



Whistleblowing Policy

Northumberland National Park Authority

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY ("THE AUTHORITY")

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Whistleblowing is ‘making a disclosure in the public interest’ and occurs when a worker raises a genuine concern about danger or illegality that affects others. This policy is intended to enable and encourage employees to raise serious concerns within the Authority as well as to provide them with guidance on the process and reassurance that they will not be subject to any detriment for doing so.

The Authority is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability and therefore expects employees, and others that it deals with, to voice any serious concerns. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

“Blowing the whistle” can be done without fear of victimisation, subsequent detriment or disadvantage. The right to “blow the whistle” applies to all employees and those contractors working for the Authority on its premises, for example, agency staff. It also applies to suppliers and to those providing services under a contract with the Authority in their own premises. This policy covers all such individuals.

These procedures are in addition to the Authority's complaints procedures and other statutory reporting procedures. It should be noted that this policy is not to be used for complaints relating to an individual's personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work. The Authority has a grievance policy for use in such cases. **In order for a concern to be dealt with under this policy there must be a public interest element to it.** If an individual is uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy they should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer, whose contact details are set out below.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended from time to time.

AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

- Explain the process to raise any concerns
- Encourage confidence to question actions and to raise concerns
- Provide reassurance that staff will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation having made a disclosure in the belief that it is correct

This policy is intended to cover the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. See below for a list of examples:

- A criminal offence
- The breach of a legal obligation
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of any individual
- Damage to the environment
- Inappropriate or unauthorised use of public funds or other resources
- Possible fraud, bribery or corruption

- Breach of internal policies and procedures
- Conduct likely to damage reputation or financial wellbeing
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- Negligence
- Other unethical conduct
- The deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST HARASSMENT OR DETRIMENT

The Authority recognises that the decision to report a concern can be difficult. Employees should be reassured that they are protected by legislation if their disclosure is in the public interest and is a genuine concern relating to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work as set out above.

The Authority will not tolerate any harassment or detrimental treatment (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action, including disciplinary action if necessary, to protect employees making a disclosure in the public interest.

If an individual believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the Monitoring Officer immediately. If the matter is not remedied the individual should raise it formally using our grievance procedure.

All employees are specifically prohibited from threatening or retaliating against whistleblowers in any way. If any employee is involved in such conduct they may be subject to disciplinary action.

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of those involved, where this is possible. Staff should note however that they may be asked to come forward as a witness if they hold relevant information.

ANONYMOUS ALLEGATIONS

This policy encourages staff to put their name to an allegation whenever possible. There may be cases where it is impossible for us to investigate the matter properly if concerns are made anonymously.

The extent to which it will be possible to investigate anonymous allegations will be considered and the Monitoring Officer will exercise their discretion on how to progress this, taking into case factors such as:-

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS

If staff make an allegation in the belief that it is correct, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, staff make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

Employees should raise concerns with their immediate manager as soon as they arise. The concern may be made in person or in writing. There may be a way to agree a way of resolving the concern quickly and effectively. If the concern cannot be resolved in this way then the manager may refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer. If this is something that is necessary then this will be done within five working days.

If the employee believes that their immediate manager is involved, they should approach the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer or Internal Audit directly.

Written notes should be taken of any concern, as well as the grounds for the concern. All concerns will be dealt with fairly and properly.

Staff may invite a trade union representative or a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with their concerns.

HOW THE AUTHORITY WILL RESPOND

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 Authority will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of other specific procedures (for example, discrimination or harassment issues) will be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:-

- be investigated by management, the Monitoring Officer, 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.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken immediately. Individuals may be required to attend further meetings in order to provide additional information.

Where the concern is made, or passed on to, the Monitoring Officer then within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Monitoring Officer will write to the member of staff:-

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how the Authority proposes to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- informing whether any initial enquiries have been made supplying them with information on support available from the Listening Officer; and
- telling them whether further investigations will take place.

We will aim to keep individuals informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us providing specific details of the investigation or any action taken as a result.

The investigator may make recommendations for changes to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. That officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (confidentially) and will report as necessary to the Board.

The Board has overall responsibility for, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.

HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally. While we cannot guarantee the outcome an individual is seeking, we will try to deal with all concerns fairly and in an appropriate way. However, if the employee is not satisfied with action taken, they should raise it externally, using the contacts below.

Staff are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are set out below.

INTERNAL CONTACT LIST

Advice or guidance about how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from any of the people named below.

Chief Executive	Tel: 01434 611514
Monitoring Officer	Tel: 01434 611527
Internal Audit	Newcastle City Council 0191 211 6511

EXTERNAL CONTACT LIST

If you have used the appropriate internal procedures and are not satisfied with any action taken in relation to your concerns and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside The National Park Authority, further possible contact points are given below.

Protect:	Helpline: 020 3117 2520 Website: www.pcaaw.co.uk (Contact form on website)
Citizens Advice Bureaux:	www.citizensadvice.org.uk
External auditor:	Mazars 0191 3836300
Northumbria Police:	www.northumbria.police.uk/
<u>Professional Bodies</u>	
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy	www.cipfa.org.uk

Royal Town Planning Institute

www.rtpi.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Personnel
and Development

www.cipd.org.uk

Regulatory Organisations

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk

Trade Union

www.unison.org.uk