

HousingExecutive

Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing Policy

	Housing Executive
Title	Raising Concerns - Whistleblowing Policy
Aim	To outline the Housing Executive's policy for Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing, and the procedure for dealing with these concerns.
Last reviewed	August 2022
Last updated	May 2023
Staff affected	All
Author(s)	Head of Corporate Investigation and Security
Approved by	Housing Executive Board
Equality screened	May 2023
Date of next review	May 2026

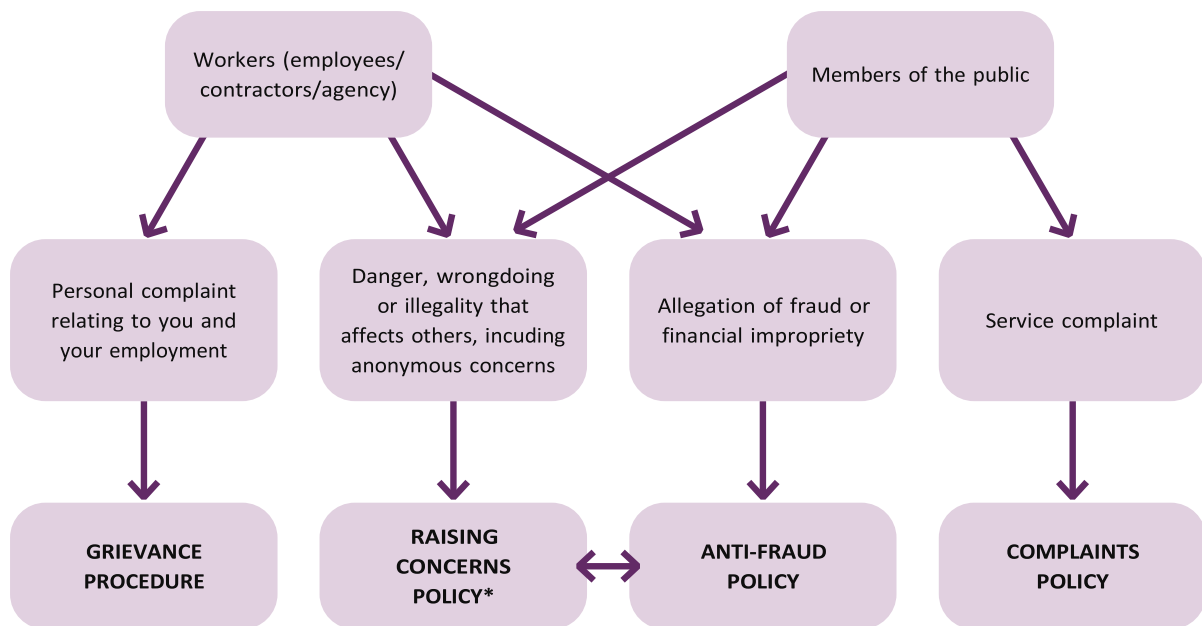
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Policy applies to all individuals within the Housing Executive, including employees, agency workers or any other individual that provides a service to the Housing Executive. It also applies to members of the public who wish to raise a concern. The Housing Executive is committed to an open and ethical culture and the Board and Senior Management seek to lead by ensuring that the tone of the organisation is set by those at the highest level. The Housing Executive has a zero tolerance policy towards wrongdoing within the organisation
- 1.2 This policy demonstrates unambiguously the organisation's commitment from Board level down, to an ethical culture and behaviours which reflect at all times the Seven Principles of Public Life (Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership).
- 1.2 This Policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question business decisions or to raise a personal grievance about terms of employment, pay or unfair treatment. Raising concerns or whistleblowing is different from making a complaint. Within NIHE a complaint is defined as: -
- “an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the NIHE or about an action, delay or lack of action which requires it to be reviewed by the appropriate management unit”
- NIHE has an established procedure for dealing with complaints which is entirely separate to raising concerns or whistleblowing.
- 1.3 An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable all individuals to voice concerns internally in a responsible and effective manner when they discover information which they believe shows serious malpractice, risk, abuse or wrongdoing. This policy is intended to guide individuals through the process for raising concerns within or in relation to the organisation.
- 1.4 There can be confusion around the terms 'raising a concern' and 'whistleblowing'. Some wrongly believe that they are separate steps involving an 'escalation', i.e. someone 'raises a concern' then, if they feel they have not been heard, they 'blow the whistle' within their organisation or to an outside body. This is a misunderstanding. Whistleblowing and raising a concern are the same thing, providing a valuable mechanism by which wrongdoing, risk or malpractice can be identified and investigated. This policy provides guidance to individuals within the organisation including signposting to arrangements for raising concerns by members of the public and what steps the organisation will take in order to effectively investigate them. The organisation welcomes raising of concerns as an opportunity to learn and to put things right.



