

SHIRLEY CHILDREN'S CENTRE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

This policy links to the following:

- Child Protection Whistleblowing Guidance

Document History

Amendment History

Version/issue Number	Date	Author	Remarks/Reason for change	Review Date
1	October 2014	Eyullahemaye Henry-Miller	To be ratified by the governing body	October 2015
2	October 2015	Eyullahemaye Henry-Miller	Review	October 2016
3	October 2016	Eyullahemaye Henry-Miller	Review	October 2017
4	October 2017	Yvonne Charalambous	Review	October 2018
5	October 2018	Nicky Cook & Katie Coomber	Review	October 2019
6	October 2019	Katie Coomber	Reviewed	October 2020

Expolink

Freephone 0800 374199

Expolink is an external and independent organisation which provides a confidential hotline service for whistle blowing. Expolink can be contacted any time, night or day, in complete confidence with any relevant concerns. The call will not be traced or monitored.

1. Introduction & Purpose of Policy

Shirley Children's Centre is committed to the highest possible standards of honesty, openness, probity and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner, to ensure that all its activities are openly and effectively managed, and that the children centre's integrity and the principles of public interest disclosure are sustained.

In line with that commitment, all members of staff and those working on behalf of the children's centre who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Children Centre's work are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns to the Children's Centre Manager or Head of School. Staff not only have the right but also a duty to report any improper actions or omissions, particularly where the welfare of young people may be at risk. Where any member of staff decides to report a serious incident within the scope of this policy, whether anonymously or otherwise, this will be treated as a 'protected' disclosure. Staff members should feel reassured that they can raise concerns in accordance with this policy without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. All staff employed in children's centres maintained by Croydon Council have access to an external, independent and confidential service provided by Expolink (see above for contact details).

This policy aims to:

- Encourage staff to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice;
- Provide avenues to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- Ensure that staff receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied;
- Reassure staff that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have made any disclosure in good faith.

Shirley Children's Centre is mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and this policy will be applied fairly and consistently to all staff employed at the children's centre as well as those carrying out work for the children's centre, for example, governors, volunteers, agency workers, contractors or consultants. The term 'member(s) of staff' is used in this document for simplicity but is intended to include this broader range of individuals covered by this policy. Copies of this are available to all members of staff from the Children's Centre Manager.

2. Scope of the Policy

There are existing procedures in place to enable employees to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment. The whistle blowing policy is intended to cover serious concerns that may fall outside the scope of other procedures, in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of law
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public or pupils as well as other staff
- Damage to the environment
- Information relating to the above issues that has been, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

Examples of the above categories are likely to include:

- The unauthorised use or misuse of public funds
- Fraudulent or improper use of the Children's Centre's money or assets
- Sexual, physical or psychological abuse of pupils at the Children Centre
- Harassment & bullying of staff
- Breaches of codes of conduct
- Dangerous practices at work
- Corruptly receiving any gift or advantage
- Allowing private interests and those of the children's centre to conflict
- Malpractice in examinations and assessments
- Deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above.

Therefore any serious concerns that a member of staff has about any aspect of the children centre's service provision or the conduct of staff or others connected with the Children Centre can be reported under this whistle blowing policy where that member of staff has a reasonable belief in the validity of those concerns and they relate to one of the specified areas set out above.

A member of staff who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because he/she has made a disclosure.

3. Key Points About Raising Concerns

3.1 Safeguarding Against Harassment or Victimisation

It is recognised that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. The Children Centre will take a zero tolerance approach to any act of harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) resulting from a member of staff raising a concern in good faith, and will handle any such allegations in accordance with the Children Centres Grievance Policy and Procedure.

A member of staff making an allegation within the scope of this policy will be supported by the Children Centre when raising a concern, providing that he/she:

- Believes the concern to be true
- Is not acting maliciously or making false allegations
- Is not seeking any personal gain.

3.2 Unsubstantiated Allegations

If a member of staff makes an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, an allegation is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action is likely to be taken.

3.3 Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence but, at the appropriate time, the whistle blower may be asked to come forward as a witness and this will be discussed with him/her.

3.4 Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages staff to put their name to their allegation wherever possible.

Where a concern is raised via the external confidential Expolink service (see p.1 for contact details), there is provision to provide Expolink with a name and contact details which will not be passed to the Children Centre without express permission from the individual.

The Children Centre will take all concerns raised seriously. Where relevant to the nature of the complaint, allegations will also be referred to officers of the Council and/or to the Council's Internal Audit Team for further investigation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will still be given consideration at the discretion of the children's centre. In exercising this discretion, the children's centre would consider the seriousness of the issues raised, the credibility of the concern and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from sources which can be attributed.

4. How to Raise a Concern

As a first step, a member of staff should normally raise concerns with the children's centre manager or the Head of School as the Children Centre's Designated Person for Safeguarding (DPS) where this is appropriate to the nature of the concern. If the allegations involve the Children's Centre Manager, the member of staff should raise the matter with the Head of School. Should the whistle blower feel the need to involve a person external to the Children Centre, his/her trade union/professional association or the Local Education Officer (LEO), will refer allegations to other officers of the Council and/or any other agency, as relevant to the nature of the concerns.

