



# **RETAS LEEDS**

## **“Whistleblowing” Policy – September 2018**

(Making a Disclosure in the Public Interest)

### **INTRODUCTION**

RETAS Leeds is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the Company to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer’s affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances the line manager would be the appropriate person to be told).

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect in 1999, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Company has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the Company nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside the Company.

### **AIM OF THE POLICY**

This policy is designed to give employees of RETAS advice about the procedure to be followed if they wish to draw attention to issues of malpractice or impropriety. This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest. These concerns could include

- Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Criminal activity
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

### **SAFEGUARDS**

#### **i. Protection**

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of RETAS who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:



- in good faith
- in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below). It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

## **ii. Confidentiality**

The Company will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

## **iii. Anonymous Allegations**

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of the Company.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

## **iv. Untrue Allegations**

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

## **PROCEDURES FOR MAKING A DISCLOSURE**

If a RETAS member of staff has a serious concern about perceived malpractice or misconduct of other staff or managers, as outlined above, that affects or could affect a group of people, they should initially raise these concerns with their line-manager.

If having done this, no action has been taken or if the issue cannot be raised with the line-manager, then concerns can be raised outside of the normal line-management structure i.e. the Chair, Vice-Chair or any other member of the Board of Trustees may be approached, as appropriate.

Complaints against the Director should be passed to the Chair who will nominate an appropriate investigating officer.

The complainant has the right to bypass the line management structure and take their complaint direct to the Chair. The Chair has the right to refer the complaint back to



management if he/she feels that the management without any conflict of interest can more appropriately investigate the complaint.

Staff making a disclosure of malpractice or misconduct, as outlined above, must have a reasonable belief that this behaviour was taking place at the time the disclosure was made and have acted in good faith or any awards at Employment Tribunal may be reduced.

Staff will be protected from detriment if, in good faith, they disclose allegations of malpractice to RETAS management using internal procedures. If a worker has a serious concern but believes that he/she cannot raise it internally, he/she is strongly urged to take legal advice before making a public disclosure.

Where staff have exhausted internal RETAS procedures and still have concerns, a disclosure may be made to a "Prescribed third party". Staff will be protected from detriment if, in good faith, they make a public disclosure to a prescribed third party – a list of prescribed third parties can be found at:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dg/groups/dg\\_digitalassets/@dg/@en/@employ/documents/digitalassets/dg\\_177605.pdf](http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/@employ/documents/digitalassets/dg_177605.pdf)

All staff have a responsibility to disclose serious concerns, failure to do so could be seen as condoning or colluding with malpractice or incidents of abuse and disciplinary action may be taken if it was discovered that this was the case.

## **TIMESCALES**

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and / or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations. The investigating officer should ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating officer, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.

## **INVESTIGATING PROCEDURE**

The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.
- The investigating officer should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures.
- The investigating officer should consider the involvement of the Company auditors and the Police at this stage and should consult with the Director and Chair
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals / bodies.



- A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to the Director or Chair as appropriate.
- The Director / Chair will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate Company procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.
- If appropriate, a copy of the outcomes will be passed to the Company Auditors to enable a review of the procedures.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Director / Chair, or one of the designated persons described above.

If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, RETAS recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons (such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Audit Commission, or the utility regulators), or, where justified, elsewhere.

**Policy Approved by.....**

**Chair of RETAS Trustees**

**Signed..... Date.....**

## **REVIEW**

The effectiveness of this policy and associated arrangements will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees under the direct supervision of the RETAS Chief of Executive.

Review Date: September 2019