(NIAO 2022)

2.0 POLICY OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 All of us at one time or another may have concerns about what is happening at work. However, when it is about unlawful conduct, a possible fraud or a danger to the public or the environment, other serious malpractice, or matters in the public interest, it can be difficult to know what to do.
- 2.2 Individuals may be worried about raising such a concern and may think it best to keep it to themselves, perhaps feeling it potentially has nothing to do with the Housing Executive or that it is only a suspicion. You may feel that raising the matter would be disloyal to colleagues, managers or to the Housing Executive. You may decide to say something but find that you have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next.
- 2.3 The purpose of this Policy is to reassure that it is safe and acceptable to speak up. The Policy also enables you to raise your concern at an early stage and in the appropriate way. Rather than wait for proof, the organisation would prefer you to raise the matter when it is still a concern. Staff, other workers and members of the public are encouraged to raise concerns under the policy when they believe them to be in the public interest and can be reassured that these concerns will be taken seriously by the organisation.
- 2.4 If something is troubling you which you think the organisation should know about or investigate, please raise it through the signposted routes, as detailed in Appendix 1. These arrangements are to allow you to raise a concern where the interests of others or the Housing Executive are at risk.

- 2.5 If you wish to make a complaint about your terms of employment, pay or unfair treatment, please use the Housing Executive's Grievance Procedures. Please note the difference between raising a concern or whistleblowing and a grievance:
- A concern or whistleblowing is about a risk, malpractice or wrongdoing that **affects others**. It could be something which adversely affects other workers, the Housing Executive itself and/or the public. See section 4.1 for a full definition under the legislation
 - A grievance is a personal complaint about someone's own employment situation.
- 2.6 If your concern is about fraud, tenancy fraud or other financial irregularity, you may also wish to refer to the Housing Executive's [Counter Fraud and Related Offences Procedural Response Plan](#) which can be found on Gateway.
- 2.7 This Policy provides an appropriate framework to ensure that there is adequate employment protection for individuals who raise an issue of concern at work and/or make disclosures which are in the public interest. Such issues of concern may fall within the scope of current 'Whistleblowing' legislation or may relate to other concerns in regard to improper conduct (referred to in this Policy as 'relevant matters').

3.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 The Board – will set the tone for the organisation in a top-down approach of zero tolerance to wrongdoing; promoting an ethical culture and behaviours at all times which reflect the seven principles of public life (Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership) which apply to all those employed by or appointed to office in the Public Sector. The Board will receive assurance that the policy and procedures in respect of Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing are operating effectively. The Board will oversee the promotion of an ethical culture and remind the organisation of the need of periodic refreshing of knowledge on the policy and procedure to staff at all levels.
- 3.2 Accounting Officer – will ensure that the Policy is in line with up-to-date Best Practice, that there is assurance available to the Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee that the Policy is operating effectively, that appropriate training has been carried out within the organisation, that staff awareness is maintained and that concerns / Personal Data are appropriately managed.

