

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

October 2024

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK	3
2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POLICY?	3
3. DEFINITION OF WHISTLEBLOWING	3
4. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN	4
5. CONCERNS RAISED ANONYMOUSLY	5
6. CONFIDENTIALITY	5
7. UNFOUNDED CONCERNS AND ALLEGATIONS	5



1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Standard 19 of the National Minimum Standard for Fostering sets out the following requirement

“There is a whistleblowing policy which is made known to all staff, volunteers, foster carers and panel members. This makes it a clear duty for such people to report to an appropriate authority any circumstances within the fostering service which they consider likely to significantly harm the safety, rights or welfare of any child placed by the service.”

Worcestershire Fostering as part of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, integrity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we expect our foster carers and employees who have serious concerns about any aspect the work of Worcestershire Fostering or WCC to come forward and voice those concerns.

Staff as employees of WCC should follow the WCC’s process for whistleblowing this policy specifically applies to foster carers.

If a foster carer has a concern about the service to a particular child or to themselves, then they should discuss this with the social workers and managers involved. If they are unhappy with the response they may of course use WCC complaints process concerning services to themselves or the WCC’s complaints process concerning services to a child.

If a foster carer thinks that there may be something seriously wrong within the organisation itself then they may need to follow the guidance in this policy.

2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POLICY?

The Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer who is the Head of Resources have overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. Their role is to ensure that any concern is investigated properly and to maintain a record of concerns raised together with outcomes and they will report as necessary to the WCC board without jeopardising confidentiality.

3. DEFINITION OF WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistleblowing is when someone raises a concern about a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing within their organisation. Raising a concern is known as “blowing the whistle” and is a vital process for identifying risks to people’s safety. Sharing information or talking through a concern can be the first step to helping an organisation identify problems and improve their practices.

A disclosure or concern can be

- a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse of children or employees, or neglect
- a legal obligation has been breached
- there has been a miscarriage of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public, children, foster carers, as well as other employees;
- damage to the environment;
- the unauthorised use of agency funds or resources;
- possible fraud and corruption;
- other unethical conduct;
- information about any of the above has been concealed.

This list is not exhaustive, and we recognise that there is some overlap for foster carers in terms of safeguarding concerns, whistleblowing and complaints.

If a foster carer has a concern which is related to child abuse, they must raise this immediately with the child's social worker or their supervising social worker or contact the EDT on 01905 768020 (out of office hours). Foster carers should refer to Worcestershire Fostering Safeguarding Children for the process to follow.

If a foster carer has a concern it is important that they raise it and if it is more properly dealt with through a different process, we will discuss this with them.

Worcestershire Fostering will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of any foster carer who raises a concern and will take immediate action to protect them. Victimisation or harassment of anyone using this policy by a member of staff or any member of staff trying to discourage foster carers from coming forward will be deemed to be a disciplinary matter.

If a foster carer victimises or harasses another foster carer or discourages them for coming forward this may lead to a review of their approval.

4. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

Step 1 – Reporting a Concern

If a foster carer has a concern they should raise this matter with their supervising social worker or their Team Manager. If they feel unable to approach either of these people, they should contact the Registered Manager or the Responsible Individual for Worcestershire Fostering. (Contact details can be found in Worcestershire Fostering Statement of Purpose or on the Useful Contact Details in your Foster Carer Handbook.)

Concerns may be raised verbally and/or in writing. Worcestershire Fostering recommends that if foster carers are putting their concern in writing that they include in their letter, the background and history (giving relevant dates) and give the reason why they are particularly concerned about the matter.

Foster Carers may also wish to seek advice from FosterTalk (<https://fostertalk.org/>) or contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice line who are a prescribed whistleblowing body for child welfare and protection: www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/report-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line.

If a foster carer feels unable to raise the matter with any of the above due to the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, they should approach either the Chief Executive or their County Councillor.

Step 2 – What will happen next?

Worcestershire Fostering will respond promptly to any concerns reported and assess what action needs to be taken. This may involve an internal investigation or a more formal inquiry. Worcestershire Fostering will tell the foster carer who will handle the matter (the Responsible Officer), including how they can be contacted and whether any more assistance or information is required. In any event within 7 working days of a concern being raised, the Responsible Officer will write to the foster carer acknowledging that their concern has been received. The letter will also inform them of any relevant support mechanisms and agree arrangements for keeping them informed.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for an investigation. If urgent action is required, this may be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Worcestershire Fostering will take steps to minimise any difficulties which foster carers may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if they are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, Worcestershire Fostering will arrange for them to receive advice about the procedure.

Step 3 - Raising a Concern Externally

Worcestershire Fostering hopes that foster carers have the confidence to raise their concern with Worcestershire Fostering or WCC however if a foster carer wishes to raise a concern with an external agency they can contact an external regulator. For issues relating to children these include:

- **Ofsted** for matters related to the provision of regulated social care services for children.
Contact details are:
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD;
ring on **0300 123 3155** or email whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk.
- **Social Work England** for matters relating to the registration of social care workers.
Contact details are:
1 North Bank, Blonk Street, Sheffield, S3 8JY
0808 1962274 or email enquiries@socialworkengland.org.uk

Where foster carers concerns relate to other issues they will need to contact the relevant agency for example

- the Health and Safety Executive for health and safety dangers;
- the Environment Agency for environmental dangers;
- the Commission for Social Care Inspection for matters related to the provision of regulated social care services for adults;

If foster carers are unsure on which agency to contact they can get advice from Protect, www.protect-advice.org.uk, a leading authority on public interest whistleblowing.

5. CONCERNS RAISED ANONYMOUSLY

Worcestershire Fostering encourages foster carers to put their name to their concern. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Responsible Individual.

In exercising their discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised;
- The credibility of the concern/s;
- The likelihood of confirming any allegations from attributable sources.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Worcestershire Fostering undertakes to protect the identity of the foster carer and will not disclose it without their consent. If the situation arises where it is not possible to pursue their concern without revealing their identity (e.g. the need to give evidence in court or at a disciplinary hearing), Worcestershire Fostering will discuss with them how and if it can proceed.

7. UNFOUNDED CONCERNS AND ALLEGATIONS

If you make an allegation in good faith, but the evidence produced during the investigation does not substantiate it, no action will be taken against you.

If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, this may lead to a review of your approval as a foster carer.

