

## Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance

This policy applies to staff and volunteers alike, and should be read in conjunction with Circles South East Safeguarding policy and Disciplinary and Grievance procedures. Our Whistleblowing process flow chart can also be consulted. The whistleblowing process is outlined to Service Users through Circles South East privacy notices, issued to potential Service Users at the point of referral. This said, whistleblowing, or public interest disclosure, is a distinct process in its own right. This policy is underscored by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Whistleblowing can occur when a worker (paid or unpaid) reports a concern about the improper actions or omissions of their colleagues or employer which may cause harm to others or to the organisation as a whole. The policy is intended to deal with serious or sensitive concerns about wrongdoings and/or malpractice such as the following:

- Criminal offences
- Failures to comply with legal obligations
- Failures in the protection of children or vulnerable adults
- Miscarriages of justice
- Health and Safety concerns
- Theft and/or misuse of charity's finance
- Behaviour likely to cause reputational damage to the organisation
- Individual or organisational concealment/cover up of the above

The essential difference between whistleblowing and personal/professional grievance is that the whistle-blower is reporting the abuse of others, rather than themselves. In other words the whistle-blower should consider themselves as a witness to the incident(s) rather than a complainant.

While the protection of whistleblowers and whistleblowing is enshrined in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, it is recognised that potential whistle-blowers may have concerns about bearing witness to malpractice. However Circles South East encourages trust and openness in general, and so encourages whistle-blowing, even in difficult circumstances.

### To this end Circles South East will:

1. Provide the organisational structure to encourage whistleblowing. This includes specific email address ([whistleblow@circlessoutheast.org.uk](mailto:whistleblow@circlessoutheast.org.uk)), designated whistleblowing officer (Daisy Collinge), and registration with The Charity Commission, who operate a whistleblowing point of contact for cases of serious malfeasance.
2. Take the issue(s) raised seriously
3. Where possible and applicable ensure the anonymity of the whistle-blower. **NB if the issue involves illegality and/or threat or risk of harm to another person(s) Circles South East have a duty to inform Police and/or other statutory agencies. This may compromise anonymity should witness statements be required. It is therefore**

**important to seek advice if the whistle-blower has any doubts in this regard. Free advice can be obtained via “Protect” on 0203 117 2520**

4. If the resolution of any issue relies on the identification of the whistle-blower, this will be done in negotiation, and we will take any attempted reprisals against potential whistle-blowers very seriously indeed.
5. Investigate and attempt to resolve any issue to the best of their ability, and in a timely fashion (see below)

Circles South East’s Whistleblowing Officer is:

**Daisy Collinge – 07387 140718**

[Daisy.Collinge@circlessoutheast.org.uk](mailto:Daisy.Collinge@circlessoutheast.org.uk)

Concerns can also be logged on; [Whistleblow@circlessoutheast.org.uk](mailto:Whistleblow@circlessoutheast.org.uk) which is currently accessed by Daisy Collinge and Dom Williams, Senior Manager. Chair of Trustees, Nora Holford, has overall responsibility for addressing Whistleblowing concerns.

Should the whistle-blower wish to report anonymously, they can contact The Charity Commission at [charitycommission.gov.uk](http://charitycommission.gov.uk) and click on “Reporting a Serious Incident at your Charity” page then follow instructions.

### **Reporting Concerns:**

For a quick view of the process please refer to the accompanying flow chart.

In summary, concerns should be reported as soon as possible. Reporting options available are:

- To your line manager or any member of Circles South East staff. Any staff member is approachable and trained to receive this information.
- To the Whistleblowing Officer
- To the independent organisation the Charity Commission.

Prior to reporting a whistle-blower may wish to seek advice. Free and independent advice can be obtained from a Helpline operated by an organisation called Protect who can be contacted on **0203 117 2520**. The type of questions they are likely to ask are:

What have you witnessed?  
What is the risk involved?  
Why do you want to blow the whistle now?  
Who do you want to tell?

**If receiving whistleblowing information a member of staff will then:**

- Record the issue/incident. The Incident Reporting Form is a working document which records reported concerns, actions taken by whom, any follow up actions (again by whom) and how any issue/concerns have been resolved. A rationale for the resolution will also be recorded.
- In any case where there is a safeguarding or legal issue then relevant statutory agencies will be made aware of concerns (e.g. Police, Probation and/or Social Services)
- In any case where concerns involve partnership agencies, or a service user who is involved with other agencies then those agencies will be informed at an appropriate level. These notifications should be reported on the Incident Reporting Form.
- Report the issue to the Chief Executive Officer and Board of Trustees where any issue involves Safeguarding, grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, or any issue involving potential reputational damage to the Charity. These notifications should be recorded on the Incident Reporting Form. Where deemed appropriate the CEO will oversee the investigation and outcomes with Board oversight.
- From the initial reporting the incident(s) will be treated in the same way as a grievance complaint and the ensuing investigation will be conducted within the same parameters as the Circles South East Grievance Procedure, and completed within 28 days.
- The whistle-blower will receive acknowledgement of their complaint/issue raised within 1 working day. There will be a formal response from either the Whistleblowing Officer or where appropriate the Chief Executive with 7 working days of the original report. The investigation will be completed within 28 days and a response and findings will be fed back to the whistle-blower.
- All records relating to the complaint/issue reported (together with the identity of the whistle-blower if known) will be stored securely with access only granted to the Whistleblowing Officer, Chair and Vice Chair of Trustees

#### **The Whistleblowing Officer – Daisy Collinge:**

- Initially receives any whistleblowing concerns raised, conducts any ensuing investigation and response.
- Escalates concerns in conjunction with Safeguarding Lead, Trustee Lead with knowledge of CEO so that oversight of investigation and outcomes may be transferred appropriately, and third party agencies informed.
- Ensures appropriate support network is in place for whistleblowing witness.
- Ensures that policy is enacted.
- Ensures that appropriate independent advice and support are in place and that these are advertised signposted and available to all service users, staff and volunteers.
- Where a whistle-blower elects to engage with an independent organisation, endorses this and ensures Circles SE engagement with any processes (eg mediation/disciplinary procedures) recommended by that organisation.

- Is responsible for contacting relevant authorities (eg Police) where necessary. Where there is disagreement about response thresholds not being reached enacting Circles SE risk escalation procedure (in conjunction with CEO and Safeguarding lead) and informing relevant authority's management team.
- Ensures that confidentiality is maintained of all whistleblowing records and follow up information.

## WHISTLEBLOWING PROCESS FLOWCHART FOR COMPLAINANT/STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