- 3.3 The Executive Team – similarly to the Board will promote a top-down ethical approach to good governance, zero tolerance to wrongdoing, promoting a culture reflecting the seven principles of public life. The ET will be provided with regular assurance that the policy is operating effectively and that the reporting requirements agreed between the Housing Executive and DFC are being adhered to. The team will ensure that all concerns raised in any direct correspondence with any of the Directors are properly dealt with by referring them to the Head of CISU or through the internal routes detailed below.
- 3.4 Head of Corporate Investigation and Security – day to day management of the policy is the responsibility of the Head of CISU. They are also responsible for:
- Developing and maintaining a Raising Concerns Policy;
 - Establishing and maintaining well-publicised, appropriate mechanisms for employees and members of the public to report their concerns;
 - Providing advice and support to employees;
 - Registering new concerns, informing DFC through the established procedures for ALBs and maintaining a register of cases. Preliminary fact-finding in order to determine what investigation is necessary and to whom it should be referred further for investigation using suitably trained and experienced employees;
 - Reporting to the Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on all aspects of concerns raised under this Policy; and reporting on case progress and conclusion to DFC Head of Governance;
 - Ensuring that appropriate training and awareness of policies on Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing are communicated to all employees.
- 3.5 Line Managers – will promote a culture where concerns can be raised openly and dealt with in a manner that forms part of the day to day functioning of the team. If it is not appropriate to raise or deal with a concern in this manner then Line Managers are able to signpost staff to any of the four internal routes detailed below. If an individual raises a concern directly with a Line Manager that falls within Route One below, they will inform the Head of CISU as soon as possible. The role of Line Manager is critical in the initial receipt and assessment of a concern raised at work. These principles, detailed below, must be followed by line managers who receive a concern or whistleblowing allegation at work:
- have a positive and supportive attitude towards workers raising a concern;
 - record as much detail as possible about the concern being raised and agree this record with the staff member involved;
 - be aware of the process following the raising of a concern and explain this to the staff member;

- make sure the staff member knows what to expect, for example in relation to feedback on their concern;
- assure the staff member that their confidentiality will be protected as far as possible;
- make no promises and manage the expectations of the worker;
- make clear that your organisation will not tolerate harassment of anyone raising a genuine concern and ask the member of staff to let you know if this happens;
- refer the member of staff to available sources of support, for example Protect or their union; and
- pass the information as quickly as possible to the Head of Corporate Investigation and Security.

3.6 All Housing Executive Employees - employees must have, and be seen to have, the highest ethical and personal standards and be honest and objective in their work. Every employee is responsible for –

- Conducting themselves in accordance with the seven principles of public life;
- Applying established policy and procedure in all aspects of their work;
- Reporting concerns which are in the public interest; and
- Co-operating with any investigatory process.

4.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATION

4.1 Whistleblowing, when defined in legislation, is when a worker reports suspected, risk, malpractice or wrongdoing in the workplace that affects others. This is called 'making a disclosure in the public interest'. The Public Interest Disclosure (N. Ireland) Order 1998 provides protection if you make a 'qualifying disclosure'. A qualifying disclosure is a disclosure of information which you believe tends to show that one or more of the following matters is either happening now, took place in the past, or is likely to happen in the future:-

- (i) a criminal offence;
- (ii) a breach of legal obligation;
- (iii) a miscarriage of justice;
- (iv) a health and safety risk, either to the public or other employees;
- (v) damage to the environment; or,

(vi) deliberate covering up of information tending to show any of the above.

4.2 Under the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the term "worker" or "employee" refers to individuals who have an employment relationship with an organisation. The legislation defines a worker as:

- An individual who has entered into or works under a contract of employment, which can be written, oral, or implied. This typically includes individuals who have a formal employer-employee relationship.
- An individual who works under any other contract (express or implied) to personally execute any work or services. This includes individuals who are engaged as freelancers, contractors, or agency workers.

