Selsey Community Forum
Whistleblowing Policy

Introduction

Selsey Community Forum is committed to conducting its activities lawfully, ethically and with integrity. Employees and workers are encouraged to speak up where they reasonably believe that serious wrongdoing has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur. The purpose of this Policy is to explain:

- what whistleblowing is;
- what types of concern may qualify for protection;
- how concerns can be raised;
- how Selsey Community Forum will respond; and
- the protection available to individuals who make protected disclosures.

Selsey Community Forum will not tolerate retaliation, victimisation or other unlawful detriment against a person because they have raised a protected disclosure. This Policy should be read alongside Selsey Community Forum's Grievance, Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment, Disciplinary, Safeguarding, Data Protection and other relevant policies and procedures.

Scope

This Policy applies to employees and workers of Selsey Community Forum. It may also be used, where appropriate, by volunteers, Trustees, contractors, consultants, agency workers or others who become aware of serious wrongdoing connected with Selsey Community Forum.

The legal protections available under whistleblowing legislation depend on an individual's employment status and the circumstances of the disclosure. The fact that this Policy may be used by a volunteer, Trustee or other individual does not mean that they automatically have the same statutory whistleblowing rights as an employee or worker.

What is Whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing where the person making the disclosure reasonably believes that:

- the concern falls within one of the categories recognised by law; and
- the disclosure is made in the public interest.

Whistleblowing is generally concerned with wrongdoing that affects other people, the organisation or the wider public rather than a purely personal employment concern. A disclosure may relate to wrongdoing that:

- has already happened;
- is currently happening;
- is likely to happen in the future; or
- has been deliberately concealed.

Ultimately, whether a disclosure qualifies for statutory protection is a matter of law and may only be determined by an employment tribunal.

Qualifying Disclosures

A qualifying disclosure may relate to a reasonable belief that one or more of the following has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur:

- a criminal offence;

- a breach of a legal obligation;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- danger to the health or safety of any individual;
- damage to the environment;
- sexual harassment; or
- deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above.

Examples may include:

- fraud, theft, bribery or corruption;
- serious financial irregularity;
- unsafe working practices;
- unlawful discrimination or sexual harassment;
- serious safeguarding concerns;
- environmental damage;
- deliberate breaches of regulatory requirements; or
- deliberate attempts to conceal serious wrongdoing.

This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Public Interest

For whistleblowing protection to apply, the person making the disclosure must reasonably believe that the disclosure is in the public interest. This generally means the concern affects or could affect others, such as colleagues, customers, service users, the organisation, regulators or the wider public. A concern that relates solely to an individual's own employment situation will not normally amount to whistleblowing unless it also raises a wider public-interest issue.

Whistleblowing and Personal Grievances

Whistleblowing is different from raising a personal grievance. Concerns about matters such as:

- an individual's own terms and conditions;
- interpersonal disagreements;
- workload;
- personal treatment;
- management decisions affecting only the individual; or
- other personal employment concerns

will normally be dealt with under Selsey Community Forum's Grievance Policy or another appropriate procedure. However, a grievance may also contain a protected disclosure where it raises a relevant public-interest concern. Employees do not need to identify the correct policy themselves. Where a concern appears to fall under another procedure, Selsey Community Forum will explain how it will be handled.

Raising a Concern Internally

Selsey Community Forum encourages individuals to raise whistleblowing concerns internally where they feel able to do so. A concern may normally be raised with:

- the employee’s manager or Project Lead;
- another appropriate manager;
- the Chair of Trustees;
- another Trustee; or
- another appropriate person nominated by Selsey Community Forum.

Where the concern relates to the individual’s manager or Project Lead, or the individual does not reasonably feel able to raise the concern with them, the concern may be raised with the Chair, another Trustee or another appropriate nominated person. A concern may be raised verbally or in writing. Where practicable, a written disclosure should include:

- the nature of the concern;
- relevant background;
- approximate dates;
- individuals or areas involved;
- whether the matter has previously been raised; and
- any relevant information already available to the person making the disclosure.

An individual is not expected to investigate the matter personally or obtain proof before raising a concern.

