Parks for London

Whistleblowing Policy

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The London Parks and Green Spaces Forum is a registered charity and trades as Parks for London. For the purposes of this policy the organisation will be referred to as 'Parks for London', 'our', or 'we'.

1. What is this policy about?

We are committed to conducting our business with honesty and integrity, and we expect all staff to maintain high standards at all times. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- provide staff with guidance as to how to raise such concerns.
- reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services, and we may amend it at any time, subject to appropriate advice.

2. Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to all employees, officers, consultants, self-employed contractors, casual workers, agency workers, volunteers, and interns.

3. Who is responsible for this policy?

The board of trustees has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy.

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Exec Administrator & Finance Manager in consultation with Worknest. The Board will be made aware of any updates and amendments to the policy.

All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Staff are encouraged to review this policy and if applicable offer comments or suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions, and queries should directed to the Executive Administrator & Finance Manager.

4. What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- criminal activity
- failure to comply with any legal [or professional] obligation [or regulatory requirements]

- miscarriages of justice
- danger to health and safety
- damage to the environment
- bribery [under our Anti-corruption and Bribery Policy]
- facilitating tax evasion [contrary to our Anti-facilitation of Tax Evasion Policy]
- financial fraud or mismanagement
- breach of our internal policies and procedures [including our Code of Conduct]
- conduct likely to damage our reputation or financial wellbeing
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- negligence
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy.

This policy is not for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you may have been treated at work. In those cases, you should use the Grievance Procedure, or Bully and Harassment Procedure, as outlined in Parks for London's Employee Handbook.

If a complaint relates to your own personal circumstances but you also have wider concerns regarding one of the areas set out above (for example, a breach of our internal policies), you should discuss with Exec Administrator and Finance Manager which route is the most appropriate.

If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from Exec Administrator and Finance Manager, whose contact details are at the end of this policy.

5. Raising a whistleblowing concern

We hope that in most cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your line manager, you may tell them in person or put the matter in writing. They may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to the Board.

However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your line manager has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact the Exec Administrator and Finance Manager or Chair of the Board of Trustees.

We will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or other representative to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

6. Confidentiality

We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.

We do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously, although we will make every effort to investigate anonymous disclosures. You should be aware that proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistle-blowers who are concerned about reprisals if their identity is revealed, should come forward to the Exec Administrator & Finance Manager so measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are at the end of this policy.

7. Investigation and outcome

Once you have raised a concern, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings to provide further information.

In some cases, we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator (or investigators) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation, an outcome or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential. If we conclude that a whistle-blower has made false allegations maliciously, the whistle-blower will be subject to disciplinary action.

8. If you are not satisfied

While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy, you can help us to achieve this.

If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled, you can raise it with the Executive Director or Chair of the Board of Trustees.

9. External disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a 'Supporter' or an organisation we are working in partnership with. In some circumstances the law will protect you if you raise the matter with the third party directly. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first in line with this policy. You should contact your line manager for guidance.

10.Protection and support for whistle-blowers

It is understandable that whistle-blowers are sometimes worried about potential repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistle-blowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern if they have the reasonable belief that it is true. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform your line manager immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you should raise it formally using the Grievance Procedure.

A whistle-blower must not be threatened or retaliated against in any way. Any member of staff involved in such conduct you may be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases the whistle-blower could have a right to sue such perpetrators personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.

11.Contacts

Ed Stannard, Executive Director ed.stannard@parksforlondon.org.uk
Chair of the Board of Trustees chair@parksforlondon.org.uk
Administrative and Finance Manager nina.obhrai@parksforlondon.org.uk
Postal address for disclosures: Parks for London, PO Box 77664, London, SE6 9RQ.

Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) is a charity which leads on whistleblowing. You can find more information here, including details about their free advice line.