The definition of a worker or employee under the legislation is broad and encompasses a range of employment relationships. It is not limited to traditional full-time employees and includes temporary workers, part-time workers, casual workers, and self-employed individuals who work under a contract to provide services personally

Detailed guidance to the Public Interest (Northern Ireland) Disclosure Order can be found on the Department for the Economy website at the following address;

[Public Interest Disclosure guidance | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/public-interest-disclosure-guidance)

Further guidance on protected disclosures and their qualifying criteria can be found on the website of the whistleblowing charity, Protect.

[Protect - Speak up stop harm - Protect - Speak up stop harm \(protect-advice.org.uk\)](https://www.protect-advice.org.uk)

4.3 In addition to the protection afforded by the Public Interest Disclosure Order, this policy also provides protection if you make disclosures in regard to other relevant matters, indicated below:-

- (i) Any instance in which an individual believes that they are being required to act in a way which is illegal, improper or unethical.
- (ii) Any instance in which an individual believes they are being required to act in a way which may involve possible maladministration, fraud, or misuse of public funds.
- (iii) Any instance in which an individual believes that they are being required to act in a way which is otherwise inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct. Any case of irregular or improper behaviour within

the Housing Executive, regardless of whether or not the relevant individual has been personally involved.

- (iv) Any instance in which the individual has been required to act in a way which, for that individual, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

4.4 Other relevant legislation that relates to raising concerns is summarised below:

- Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996: This legislation outlines the employment rights and protections for workers in Northern Ireland. It covers areas such as unfair dismissal, redundancy, and protection against detrimental treatment for making protected disclosures.
- Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999 (amended 2022): This order designates certain public bodies and organisations as "prescribed persons" to receive protected disclosures from whistleblowers. These prescribed persons have the responsibility to handle and investigate such disclosures in accordance with the law.

4.5 The legislation below has its own separate policies and procedures for raising concerns that fall within the scope of the legislation. The relevant links are provided.

- Data Protection Act (DPA): The DPA regulates the processing of personal data by organisations. It sets out principles and rights concerning the collection, storage, use, and sharing of personal information, ensuring individuals' privacy is respected.

<http://gateway/Data-Protection/Documents/Data Protection Policy.pdf>

- Equality legislation: The equality legislation framework in Northern Ireland and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides protection from discrimination and harassment and promotes equality for many groups on the basis of protected characteristics including sex, including pregnancy and maternity;

- gender reassignment;
- sexual orientation;
- marital status including civil partnership;
- religious belief;
- political opinion;
- race, including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins;
- disability;
- age;
- trade union members or non

Safeguarding concerns must be raised immediately with the NIHE Safeguarding Team – the Safeguarding policy and procedures are on Gateway and can be accessed on the following link:

<http://gateway/AllStaff/Equality/Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.pdf>

<http://gateway/AllStaff/Personnel/Handbook/Staff%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf#search=staff%20code%20of%20conduct>

- Health and Safety at Work Act is a key piece of legislation ensuring a safe and healthy working environment for employees. It places responsibilities on employers to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their employees and others affected by their work activities.

<http://gateway/Pages/Documents/Compliance%20Health%20and%20Safety/Compliance-Health-and-Safety.aspx>

- Human Rights Act (HRA): The HRA incorporates the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law. It protects individuals' rights to life, liberty, privacy, fair trial, freedom of expression, and freedom from discrimination.

5.0 OUR ASSURANCES TO YOU

5.1 Employment Protection

The Housing Executive is committed to making Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing arrangements work effectively. They are one of the most important sources of information to identify and address problems that disadvantage or endanger other people.

5.2 The legislative framework makes it unlawful for an employer to subject a worker to detriment on account of the fact that they have made a qualifying disclosure i.e. a disclosure which qualifies for protection under legislation (Protected Disclosures). Where detriment occurs as a result of a qualifying disclosure being made, the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 provides a right for a worker to bring a claim to an Employment Tribunal. In effect the legislation therefore provides a remedy as opposed to protection

5.3 Detriment includes actions or failure to act. Examples include dismissal, failure to promote, disciplinary sanction, unrequested reassignment or relocation, ostracism, victimisation, bullying, failure to provide a reference, but can mean any action or inaction which disadvantages the worker. Detrimental treatment can be caused by the actions / inaction of co-workers as well as the employer.

