



Integrity at Work

Title	Whistle-blowing Policy
Scope	This policy applies to all members within EMH Group
Author	Business Assurance Manager/Asst Company Secretary/Human Resources Director
Date approved	<p>EMH Group May 2016</p> <p><i>Housekeeping update: May 2011/ May 2016</i></p> <p><i>Approved by: J Tilley Director Executive Director Business Support</i></p>
Review Date	June 2019

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 East Midlands Housing Group is committed to the highest standards of quality and probity, transparency, openness and accountability.
- 1.2 This whistle-blowing policy provides a procedure which enables employees and board/committee members to raise concerns about what is happening at work, particularly where those concerns relate to unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangers to the public or the environment.
- 1.3 The object of this policy is to ensure that concerns are raised and dealt with at an early stage and in an appropriate manner. This is in recognition of the fact that employees and Board members have a right and responsibility to raise concerns about the way in which the Group delivers its services and the way in which it deals with its tenants, suppliers and contractors.
- 1.4 This policy applies as far as possible equally to members of the EMH Group Board , Boards of operating businesses and employees of East Midlands Housing Group, whether permanent or temporary. In the context of this policy, the term employee also embraces consultants and agency staff employed by the Group from time to time. Customers and Contractors have different methods of reporting concerns which fall outside this policy.
- 1.5 This organisation is committed to its whistle-blowing policy. If an individual raises a genuine concern under this policy, he or she will not be at risk of losing their position, nor will they suffer any form of detriment as a result. As long as the individual is acting in good faith and in accordance with this policy, it does not matter if they are mistaken. These assurances would not be extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know to be untrue.

2.0 How the Whistle-blowing policy differs from the Grievance procedure

- 2.1 This policy does not apply to raising grievances about an individual's personal situation. These types of concern are covered by the grievance procedure. The whistle-blowing policy is primarily concerned with where the interests of others or of this organisation itself are at risk. It may be difficult to decide whether a particular concern should be raised under the whistle-blowing policy or the grievance procedure or under both. If an individual has any doubt as to the correct route to follow, the Group encourages the concern to be raised under this policy and will decide how the concern should be dealt with.
- 2.2 The individual has only to have a reasonable belief that events are occurring which warrant further scrutiny, they do not need to have any definite proof or evidence. Individuals are encouraged to report a concern at the earliest opportunity.

3.0 Communication

- 3.1 Through our induction and staff briefing procedures, we will make sure that an individual knows how to recognise the following problems and that they understand the effects they may have on the organisation, their job and the service provided. Those problems are:

- Fraud, corruption and malpractice
- Abuse or neglect of vulnerable people
- Failure to deliver proper standards of service
- Damaging personnel conflicts at senior level
- Bullying, discrimination, harassment or victimisation in the workplace.

3.2 The Group will make sure that individuals know what is expected of them and practices regarded as unacceptable. If an individual is not sure what to do in a given situation, it is advisable to ask before taking any action.

4.0 **Protecting the individual**

4.1 This Group will not tolerate harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern under the whistle-blowing policy. If an individual requests that their identity be protected, all possible steps will be taken to prevent the individual's identity becoming known. If the situation arises where it is not possible to resolve the concern without revealing the individual's identity (e.g. if the individual's evidence is needed in court or disciplinary hearing), the best way to proceed with the matter will be discussed with the individual.

4.2 Individuals should be aware that by reporting matters anonymously, it will be more difficult for the organisation to investigate them, to protect the individual and to give them feedback. The Group will consider anonymous reports, which will be dealt with under the Complaints Policy and Procedure.

5.0 **How the matter will be handled**

5.1 Once an individual has informed the organisation of his or her concern, the concerns will be examined and the organisation will assess what action should be taken. This may involve an internal enquiry or a more formal investigation. The individual will be told who is handling the matter, how they can contact him/her and whether any further assistance may be needed. If the individual has any personal interest in the matter, this should be declared by the individual at the outset. If the individual's concern falls more properly within the grievance procedure, then they will be informed accordingly.

5.2 The supporting procedure will enable staff to determine what action needs to be taken. Timescales for informing an individual will vary according to the action taken and the seriousness of the matter, but they will be embedded within the various procedures. Our ultimate object will be to resolve the issue as quickly as possible in a fair and thorough manner.

6.0 **Internal Contact**

6.1 The procedures for all individuals to follow when raising a concern are attached. *Appendix 1*

7.0 **Independent Advice**

7.1 If an individual is unsure whether to use this procedure or wants independent advice at any stage, they may contact the independent charity Public Concern at Work. Their lawyers can give free confidential advice at any stage about how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work. An individual can, of course, seek advice from a lawyer of their own choice at their own expense, or if they are a member, from their trade union or professional body.

Appendix 2 – gives details of bodies providing independent advice.

8.0 **External Contacts**

8.1 It is intended that this policy gives individuals the reassurance they need to raise concerns internally. However, the Group recognises that there may be circumstances where individuals should properly report matters to outside bodies, such as our regulator (see

Appendix 2) or the police. If an individual is unsure as to whether this is appropriate and does not feel able to discuss the matter internally, Public Concern at Work will be able to give advice on such an option and on the circumstances in which an employee should contact an outside body rather than raise the matter internally. They would be able to provide contact details of external agencies.