While the Children Centre encourages members of staff to raise their concerns internally, the Children Centre also recognises that some staff may feel unable to do this and that they may therefore wish to contact an independent, external organisation, such as Expolink, to report the concern (for contact details, see p. 1). Expolink will be responsible for ensuring that concerns are referred on to the appropriate personnel at the Council who will, in turn, contact the Children Centre. Where financial impropriety has been alleged, information will be referred to the Council's Internal Audit Team.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing, but the earlier the concern is expressed the easier it is to take any required action. Members of staff who wish to make a written report are encouraged to include the following information:

- The background and history of the concern, giving relevant dates and providing as much supporting evidence as possible;
- The reason(s) why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

Where a concern is raised verbally, the person hearing it must ensure that a written account of it is made to assist with any subsequent investigation. Children Centre management will take all concerns raised within the scope of this policy seriously and identify the appropriate level of investigation. Advice and guidance will be obtained as necessary from the Children Centre's Personnel Consultant.

The whistle blower may invite a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews held in connection with the concerns raised.

5. How the Children Centre Will Respond

5.1 Initial Enquiry

In order to protect the individuals involved, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take and who should be appointed to conduct it. The overriding principle is that of the public interest. If urgent action is required, for example if the welfare of families may be at risk, this action will be taken before any investigation is conducted. Further to the results of this enquiry, the following steps will be considered:

- Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures, e.g. child protection, bullying or harassment or disciplinary, will normally be referred for investigation and consideration under those procedures.
- Where there are any concerns about financial impropriety or criminal activity, the concern will be referred to Croydon Council's Internal Audit Team before taking any other action, which may include reporting to the police.
- Concerns indicating unlawful activity should be reported to the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- Suspected incidents of malpractice relating to examinations will be reported to the appropriate awarding body at the earliest opportunity.
- In other cases, an impartial investigator may be appointed and the Children Centre will seek advice from Forest Academy/Croydon Council.

5.2 Communication

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person who is dealing with the concern will respond in writing either to the employee directly or to Expolink where this was the reporting route. The response will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the concern
- Indicate how the Children Centre proposes to deal with the matter
- Give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- Advise whether any initial enquiries have been made
- Supply information on any staff support mechanisms (e.g. EAP), and

- Advise whether further investigation or action is required, and if not, why not.

Where Expolink was the reporting route, the person dealing with the concern will provide an additional update after 4 weeks of receipt of the report, advising of additional progress and timescales for a final response.

5.3 Investigation

Once preliminary enquiries have established the need for an investigation, an appropriate person will be appointed to conduct the investigation (section 5.1). The person appointed to undertake the investigation is responsible for establishing the facts of the matter, as far as it is reasonably possible to do so, and assessing whether the concern has foundation and can be resolved internally. Other people may need to be interviewed to provide further information and/or clarification concerning the issue(s) raised.

Written records of all interviews will be kept throughout the investigation together with details of any action taken. The investigation will result in a written report and recommendations for corrective action, which will be passed to the Children's Centre Manager and/or the Head of School, as appropriate to the concerns under consideration, to determine whether formal action shall be taken.

The member of staff raising the concern will, subject to legal constraints, be advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation and, where appropriate, what action is being taken. This may, for example, include changes to working practices to ensure that a similar situation does not occur again. Where the concern was raised via Expolink, the employee will be invited to contact the service for feedback at the appropriate time.

6. Taking the Matter Further

This policy is intended to provide members of staff with an avenue to raise concerns internally. If the member of staff feels that it is right to take the matter outside the Children Centre, contact can be made with a recognised trade union, local Citizens Advice Bureau, relevant voluntary or independent organisation or legal advisor. The Public Interest Disclosure Act also sets out a number of bodies to which protected disclosures can be made, including HM Revenue & Customs, the FSA, the Health and Safety Executive and the Serious Fraud Office. Employees should be aware that going directly to the press may limit their protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act and they could therefore be subject to disciplinary action. An employee considering such a course of action is strongly advised to seek prior advice from their trade union or an independent organisation such as Public Concern at Work (www.pcaaw.co.uk)

7. Monitoring & Reporting

It is the responsibility of the Children's Centre Manager to monitor and review the effectiveness of all policies relating to the centre. The Children's Centre Manager will review and update this policy in accordance with the information outlined in the document history. The Children's Centre Manager will update and amend this policy and its procedures in line with any emerging and relevant government legislation or Croydon Council guidance

October 2019

It is intended that by adopting this policy and keeping staff, volunteers, families and the management committee informed, trained and up-to-date with procedures, the centre can avoid the need for complaints.

However, the Children's Centre Manager is the first point of contact should you have any queries over this policy and its related procedures

For further information please contact:

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Policy endorsement

This policy is agreed and signed by the governing body of Forest Academy School