5.4 The Housing Executive will not tolerate victimisation or harassment of a staff member / worker due to the fact that they have raised a concern. Such

treatment would be likely to be classed as detriment in the case of Protected Disclosures.

5.5 If an individual who raises a concern is not a worker or employee as defined in the legislation then the legal protections do not apply. Even if an individual is a worker the disclosure may not meet all of the requirements of the legislation and may not be protected. Ultimately only a court (Tribunal) can determine this.

5.6 If you raise a genuine concern under these arrangements, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of detriment as a result. Provided you are acting in good faith, it does not matter if you are mistaken. The Housing Executive Acceptable Use of Technology Policy clearly sets out which actions are unlawful and in breach of the staff Code of Conduct in relation to the use of Housing Executive IT systems. There is a list of prohibited user actions contained within this policy and when raising concerns you **MUST** not knowingly breach this policy or put yourself at risk of committing an offence.

<http://gateway/sites/search/Pages/results.aspx?k=acceptable%20use%20of%20technology#:~:text=http%3A//gateway/AllStaff/Personnel/Handbook/Policy%20on%20Acceptable%20Use%20of%20Technology.pdf>

- You do not need firm evidence before raising a concern, only a reasonable suspicion that something may be wrong;
- You are a witness to potential wrongdoing and are merely relaying that information to your employer;
- It is the responsibility of your employer to use the information you provide to investigate the issue raised.

5.7 What is not protected:

Of course, this assurance does not extend to someone who:

- Makes vexatious, baseless or repeat complaints about others;
- Maliciously raises a matter they know to be untrue;
- Releases or seeks to publicise commercially sensitive information or otherwise confidential information (such as legal advice) when the protection of such data is part of your contract of employment with the organisation.

5.8 This type of behaviour can be misconduct and such disclosures are firmly outside of the whistleblowing context. In addition certain actions in releasing, accessing or publicising personal, commercially sensitive, confidential or legally privileged information may constitute a criminal offence.

5.9 Concerns that aren't protected because the individual raising them is not an employee will be investigated by the organisation in accordance with this policy in the same manner as a protected disclosure.

5.10 Confidentiality

The Housing Executive will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone who raises a concern. Victimisation is discrimination contrary to the anti-discrimination legislation. Any complaint of harassment or victimisation will be treated seriously, and properly investigated. Victimisation may result in disciplinary action and may warrant dismissal. With these assurances you are encouraged to openly raise your concern.

5.11 However, the organisation recognises that there may be circumstances when individuals would prefer to speak to someone in confidence first. If this is the case, please advise at the outset. If you ask not to disclose your identity, we will not do so without your consent, unless required by law. Individuals should understand that there may be times when the Housing Executive is unable to resolve a concern without revealing your identity, for example, where your personal evidence is essential. In such cases, we will consult with you and, where possible, gain your consent prior to any action that could identify you.

5.12 Your Anonymity

The purpose of Public Interest Disclosure legislation is to encourage the open raising of concerns. However, you can make a disclosure anonymously. The Housing Executive gives a commitment that we will consider all concerns raised anonymously. However, these arrangements are not always well suited to whistleblowing. The Housing Executive will assure your anonymity as far as possible, however it may not always be possible to maintain confidentiality if this impedes the investigation. If the situation arises where your concern cannot be resolved without revealing your identity (for instance because your evidence is needed in Court), this will be discussed with you on whether and how to proceed.

The Housing Executive will not take any steps to identify an individual who raises concerns on an anonymous basis. However, individuals should be aware of the disadvantages of raising concerns anonymously:

- Detailed investigations may be more difficult, or even impossible, to progress if you choose to remain anonymous and cannot be contacted for further information;

- The information and documentation you provide may not easily be understood and may need clarification or further explanation;
- There is a chance that the documents you provide might reveal your identity;
- If you do not tell us who you are, it will be difficult to protect your position, or to give you feedback.

