It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action by the person(s) complained about.

3.2 Confidentiality

Woodcraft Folk will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

3.3 Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of the Woodcraft Folk.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

3.4 Untrue Allegations

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or allegations with no sufficient grounds, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

4. Procedures for Making a Disclosure

On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible, to the appropriate designated investigating officer as follows:

- Complaints of malpractice will be investigated by the General Secretary unless the complaint is against the General Secretary or is in any way related to the actions of the General Secretary. In such cases, the complaint should be passed to the Chair for referral.
- In the case of a complaint which is any way connected with but not against the General Secretary, the Chair will nominate a senior person to act as the alternative investigating officer.
- Complaints against the Chair should be passed to the General Secretary who will nominate an appropriate investigating officer.

- The complainant has the right to bypass the line management structure and take their complaint direct to the Chair. The Chair has the right to refer the complaint back to management if he/she feels that the management without any conflict of interest can more appropriately investigate the complaint.

Should none of the above routes be suitable or acceptable to the complainant, then the complainant may approach one of the following individuals who have been designated and trained as independent points of contact under this procedure. They can advise the complainant on the implications of the legislation and the possible internal and external avenues of complaint open to them:

- 1 Chair of Staffing
- 2 Director of Development
- 3 Trade Union representative
- 4 Vice-Chair

Woodcraft Folk will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder a formal police investigation.

5. Timescales

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and/or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations, however every effort should be made to proceed promptly and in line with the timescales outlined in the Woodcraft Folk Dispute Resolution and Complaints Procedures.

The investigating officer should ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating officer, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.

6. Investigating Procedure

The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.
- The investigating officer should inform the individual against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The individual will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures.
- The investigating officer should consider the involvement of the Police at this stage and should consult with the Chair
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance, where appropriate, of other individuals/bodies.

- A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to the Chair as appropriate.
- The Chair will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate Woodcraft Folk procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.
- If appropriate, a copy of the outcomes will be passed to the General Council to enable a review of the procedures.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Chair, or one of the designated persons described above.

If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, Woodcraft Folk recognises the lawful rights of members, employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons (such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Audit Commission, or the utility regulators), or, where justified, elsewhere.