

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Ayrshire Housing is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. As employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong, Ayrshire Housing expects those who have serious concerns about any aspect of Ayrshire Housing's work to come forward and speak up without fear of reprisal. Thus, Ayrshire Housing recognises that it is an important aspect of accountability and transparency to provide a mechanism to ensure that no employee, board member or stakeholder of Ayrshire Housing feels at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, 1998, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. These concerns must be made in the 'public interest' as per the Enterprise and Regulatory Act 2013, in addition if a disclosure is not made in 'good faith' this will still be considered by an employment tribunal but compensation can be reduced by up to 25% in such circumstances.

Employers may also be held vicariously liable for workers who victimise colleagues for making a disclosure. Ayrshire Housing will take all reasonable steps to protect workers from being victimised.

All employees, Board and Stakeholders working for or acting on behalf of Ayrshire Housing are covered by this policy. The policy also applies to suppliers and those providing services under a contract within Ayrshire Housing.

If you are a customer, member of the public or other service user, you should raise any concerns regarding "Whistleblowing" directly with the Director, or in writing marked "Private & Confidential".

Data Protection

The organisation will treat your personal data in line with our obligations under the current data protection regulations and our own privacy policy. Information regarding how your data will be used and the basis for processing your data is provided in Ayrshire Housing's General and Worker privacy notice.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy is designed to enable employees of Ayrshire Housing to raise concerns internally and at a high level to disclose information that the individual believes shows malpractice or impropriety. A number of policies and procedures are already in place, including grievance, dignity at work, and discipline. This policy is intended to cover concerns that are in the public interest and may (at least initially) be investigated separately, but may lead to the instigation of other procedures.

These concerns might include:

- financial malpractice, impropriety or fraud
- failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes

- dangers to health and safety or the environment
- criminal activity involving Ayrshire Housing, its staff, board member or stakeholders
- professional malpractice
- improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- failure to meet legal obligations
- abuse of power or status
- deliberate attempts to conceal any of the above

Legal Framework

- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
- Enterprise & Regulatory Act 2013

SAFEGUARDS

Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of Ayrshire Housing who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:

- in the public interest;
- to an appropriate person/body; and
- that the individual has reasonable belief in the validity of the concerns being raised

Ayrshire Housing will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect the individual when they raise a concern with the above provisions acknowledged.

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. However, at the appropriate time the individual may need to come forward as a witness.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages individuals to put their names to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but may never the less be considered at the discretion of Ayrshire Housing.

Untrue Allegations

If an individual makes an allegation that is not confirmed by the subsequent investigation, it is probable that no action will be taken against them. However, if the individual makes an allegation that is deemed to be made 'in bad faith' i.e frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against them and this may be up to and including dismissal. It should also be noted that under the provisions of the Enterprise and Regulatory Act 2013, if a disclosure is not made in 'good faith' this will still be considered by an employment tribunal but compensation can be reduced by up to 25% in such circumstances.

RAISING A CONCERN

- **First Step**

The individual should raise concerns with their immediate line manager. This information will be passed on as soon possible to the Director.

Any complaints will be investigated by the Director unless the complaint is against the Director or is in any way related to their actions. Where the complaint is related to the Director it should be addressed to the Chairperson who will in turn appoint an independent person to investigate the allegations.

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

The earlier the individual expresses their concern, the easier it is to action. The amount of contact between the persons considering the issues and the individual will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, Ayrshire Housing will seek further information from the individual concerned.

Where any meeting is arranged, the individual can be accompanied by a trade union representative and also have the meeting off-site if they so wish.

- **Process**

On receipt of a disclosure the appropriate person will launch an investigation.

Depending on the circumstances surrounding the investigation appropriate action will be taken in accordance with Ayrshire Housing's existing policies and procedures.

- **Timescales**

Once the investigator has completed the investigation it will be given to the individual who instructed the investigation. They will then write to the person who raised the concern as soon as possible and:

- Acknowledge that the concern has been received;
- indicate how the matter will be dealt with;
- give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- supply the individual with information on staff support mechanisms; and tell the individual whether further investigations will take place and if not, explain why.

OUTCOME OF INVESTIGATION

Once the investigation has been completed and the report is received by the Chairperson a decision on what action to take will be considered. If there are reasonable grounds to substantiate the complaint, an appropriate procedure will be invoked.

This may also include referral to an external body or regulator.

Where an individual feels that their concern has not been dealt with appropriately they can appeal the decision internally to the Chair of the Audit Committee. If, after appealing internally the individual is still not satisfied with the outcome, they can raise the issue with the appropriate external body as outlined in Appendix 1.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PRESCRIBED PERSONS

The Scottish Housing Regulator, Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Street, GLASGOW, G4 0HF
Telephone 0141 242 5642

South Ayrshire Council, **Environmental Health**, Burns House, Burns Statue Square, AYR, KA7 1UT
Telephone 0300 123 0900

Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 1st Floor, Mercantile Chambers, 53 Bothwell Street, GLASGOW, G2 6TS

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

ACAS

Helpline: 08457474747

Public Concern at Work

Tel (general): 0207 404 6609

Unite

145/165 West Regent Street
Glasgow G2 4RZ
Tel: 0141 404 5424 or 0845 604 4384