6.0 HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN INTERNALLY

Through normal day to day business of the organisation

- 6.1 The Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing policy does not detract from the principle that day to day concerns can be raised and resolved through normal communication between management and individuals. No concern is considered too small for this policy to be applicable.
- 6.2 If an individual wants to raise a concern it should be raised with their line manager, or appropriate manager, who is then required to deal reasonably with an individual’s concern.
- 6.3 Individuals are encouraged to express their concerns freely within the Housing Executive on all aspects of Housing Executive activities. The expression of such concerns is welcomed and will be viewed as a contribution towards improving the services that we offer.
- 6.4 Recourse to raising a concern in this manner as part of day to day business does not preclude individuals from pursuing actions through this policy, in order to gain protection under the Public Interest Disclosure (N. Ireland) Order 1998, as detailed under section 4.0 of the Whistleblowing policy.
- 6.5 Concerns raised provide public bodies with an important source of information that may highlight serious risks, potential fraud or corruption. Workers are often best placed to identify deficiencies and problems before any damage is done, so the importance of their role as the ‘eyes and ears’ of organisations cannot be overstated.
- 6.6 An individual does not have to have proof of the concerns but should have a “reasonable belief” that the information they are disclosing is correct and that raising the concern is in the public interest.

If you are not comfortable raising your concern through the normal day to day business of the organisation then there are three routes by which you can make a protected disclosure within the organisation.

6.7 Individuals may raise a concern through the internal routes detailed below.

6.8 Individuals should remember that there is no need to have firm evidence of malpractice, risk, abuse or wrongdoing before raising a concern. However, we do ask that you explain in full the information or circumstances that gave rise to your concern. If you have evidence in regard to your concern you should let your manager know at the outset.

Route One

Any employee who has a suspicion of wrongdoing, must in line with the Code of Conduct and without delay, report the matter in confidence to his/her line manager. This may be done orally or in writing.

Route Two

If, for whatever reason, you feel that raising it with your line manager or their immediate manager is not appropriate or it has not worked please raise the matter with your Assistant Director or Director. This may be done orally or in writing.

If, for whatever reason, you are dissatisfied with the response or outcome, please raise the matter in the following order listed below:

1. Head of Corporate Investigation and Security – single point of contact for all concerns or whistleblowing allegations within the Housing Executive;
2. Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance;
3. The Chief Executive.

Route Three

If the above routes have been followed or you have concerns of a very serious nature that you don't feel are appropriate to raise with any of the parties mentioned above, then the organisation has a nominated Board member (Senior Independent Director – or SID) with whom you can directly raise your concerns. The Board member is Pauline Leeson and you can make contact with them in writing at pauline1.leeson@nihe.gov.uk.

Route Four – protected disclosures made to organisations outside of the Housing Executive

If these channels have been followed and you still have concerns, or if you feel the matter is so serious that you cannot discuss it with any of the above, you can raise your concerns with the following prescribed persons or organisations. A Prescribed Person's decision / ability to take action is dependent on the existing legislative powers available to them and that they

are unable to become involved in employment disputes. The Prescribed Person will assess the actions available to them depending on the nature of the concern

- The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) using the following contact details

Email: raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 9025 1000

Address: NI Audit Office

106 University Street

Belfast BT7 1EU

- Governance Unit
Department for Communities

Level 5

9 Lanyon Place

Belfast

BT1 3LP

Email: Raising.Concerns@communities-ni.gov.uk

6.9 The Housing Executive has an online reporting function via the NIHE website. This portal is designed to enable concerns to be passed directly to the Head of Corporate Investigation and Security. If members of staff are unable or unwilling to report a concern using Route One or Route Two, then concerns MAY be raised through this online reporting function. The online form contains fields for contact details such as email addresses or mobile numbers. The Housing Executive encourages users of this online reporting function to provide contact details in order that follow-up enquiries can be made. It is also possible to raise concerns anonymously via this route.

