



# WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

November 2023

Review Date 10<sup>th</sup>

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## 1. Aim of the policy

Our organisation is committed to being open, honest, and accountable. It encourages a free and open culture in its dealings between board and volunteers.

This policy aims to help board members and staff to raise any serious concerns they may have about volunteers or the trustees with confidence and without having to worry about being victimised, discriminated against or disadvantaged in any way as a result.

It is written in the context of the public interest Disclosure Act 1998 which protects employees who “blow the whistle” on malpractices within the organisation.

What types of concerns?

The policy is intended to deal with serious or sensitive concerns about wrong doings such as the following (This is not a comprehensive list;)

- A serious criminal offence, such as fraud or corruption
- Unauthorised use of Aim Highers money
- Serious failure to comply with any legal obligation
- Serious breaches and abuses of Aim Highers own policies
- Action resulting or potentially resulting in a serious health and safety risk

- Discrimination based on any of the protected characteristics specified in the equal opportunities Act 2010

It is not necessary for individuals who raise the concern to prove wrongdoing that is alleged to have occurred or is likely to occur, but they must have a reasonable basis of facts or observation.

If a staff member knowingly or maliciously makes an untrue allegation (e.g. to cause disruption within the organisation) the organisation will take appropriate disciplinary action against them. This may constitute gross misconduct. Individuals should have note they may not be protected from the consequences of making a disclosure if, by doing so they commit a criminal offence.

This policy does not deal with any complaints staff may have about their volunteer role, this should be dealt with through Aim Highers Grievance procedure, which should also offer protection to workers against

harassment, bullying and discrimination. Volunteers should make complaints or raise concerns through the volunteer complaints procedure. Service users should make complaints or raise concerns through the service user complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern

The trustee designated by the board to handle whistleblowing concerns is Nicola Robinson (The whistle blower officer).

Where a member of Aim Higher has a serious concern about any of the above issues, they should first raise them with Gill Jagger in the absence of Nicola Robinson. The whistle blower should only be contacted if:

- The whistle-blower feels that the issue has not been dealt with adequately by Nicola Robinson
- Where the concern relates directly to the whistle blowing officer
- If the whistle-blower believes that the issue is of such urgency that it needs to go direct to the trustees

If the matter concerns the whistle blowing officer, it should be raised with the charity commission.

Individuals are encouraged to raise their concerns in writing where possible setting out the background and history of their concerns (giving names, date, and places where possible) and indicating the reasons for their concerns. However, in cases of urgency or sensitivity staff may request a confidential meeting with the whistleblowing officer. Where possible this should be held outside Aim Higher.

Volunteers may invite a colleague or trade union representatives to be present during any meetings or interviews about the concerns they have raised.

Protecting the individual raising the concern

If an individual raises a concern which they believe to be true, the organisation will take appropriate action to protect the individual's identity. The matter will be treated

confidentially if the individual requests it and their name or position will not be revealed without their permission unless the organisation must do so by law. If the concern cannot be resolved without revealing the individual's identity, the whistleblowing officer will discuss with the individual whether and how to proceed.

Volunteers who raise a genuine concern under the policy will not be at risk of losing their voluntary status. Concerns raised anonymously tend to be far less effective, but the whistle blower will decide whether to consider the matter considering:

- The seriousness of the matter
- Whether the concerns are believable
- Whether the investigation can be carried out based on the information provided

How Aim Higher will deal with the concerns

How the concern will be dealt with will depend on what is involved. It is likely that further investigation will be necessary depending on the seriousness of the concern.

- Initially the whistle blowing officer will discuss the concerns with Gill Jagger Aim Higher chairperson, unless the concern is related to Gill
- Nicola Robinson and Gill Jagger will advise the person who the allegation is made against to give them an opportunity to make an initial statement
- An investigation will begin if it is felt a crime has been committed the police will be contacted. In some instances, the charity commission will become involved
- The person against whom the allegation is made against may be suspended during the investigation depending on the seriousness of the concern. At such time, all access to Aim Higher IT systems will also be withdrawn
- Should investigations find a crime has been committed the member will be dismissed from duties and criminal proceedings initiated
- For concerns that are found to have credence on initial investigation but are not of a nature when other authorities need to be involved then they should be dealt with



under the organisation Disciplinary procedures

It may be necessary for the individual reporting a concern to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings if the concern when investigated is taken further

The organisation will give the individual feedback on the progress and outcome of any investigation wherever possible.

If the suspicions are not confirmed by an investigation, the matter will be closed. Staff will not be treated or regarded any differently for raising the concern, and their confidentiality will continue to be protected.

## Review

These procedures will be reviewed by the board of trustees every three years, after consultation with volunteers or to accommodate alterations to current legislation, reforms, and law.