Anonymous Disclosures

Selsey Community Forum will consider anonymous disclosures where sufficient information is available to do so. However, anonymity may make it more difficult to:

- clarify the concern;
- investigate effectively;
- provide feedback; or
- assess whether statutory whistleblowing protection applies.

Employees are therefore encouraged to identify themselves where they feel able to do so. Where a person asks for their identity to be kept confidential, Selsey Community Forum will take reasonable steps to respect that request, subject to the requirements of a fair investigation and any legal or regulatory obligations.

How Selsey Community Forum Will Respond

A whistleblowing concern will be taken seriously and considered as soon as reasonably practicable. The initial response may include:

- acknowledging the concern;
- obtaining further information;
- considering whether immediate protective action is required;
- deciding whether an investigation is necessary;
- referring the matter to an appropriate internal or external specialist;
- considering whether another procedure is more appropriate; or
- determining whether a regulator or other authority should be notified.

The nature of the response will depend on the seriousness, complexity and circumstances of the concern.

Investigation

Where investigation is appropriate, Selsey Community Forum will appoint a suitable person to consider the matter. Depending on the circumstances, the investigator may be an appropriate manager, Trustee, external HR adviser or other suitably independent person. Where reasonably practicable, the investigator should be sufficiently independent from the matters raised. An investigation may include:

- meeting with the person who raised the concern;
- interviewing relevant individuals;
- reviewing documents, records, systems or other evidence;
- obtaining professional or technical advice; and
- considering whether external reporting is required.

Investigations will be conducted fairly and without unreasonable delay. The person who raised the concern may be asked to provide further information or clarification.

Feedback and Outcome

Selsey Community Forum will seek to keep the person who raised the concern appropriately informed about the progress of the matter. Where reasonably practicable, they will be informed when consideration of the concern has concluded. However, Selsey Community Forum may not be able to provide detailed information about:

- disciplinary action involving another employee;
- confidential personnel matters;
- commercially sensitive information;
- regulatory or legal proceedings;
- safeguarding matters; or
- other information that Selsey Community Forum is not legally entitled to disclose.

The purpose of feedback is to provide reasonable reassurance that the concern has been considered, not to disclose confidential information about other individuals.

Protection from Detriment

Employees and workers who make a protected disclosure are protected by law from being subjected to unlawful detriment because they made that disclosure. Examples of detriment may include:

- bullying or harassment;
- threats or intimidation;
- exclusion;
- unjustified reduction in hours or duties;
- denial of training or development opportunities without proper reason;
- unfair treatment in promotion or progression; or
- other adverse treatment because the individual raised a protected concern.

Employees or workers who believe they have experienced retaliation or detriment should raise this as soon as reasonably practicable with an appropriate manager, the Chair, another Trustee or through Selsey Community Forum's Grievance Policy where appropriate. Retaliation against a whistleblower may itself result in disciplinary action.

Dismissal and Whistleblowing

An employee must not be dismissed because they have made a protected disclosure. Dismissal for making a protected disclosure may amount to automatically unfair dismissal. Workers who are not employees may also have legal protection against unlawful detriment.

Genuine Concerns and Mistaken Beliefs

An individual does not need to prove that wrongdoing has actually occurred in order to raise a whistleblowing concern. A concern will not be treated as misconduct merely because:

- it is not substantiated;
- the individual is mistaken; or
- the investigation does not confirm wrongdoing.

What matters is whether the individual reasonably believed the information disclosed showed relevant wrongdoing and met the applicable legal requirements.

Deliberately False or Malicious Allegations

Selsey Community Forum distinguishes between a genuine concern that turns out to be mistaken and a deliberately false allegation. Where there is clear evidence that an individual knowingly fabricated information or made a deliberately false allegation in bad faith, the matter may be considered under Selsey Community Forum's Disciplinary Policy. Where the concern involves a volunteer or Trustee rather than an employee, the matter will be addressed under the appropriate volunteer or governance arrangements. A disclosure will not be treated as malicious simply because it is not upheld.

Confidentiality

Whistleblowing concerns will be handled sensitively and with appropriate regard to confidentiality. Information will only be shared with individuals who have a legitimate need to know for the purposes of:

- considering or investigating the concern;
- providing support;
- obtaining professional advice;
- complying with legal or regulatory obligations; or
- taking appropriate corrective or preventative action.

Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Nothing in this Policy prevents an individual from obtaining independent legal advice, contacting a trade union representative, seeking support from Protect or making a lawful disclosure to an appropriate external body.

External Disclosures

Whistleblowing law allows disclosures to be made outside the organisation in certain circumstances. An individual may make a disclosure to a relevant prescribed person or body where the statutory requirements are met. The appropriate prescribed person depends on the subject matter of the concern. Examples may include regulators or authorities dealing with:

- health and safety;
- financial services;
- fraud;

- charities;
- environmental matters;
- pensions;
- data protection;
- healthcare or social care; or
- other regulated areas.

The Government maintains an up-to-date list of prescribed persons and bodies. Employees considering an external disclosure are encouraged to ensure that they contact the correct prescribed body for the subject matter concerned. A person may also make a protected disclosure to a legal adviser in the course of obtaining legal advice. Different and generally stricter statutory requirements apply to wider disclosures, such as disclosures to the media or another person who is not a prescribed body. Individuals considering such a disclosure are encouraged to seek independent legal advice or advice from Protect.

Reporting to Regulators or Other Authorities

Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent an individual from making a lawful report to:

- a prescribed regulator;
- the police;
- a safeguarding authority;
- a professional regulator;
- another appropriate authority; or
- a legal adviser.

Where Selsey Community Forum itself becomes aware of information that creates a legal or regulatory reporting obligation, it may make an appropriate external notification.

Criminal Conduct and Obtaining Evidence

Individuals are not expected to carry out their own investigation into suspected wrongdoing. Employees should not:

- unlawfully access records;
- hack systems or accounts;
- steal documents;
- secretly obtain information in circumstances that may constitute a criminal offence; or
- otherwise break the law in an attempt to gather evidence.

Employees should instead disclose the information already available to them and allow the concern to be properly investigated.

Support

Selsey Community Forum recognises that raising a whistleblowing concern can be difficult. Depending on the circumstances and resources available, support may include:

- discussions with an appropriate manager, Trustee or nominated person;
- reasonable temporary working arrangements where appropriate;
- signposting to independent advice or external support; or
- other appropriate support having regard to the circumstances.

Employees may also seek independent advice from ACAS, their trade union, a legal adviser or Protect, the UK's whistleblowing charity.

Responsibilities of Managers, Trustees and Others Receiving Concerns

Managers who receive a whistleblowing concern must:

- take the concern seriously;
- avoid dismissing or minimising the issue;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- avoid retaliation or inappropriate treatment;
- escalate the concern to the appropriate person where necessary;
- avoid attempting to investigate matters beyond their authority or competence; and
- seek appropriate advice where required.

Managers should not promise complete confidentiality or a particular outcome before the concern has been properly considered.

Record Keeping and Data Protection

Selsey Community Forum may maintain appropriate records of whistleblowing concerns and how they have been handled. Records may include:

- the nature of the disclosure;
- relevant correspondence;
- investigation records;
- decisions and outcomes;
- external referrals; and
- action taken.

Whistleblowing information will be processed in accordance with applicable data protection legislation, Selsey Community Forum's Data Protection Policy, applicable privacy information and retention arrangements. Access to records will be restricted to individuals who have a legitimate need to know.

Training and Awareness

Selsey Community Forum will seek to ensure that employees and, where appropriate, volunteers and Trustees understand:

- what whistleblowing is;
- how concerns can be raised;
- the difference between whistleblowing and a personal grievance;
- the protection available to whistleblowers; and
- where further advice can be obtained.

Managers, Trustees or others who may receive whistleblowing disclosures should receive appropriate guidance or training relevant to their responsibilities.

Review

This Policy will be reviewed at least annually by Selsey Community Forum and sooner where appropriate, including following relevant changes in legislation, government or ACAS guidance, regulatory requirements, organisational arrangements or whistleblowing practice.

Version Control

Version Number	Date of Update	Amendments
1.0	October 2025	Policy reviewed
2.0	October 2026	Reviewed and updated in line with current whistleblowing legislation and 2026 ACAS and government guidance