6.10 When a manager receives a concern from an individual it is their responsibility to advise the Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance, Head of Corporate Investigation and Security and Functional Director in a timely manner. All concerns received will be recorded by the Head of Corporate Investigation and Security and the Department for Communities informed in line with the procedure for raising concerns or whistleblowing. The Department may request sight of the original allegation however the identity of the person raising the concern will not be divulged, or any other features of the concern that may identify the source.

6.11 Any allegation raised will be acknowledged in writing as soon as practicable by the person with whom it was initially raised. This acknowledgement will include details of whom will be taking forward the investigation and how to get in contact with them. If no contact details are provided then it will not be possible to

either acknowledge receipt of the concerns or provide updates or feedback on progress of the investigation.

7.0 RAISING A CONCERN EXTERNALLY

7.1 The Housing Executive has a single point of contact for all concerns raised externally by members of the public. The Head of Corporate Investigation and Security receives all reports raising concerns either directly by email, telephone or through the Housing Executive website online reporting function.

7.2 A member of the public can raise a concern directly with the Housing Executive in a number of ways:

- Using the online “report a concern” form. This form is directed to the Head of CISU who will take action immediately upon receipt. There are fields within this form for contact details however if you wish to remain anonymous these need not be completed in order to submit your information.
- Write to the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance or any member of the Housing Executive Board detailing the concern and including contact details if they wish. The Housing Executive encourages those raising a concern to supply a contact email address at the very minimum in order to provide feedback and to ask for further information if required.

7.3 A member of the public may also raise a concern with The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). They publish comprehensive guidance on Raising Concerns and more information is available on their website at [Raising Concerns | Northern Ireland Audit Office \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk)

- A member of the public can also raise a concern directly with the Department for Communities Governance Unit:
Department for Communities
Level 5
9 Lanyon Place
Belfast
BT1 3LP
Email: Raising.Concerns@communities-ni.gov.uk

8.0 HOW WE WILL HANDLE THE CONCERN

8.1 Once you have advised the organisation of your concern, it will be initially assessed to ascertain what action should be taken. This may involve the Head of Corporate Investigation and Security reviewing your concern and determining whether or not the concern warrants an informal review; an internal inquiry; or a more formal investigation. This work is undertaken as an initial fact-finding exercise which will determine who should investigate the concerns further and whether or not the Housing Executive is the appropriate

body to do so. On occasion this initial fact-finding work can quickly establish if a concern is an employment-related matter or a complaint and it will be referred for investigation under the relevant policy. If the concerns relate to a provider funded through the Supporting People programme, a separate set of procedures will be followed which have been agreed between DFC and the Housing Executive. All concerns raised are reported to the Department for Communities Governance Unit and quarterly to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

- 8.2 Some concerns, by their nature and scale, will require a more formal process of review and investigation than others. In general terms, some of the possible actions that may be taken upon receipt of a concern include;
- Explaining the context of an issue to the person raising a concern may be enough to alleviate their worries.
 - Minor concerns might be dealt with straight away by line management.
 - A review by internal audit as part of planned audit work might be sufficient to address the issue e.g. through a change to the control environment.
 - There may be a role for external audit in addressing the concerns raised and either providing assurance or recommending changes to working practices.
 - There may be a clear need for a formal investigation.
- 8.3 When you formally raise your concern you can expect the organisation to:
- acknowledge receipt of your concern; (providing it is not anonymous)
 - offer you the opportunity of a meeting to fully discuss the issue, this meeting should be with the most appropriate individual, related to the route you have chosen to raise your concern;
 - if an investigation is appropriate, formally notify you who will be investigating your concern;
 - respect your confidentiality where this has been requested. Confidentiality will not be breached unless required by law;
 - take steps to ensure that you have appropriate support and advice;
 - agree a timetable for feedback. If this cannot be adhered to you will be informed as to the reasons why;
 - provide you with appropriate feedback; and
 - take appropriate and timely action against anyone who victimises you as a result of raising a concern.
 - Manage expectations in relation to timescales and outcomes, making it clear that in some cases only very general information can be supplied to persons raising concerns in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

- 8.4 In terms of managing expectations of those raising a concern, it must be emphasised that they may not get the outcome they want or expect, however their concerns will be taken seriously and the matter handled fairly and properly in line with Housing Executive policy and external guidance on raising concerns
- 8.5 If you are unsure whether or how to raise a concern or you want confidential advice at any stage, you may contact your Trade Union Representative. Further advice is available from Protect – the whistleblowing charity, or from NIAO.

