

## **CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING**

### **Introduction**

Solon Wandsworth Housing Association is committed to the highest standards of quality, probity, openness and accountability.

As a part of that commitment, we encourage employees or others with serious concerns about any aspect of our work to come forward and express those concerns. The norm is that concerns or complaints will be dealt with through our normal procedures, such as the mechanisms for resolving grievances, disciplinary matters, or concerns relating to equal opportunities.

However, in some cases, we recognise that employees will need to come forward on a confidential basis. Our staff code and procedures make it clear that they can do so without fear of reprisal or victimisation.

This statement to our employees is intended to underline our commitment to them, and our support for those who come forward to express their concerns in good faith, if they believe that there is or may be a problem.

### **Consultation and information**

1. All workers will be consulted and involved as we develop our procedures and practices on confidential reporting. We will also consult the recognised trades union.
2. Through our induction and other communications, we will make sure that workers know how to recognise the following problems, and understand the effects they may have on the organisation, their jobs, and the service we provide:
  - fraud, corruption and malpractice
  - abuse or neglect of vulnerable people
  - failure to deliver proper standards of service
  - damaging personal conflicts
  - bullying, discrimination, harassment or victimisation in the work place
  - failure to comply with health and safety rules.
3. We will make sure that all workers know what is expected of them, and what practices are regarded as unacceptable.

4. When we find a problem, we will always deal with it seriously. We will always pursue fraud and serious abuse as vigorously as possible through our disciplinary procedures, or if necessary through the courts; frauds are also always reported to the police. We hope that all workers will feel confident in coming forward, that the association will share their sense of right and wrong, and act on what they tell us.

## **Confidential reporting**

5. It is never easy to report a concern, particularly one that may relate to fraud or corruption. Workers are urged to come forward with any concerns at an early stage, and before problems have a chance to become serious.
6. Workers may, if they wish, come forward with a colleague, a friend, trade union representative or other advisor to report a concern.
7. Concerned workers will be supported and protected from reprisals or victimisation. If a worker comes forward with a concern, he/she can be confident that this will not affect their employment or enjoyment of their job. This applies equally if a worker comes forward in good faith with a concern that turns out later not to have been justified.
8. Everything possible will be done to respect a worker's confidentiality, if he/she has requested this.
9. If anyone tries to discourage a worker from coming forward to express a concern, it will be treated as a disciplinary offence. In the same way, if anyone harasses or victimises a worker after a concern has been expressed this will also be considered a disciplinary matter.

## **Whom to contact**

10. In most cases, workers should be able to raise any concerns with the CAT. If for some reason this is not possible, a worker should speak to an Officer of the Management Committee, or the organisation's internal auditor. All such contacts will be treated in confidence.
11. If our policy and procedures are working properly, a worker should not need to contact an external agency, to express concerns. But there may be exceptional or urgent circumstances where it might be best to contact an

external agency. It is not possible to give precise examples but, for instance, relevant situations might be:

- if the problem involved the Chair or another board member
- in the case of a criminal offence, the police
- in the case of abuse of vulnerable people, the local authority social services registration officer
- in the case of abuse of public funds, the Housing Corporation, which is responsible for regulating all registered social landlords
- in the case of any fraud, the association's external auditors and/or the Housing Corporation
- in the case of breaches of health and safety rules, the Health and Safety Executive.

We hope that none of these will ever prove necessary.

12. A worker can also approach Public Concern at Work for confidential and independent advice - the address is: Lincoln's Inn House, 42 Kingsway, London WC2B 6EX. Tel: 0171-404 6609, Fax: 0171-404 6576, E-mail: [whistle@pcaw.demon.co.uk](mailto:whistle@pcaw.demon.co.uk).
13. Performance Audit staff in the relevant regional office of the Housing Corporation are also able to advise on a confidential basis, if a worker is not sure whom to contact about a particular problem. As regulators, they may need to follow up on any potential problems identified.

### **Dealing with concerns:**

14. If a worker comes to us with a concern, we will look into it carefully and thoroughly. We have to be fair to the worker, but also to any others involved. If someone is potentially being accused of misconduct, we have to find out their side of the story as well. In our investigation, we will respect any concerns the worker has expressed about his/her own safety or career.
15. If requested, we will try to let the worker concerned know the results of the investigation and about any action that is proposed. However, in doing this, we have to respect the confidentiality of other employees as well.