8.2 It is thus open for any individual to make a disclosure externally without detriment so long as they comply with legislation (the Public Interest Disclosure Act – see section 11 for more detail)

9.0 **Staff support**

If, having raised a concern, an individual needs further support, either emotionally or otherwise, the Group has set up a facility to contact the health cash plan, details available from HR. This is not a formal reporting line for concerns; it is a confidential service providing advice and support, if necessary. See *Appendix 2*

10.0 **Matters raised maliciously**

10.1 Employees who maliciously raise a matter that they know to be untrue will be subject to the disciplinary policy.

11.0 **Public Interest Disclosure Act**

11.1 This policy has been developed with reference to this legislation to ensure that all relevant areas have been covered. One of its main purposes is to protect workers who raise concerns in a responsible way and thereby encourage employers to respond appropriately. A brief summary of the act is attached at *Appendix 3*.

12.0 **Associated policies**

12.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with all our policies which fall under the umbrella of Integrity at Work:-

Code of Conduct

Probity

Fraud policy

Discipline & Grievance

12.2 Associated policies :-

Safeguarding Policy

13.0 **Monitoring of policy**

13.1 Records will be kept of the concerns raised through this policy, how the concerns were handled and the outcome of any investigation. Confidentiality issues will be adhered to.

13.2 This will be reported to Group Risk Panel on an annual basis and then to Audit committee.

13.3 This policy will be reviewed every two years; any major amendments to relevant legislation or incidents occurring within that time will trigger a review.

Appendix 1

Procedure for Staff

How to raise a concern internally

In most cases, you should be able to raise any concerns with your line manager.

Step 1

If an individual has a concern about malpractice, he or she should consider raising it initially with their line manager. This may be done orally or in writing.

An individual should specify from the outset if they wish the matter to be treated in confidence so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Step 2

If an individual feels that they are unable to raise a particular matter with their line manager, for whatever reason, they should raise the matter with the Business Assurance Manager or any Executive Management team member.

Step 3

If these channels have been followed and the individual still has concerns, or if the individual feels that the matter is so serious that they cannot discuss it with any of the above, they should discuss it with the Group Chief Executive, the Chair of the relevant Association's Board or any other board member.

How to raise a concern externally

It is intended that this policy should give an individual the reassurance they need to raise concerns internally. However if an individual feels the issue lies outside what can be dealt with internally a disclosure could be made externally. However, we would **strongly recommend** that they seek advice from the independent agency Public Concern at Work prior to doing so. Names and addresses of all relevant bodies are included within this policy.

Matters raised maliciously

Any individual who maliciously raises a matter that they know to be untrue will be subject to action under the disciplinary policy.

Procedure for Board Members

How to raise a concern internally

Step 1

If an individual has a concern about malpractice, he or she should consider raising it initially with the Group Chief Executive. This may be done orally or in writing.

An individual should specify from the outset if they wish the matter to be treated in confidence so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Step 2

If an individual feels that they are unable to raise a particular matter with the Group Chief Executive, for whatever reason, they should raise the matter with the Chair of the relevant Association's board or Chair of Group Audit committee.

How to raise a concern externally

It is intended that this policy should give an individual the reassurance they need to raise concerns internally. However if an individual feels the issue lies outside what can be dealt with internally a disclosure could be made externally. However, we would **strongly recommend** that they seek advice from the independent agency Public Concern at Work prior to doing so. Names and addresses of all relevant bodies are included within this policy.

Matters raised maliciously

Any individual who maliciously raises a matter that they know to be untrue will be subject to action under the Members Services Agreement.

Appendix 2 - List of organisations providing advice

Public Concern at Work

3rd Floor Bank Chambers
6-10 Borough High Street

London SE1 9QQ

Telephone (general enquiries and helpline):	020 7404 6609
Fax:	020 7403 8023
Email:	UK enquiries:  whistle@pcaw.org.uk
	UK helpline:  helpline@pcaw.org.uk

Hours: The UK office is open and the helpline is staffed from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. There is an answering machine out of hours.

Action on Elder Abuse

Response Line
080 8808 8141

(This is a Freephone helpline available Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 pm)

Regulator:

Homes and Communities Agency

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
0300 1234 500

Care Quality Commission

151 Buckingham Palace Road
London
SW1W 9SZ

03000 616161

Appendix 3 Public Interest Disclosure Act

- 1 This act, sometimes known as the “Whistleblowers Act”, came into effect on 2 July 1999. It protects workers who raise concerns in a responsible way and so encourages employers to respond appropriately. Its main purpose is to protect employees who disclose information about their employer, which might otherwise be regarded as confidential, from detrimental action. It is aimed at encouraging people to raise concerns about malpractice in the workplace.
- 2 The Act provides for compensation for whistleblowers, who have been unfairly dismissed; it uses the term workers rather than employees and covers third parties such as sub-contractors and agency staff. The Act does not presently extend to volunteers and does not therefore cover Board members who work for the Association on an unpaid basis. However the Group considers as a matter of policy that members should have a mechanism available to them whereby they can raise concerns about possible malpractice or wrongdoing without leaving themselves open to possible victimisation.
- 3 Section 103a of the Employment rights Act 1996 makes it automatically unfair to dismiss a worker for making a ‘protected disclosure’, even if they have less than 12 months service.

Protected disclosures must be:

- Disclosures of information
- Qualifying’ disclosures
- Made in accordance with the permitted methods of disclosure

Qualifying disclosure

This is a disclosure that – in the reasonable belief of the individual making it- reveals genuine concerns about:

- An actual or potential criminal offence
- A failure to comply with a legal obligation, such as negligence, breach of contract or breach of administrative law
- A miscarriage of justice
- The endangerment of Health & Safety
- Damage to the environment
- Deliberate concealment of any matter failing within any one of the above