9.0 DOCUMENTING CONCERNS AND ACTIONS

- 9.1 The Head of CISU will record each concern raised on the whistleblowing register and inform the DFC Governance Unit of each new case, updates on existing cases, and case closure and outcomes. If it is evident that the concern relates to fraud or related offences then the case will be transferred to the fraud register and managed in line with the policy. [Counter Fraud and Related Offences Procedural Response Plan](#).
- 9.2 If the concern relates to criminal matters then the PSNI will be informed at the earliest opportunity and any subsequent internal investigation will take place in line with guidance from the PSNI.
- 9.3 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee receive a quarterly update on all whistleblowing cases and outcomes, which includes any lessons learned from investigations. The whistleblowing register is sent quarterly to the DFC Head of Governance and the Director of Finance, Audit and Assurance meets with the Head of CISU fortnightly as part of the management of all cases on the register.
- 9.4 The Head of CISU provides statistics in relation to whistleblowing –raising a concern in the organisational governance statement as part of the annual report, and provides an overall annual summary of statistics to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.
- If you are unsure whether or how to raise a concern or you want confidential advice at any stage, you may contact your Trade Union Representative.

Appendix 1 - Whistleblowing FAQ's

1. **Do I need to formally raise a concern under the Raising Concerns - Whistleblowing Procedure?**

The regular and open discussions between a worker and their line manager are the suggested platform to discuss a concern informally before raising it more formally under the Raising Concerns - Whistleblowing Procedure. What is important is that workers feel able to raise concerns and are protected by legislation, policy and procedure in order to do so.

2. **What if I am a member of the public or an external third party. Can I still raise a concern?**

Yes, there are a number of ways in which a member of the public or external third party can raise a concern, and these are set out in the policy. The ways to raise a concern externally are also publicised on the Housing Executive website. If you raise a concern anonymously then the organisation will not be able to keep you updated with the issues that you have raised. Occasionally you may raise an issue as a complaint or a concern that is better dealt with by another department within the organisation and your concern will be redirected.

3. **I don't have any proof of my concern yet. What should I do?**

Proof is not needed to raise a concern. To raise a concern there only needs to be reasonable belief that wrongdoing has occurred is occurring or is likely to occur. It is not for the individual to investigate or prove that their concerns are justified; that is the responsibility of the department.

4. **Why should I follow the Raising Concerns Whistleblowing Procedure?**

The Raising Concerns – Whistleblowing policy and procedures have been designed to offer protection for workers when raising a concern that falls within the parameters of the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998. It also signposts other routes to raise concerns if a worker, member of the public or external third party makes allegations that are not covered by the legislation. The policy offers assurances about what the organisation will do and what protections may be offered to those raising concerns.

5. **What are the benefits of Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing?**

A positive whistleblowing culture has numerous advantages. For example, it can:

- Encourage an open culture where employees feel confident that concerns can be raised and dealt with quickly and that they will be protected for doing so;
- Detect and deter wrongdoing;
- Provide opportunities for learning;
- Provide managers with the information they need to make decisions and control risk;
- Reduce the chance of legal claims against the organisation.

6. Will there be any repercussions if I blow the whistle?

The Housing Executive will protect any person under the terms of the legislation who reports a concern in good faith from victimisation or reprisals such as being subject to discipline, dismissal or any other detriment as a result of raising the concern.

Disciplinary action will be taken against those who victimise or otherwise subject to detriment any worker who has raised a concern under the Raising Concerns - Whistleblowing Policy.