

Whistleblowing Policy

Purpose of this Policy

This policy supports a culture of openness, safety and accountability. All staff, volunteers, contractors and agency workers have a duty to raise concerns where they believe practice, behaviour, or decisions may place people at risk of harm, breach regulations, or undermine the integrity of the service. Whistleblowing protects the rights, dignity and safety of the people we support.

Policy Statement

West Heaton is committed to ensuring that everyone can raise concerns without fear of reprisal. We encourage early reporting so issues can be addressed promptly and transparently. All concerns will be taken seriously, investigated appropriately, and handled in line with:

- The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) 1998
- The Employment Rights Act 2025 (April 2026 update)
- CQC Regulation 16 (Receiving and Acting on Complaints)
- CQC Regulation 13 (Safeguarding service users from abuse and improper treatment)

April 2026 Legal Update

From April 2026, disclosures relating to sexual harassment are formally recognised as protected disclosures. This means:

- Staff are legally protected when raising concerns about sexual harassment.
- Employers must ensure safe, confidential reporting routes.
- Any detriment, dismissal, or retaliation linked to such disclosures is unlawful.

This policy reflects these changes.

What Counts as Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing relates to concerns raised in the public interest, including:

- Unsafe care or neglect
- Poor practice or breaches of professional standards
- Financial misconduct or fraud
- Bullying, harassment or discriminatory behaviour
- Sexual harassment (explicitly protected from April 2026)
- Breaches of confidentiality or data protection
- Any action that may cause harm to service users, staff, or the organisation
- Attempts to conceal wrongdoing

If unsure whether something is whistleblowing or a personal grievance, speak with the Duty Manager for guidance.

Your Responsibilities

All staff have a professional and legal responsibility to raise concerns when:

- A person's safety or wellbeing may be at risk
- You witness or suspect wrongdoing
- You believe something is being covered up
- You feel unable to resolve the issue through normal communication

You will never be criticised for raising a concern in good faith.

How to Raise a Concern

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing, openly or anonymously.

Primary Reporting Route

- Duty Manager (on shift) - report concerns directly as soon as possible.

Alternative Reporting Routes

If you feel unable to speak with the Duty Manager, or you wish to remain anonymous, you may use:

- Anonymous phone message
- Anonymous written report (via post or in the wages box)
- Another Manager
- A Senior Leader
- The Registered Manager
- Local Authority Safeguarding Team
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) – 03000 616161
- Police (if criminal activity is suspected)

You may also seek confidential advice from Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work).

Anonymous Reporting

Anonymous concerns will always be reviewed. While anonymity may limit our ability to investigate fully, we will still take all reasonable steps to understand and act on the information provided.

How We Respond

Once a concern is raised:

1. It will be acknowledged promptly (unless anonymous).
2. A Risk & Response will be opened and an investigation will be carried out.
3. Safeguarding procedures will be followed where relevant.
4. Outcomes and actions will be recorded and monitored.
5. Feedback will be provided to the whistleblower where possible.

All investigations will be handled sensitively and confidentially.

Protection from Retaliation

West Heaton strictly prohibits victimisation, retaliation or disadvantage against anyone who raises a concern in good faith.

April 2026 Update – Sexual Harassment

Retaliation against anyone raising concerns about sexual harassment is unlawful. Any attempt to intimidate or penalise a whistleblower will result in disciplinary action.

Malicious or False Allegations

Concerns raised in good faith are always protected, even if they turn out to be unfounded. Deliberately false or malicious allegations may result in disciplinary action.

Support for Staff

Staff may access:

- Management support
- HR guidance
- External advice services

No one will be asked to work in an unsafe environment or remain silent about poor practice.

Review

This policy will be reviewed following any significant incident or change that develops.