



Thames Valley Adventure Playground

Policy and Procedures

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Playground. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Playground. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The Board of Trustees is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees, and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of our work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

The policy document makes it clear that employees and volunteers can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This whistle-blowing policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the Playground rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

These procedures are in addition to the Playground's complaints procedures.

Aims of this policy:

- To encourage staff to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice **and** to provide avenues for them to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.
- To ensure that staff receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied
- To reassure staff that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have made a disclosure in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable staff to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment. The whistle-blowing policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures.

These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of law or disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- Damage to the environment
- The unauthorised use of funds
- Possible fraud and corruption
- Sexual or physical abuse of clients, or other unethical conduct

Thus, any serious concerns that they have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of other employees or Trustees of the Association can be reported under the whistle-blowing policy.

This may be about something that:

- Makes them feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, their experience or the standards they believe the Playground subscribes to
- Is against the Playgrounds policies
- Falls below established standards of practice
- Amounts to improper conduct.



Safeguards

The Board of Trustees is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees and recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what staff are saying is true, they should have nothing to fear because they will be doing their duty to their employer and those for whom they are providing a service.

The Board of Trustees will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect staff when they raise a concern in good faith.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect the individual.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the individual's identity if they so wish. At the appropriate time, however, they may need to come forward as a witness.

Anonymous allegations:

- This policy encourages an individual to put their name to their allegation whenever possible.
- Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Board of Trustees.
- In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include the seriousness and credibility of the issues raised and the likelihood of confirmation.

Untrue allegations

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

How to raise a concern

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your immediate manager or their superior. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that management is involved you should approach a member of the Board of Trustees.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

1. The background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates)
2. The reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier the concern is expressed, the easier it is to take action.

Although staff are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, they will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for concern.

Staff may wish to consider discussing their concern with a colleague first and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) who have had the same experience or concerns.

Staff may invite their trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.



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How the Trustees will respond

The Board of Trustees will respond to concerns raised. Do not forget that testing out concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle which the Board of Trustees will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the responsible person will write to the staff member:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how TVAPA propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- stating whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying information on staff support mechanisms, and
- stating whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the staff member will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the Board of Trustees will seek further information from the staff member.

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if desired, the staff member can be accompanied by a union or professional association representative or a friend.

The Board of Trustees will take steps to minimise any difficulties which may be experienced as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if the staff member is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the Board of Trustees will arrange for them to receive advice about the procedure.

The Board of Trustees accepts that the staff member needs to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, they will inform him/her of the outcome of any investigation.

The responsible officer

The Playground Manager, or in the event of them being the subject of concern, an appointed Trustee, will have overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. That officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcome (but in a form which does not endanger confidentiality) and will report as necessary to the Board of Trustees.

How the matter can be taken forward

This policy is intended to provide an avenue within the Playground to raise concerns. The Board of Trustees hopes the staff member will be satisfied with any action taken. If they are not, and feel it is right to take the matter outside the organisation, the following are possible contact points:



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- Public Concern at Work (tel: 020 7404 6609), a registered charity whose services are free and strictly confidential
- Ofsted - 0300 123 3155 (Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm).
Email Ofsted at whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk.
Write to Ofsted at:
WBHL
Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
- trade union
- local Citizens Advice Bureau
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the police.

If the matter is taken outside the organisation, staff should ensure that they do not disclose confidential information.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or as needed.

Last Review: 16.07.2021 (GW)