

Whistleblowing Policy

Policy Statement & Purpose

Whistleblowing is the raising of a concern, either within the workplace or externally, about a danger, risk, malpractice or wrongdoing which affects others and is in the public interest.

Bromford is committed to ensuring that all its activities are conducted ethically, honestly and to the highest standards of openness, transparency and accountability.

It also is committed to providing excellent services and maintaining the highest standards of conduct and governance so we can deliver the Bromford Strategy. We aim to create a culture and ways of working to uphold the highest standards of governance and conduct but we know that sometimes malpractice and wrongdoing may occur.

Bromford recognises that its colleagues are often in the best position to know when the interests of the public are being put at risk or can act as an early warning system on matters of health and safety or to help uncover fraud and mismanagement in their workplace.

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure colleagues feel encouraged and confident to raise, at an early stage, any legitimate concerns, or suspicions they may have concerning fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by colleagues, Directors or Board Members. By knowing about these concerns at an early stage we stand a good chance of being able to safeguard the interests of our colleagues and Bromford, and stop wrongdoing or malpractice from happening.

Scope

This Policy applies to all colleagues who should be alert to instances of malpractice whether they are witness to it or if it is raised with them as a matter of concern.

Other individuals performing functions in relation to Bromford Housing Group, such as agency workers and contractors, are encouraged to use it, however the protection under the Act does not extend to them

Whistleblowing matters which are raised by an individual external to Bromford will be considered on an individual basis and be investigated appropriately.

The Whistleblowing Policy provides a mechanism to raise issues of concern which fall outside our other policies.

Disclosures under this Policy

Whistleblowing should not be used for personal gain, or to raise unfounded allegations or bully, harass or victimise a colleague. Maliciously making a false allegation could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Issues that may be of concern may also be covered by one of our other Group Policies and you should consider which mechanism is most appropriate. Whistleblowing does not apply to personal grievances or employment issues. If your concern relates to these areas, you should check the Disciplinary, Grievance or Bullying and Harassment Policies or Procedures to see if one of these provides a way for your concern to be addressed.

You can make a disclosure under this Policy if you have genuine concerns relating to any of the following areas:

- actual or potential criminal offences, for example, theft, fraud, corruption or malpractice;
- failure to comply with a legal and regulatory obligations, for example, unsafe working conditions, health & safety or the care and protection of minors or vulnerable people;
- abuse or neglect of vulnerable people and failure to safeguard customers;
- failure to deliver proper standards of service;
- undisclosed personal conflicts of interest;
- all types of discrimination or victimisation in the workplace;
- risk or actual damage to the environment;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- circumstances that may give rise to enhanced risk of slavery or human trafficking; or
- concealment of any of the above.

The Policy Approach

It is important that concerns about fraud, bribery, corruption or any other issue can be reported and that those concerns are dealt with.

Colleagues are encouraged to report concerns as soon as possible. Colleagues should refer to the Whistleblowing Procedure to establish where the concern should be raised.

All legitimate concerns will be investigated. We will:

- pursue fraud and serious abuse through our disciplinary procedures and/or the courts;
- report all criminal offences to the Police;
- report inappropriate behaviour in line with our Safeguarding Policy.

Disclosures made under this Policy will be treated, as far as possible, in a confidential and sensitive manner. If confidentiality is not reasonably practicable, for instance, because of the nature of the information or the level of investigation required, the reasons will be explained.

No formal disciplinary action will be taken against a colleague if they have raised a concern, even if this is not confirmed by any subsequent investigation, as long as the colleague had a reasonable belief that serious malpractice has taken place, or is currently taking place or is likely to take place.

To encourage colleagues to make disclosures in confidence and without fear of retribution, Bromford will take all reasonable steps to try and ensure that individuals

that make disclosures are not victimised, bullied, or otherwise disadvantaged as a result of the disclosure.

Victimising, bullying or other action that is intended to deter a colleague from making a disclosure, or by way of revenge following a disclosure, will be regarded as disciplinary matter.

Any instruction to cover up a wrongdoing is also a disciplinary matter and any colleague instructed to do so, irrespective of who by, should tell someone straight away.

Colleagues should not remain silent if told not to pursue an issue.

The Whistleblowing Procedure sets out how a concern should be raised and how it will be dealt with. This is alongside a new external confidential Whistleblowing hotline set up for colleagues to raise matters of concern where they don't feel able to raise this internally.

In addition, attached as Annex A to the Procedure is a Whistleblowing process flow chart.

Concerns can also be raised anonymously but colleagues should be aware that anonymous allegations are much less powerful and are more difficult to act upon. Colleagues are therefore encouraged to give their name, otherwise we are unlikely to be able to offer protection or provide feedback.

In considering anonymous allegations, the following factors will be taken into account at our discretion:

- The seriousness of the matter raised
- The credibility of the allegation made
- The likelihood of obtaining information from other sources which can confirm the allegation

Our Whistleblowing Procedure includes the following specific safeguards for colleagues:

- We will support and protect colleagues who raise a concern about harassment/victimisation (including informal pressures). We will investigate any claims of harassment/victimisation and, depending on the outcome, may take disciplinary action against the perpetrator.
- All reported wrong-doings will be treated in absolute confidence, with every effort made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to become an identified witness, particularly if it has not been possible to substantiate the allegations by other means. The implications of this and the setting up of appropriate support or protection arrangements will be carefully and sensitively discussed with you.
- You and leaders to whom allegations are disclosed, must ensure absolute confidentiality in all areas, including amongst customers and other colleagues.

Responsibilities

For queries about this Policy please contact the Governance, Risk and Assurance Team.

The Board has overall responsibility for this policy.

Leaders are responsible for engaging with their team to ensure that colleagues are aware of this Policy and the Whistleblowing Procedure and take appropriate action if a disclosure is made to them.

All colleagues are responsible for carrying out their work in line with this policy and reporting concerns of wrong doing in accordance with the procedure.

Risks

Failure to manage and mitigate financial crime, fraud bribery and corruption.

Reputational risk if issues of concern are not investigated and dealt with appropriately.

Reference Documents

- Grievance Procedure
 - Disciplinary Procedure
 - Bullying and Harassment Policy
 - Financial Regulations
 - Probity and Bribery Policy
 - Anti-Fraud Policy
 - Anti-Money Laundering Policy
 - Safeguarding Policy
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Whistleblowing Procedure
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Legislative Requirements

Bromford's policy is to comply with Whistleblowing legislation.

Whistleblowing is covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, as amended by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 (ERRA). The Act is designed to provide statutory protection for disclosures, protecting individuals against dismissal, employer reprisals short of dismissal and victimisation as a result of the disclosure.

Bromford is required to comply with the Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Standards, part of which is the Governance & Financial Viability Standard which the Board annually must formally state its compliance within its statutory accounts.

As part of meeting this standard and working towards the highest standards of governance, Bromford has adopted the UK Code of Governance 2018. This includes maintaining and being seen to maintain the highest ethical standards of probity and conduct and operating in an open and transparent manner having dialogue with and accountability to customers and other key stakeholders.

Assurance Framework

Policies, frameworks and training is in place to mitigate against fraud. Procedures exist to allow staff member to report any suspicions in an anonymous way.

All staff are required to read and understand this policy.

Annual whistleblowing update report provided to Board.

We will produce an annual compliance statement and have periodic reviews to confirm that we follow the policy principles.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if changes are made to organisational structure, responsibilities, assurance arrangements or due to changes in the external environment.

Document Details

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Approved By: Board of Bromford Housing Group Limited

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