ST ANNE'S COMMUNITY SERVICES

POLICY

1.28 Whistleblowing Policy

Policy Category	**Category 1 – ELT & Trustees** **Category 2 – All staff**
Policy/Procedure Cross Ref	**8.03 Disciplinary Policy** **8.08 Grievance Policy**
Summary of Policy Changes	**Previous versions prior to 2016 are available on request.** **V10.0 –** Annual review of policy **V10.1 – February 2024** template update. **V10.2 – June 2024** Minor changes. Chair contact details updated. Reporting route for concerns with the Chair of Board. **V11.0 – June 2025** Annual review, Datix updated to Nourish. Policy template update **V11.1 March 2026**
Policy Owner	**Director of People**
Approval	**ELT – Q&P Committee**
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1.0 Policy Summary

St Anne's is committed to ensuring an open culture, where people feel comfortable and safe in raising concerns related to conduct, behaviour and / or practices of others. We are committed to continuous improvement within our services. The quality of care and support we provide clients, and the welfare of our staff are both considered to be paramount.

Staff members are in a key position to notice serious issues within St Anne's and to ensure the safety and welfare of both their colleagues and people we support. As an organisation we recognise it can be difficult to raise concerns regarding the actions of others. Staff must feel safe in raising concerns and believe that the organisation will act on information it receives.

St Anne's Whistleblowing Policy exists to protect whistleblowers and to make clear the steps to be followed if malpractice, misconduct, or abuse is witnessed or suspected.

For the full details of this policy, please read **the entire document, not just the summary.**

2.0 Scope

Whistleblowing is defined as:

"A worker raising a concern with someone in authority – internally, and/or, externally, about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice that affects others."

It is the reporting of suspected misconduct, illegal acts, or omissions on the part of St Anne's Community Services or any of its employees or Board members. Staff can "whistleblow" both internally and to external bodies. Where staff wish to raise genuine concerns, which are believed to be in the public interest, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) provides legal protection to whistleblowers from victimisation or unfair treatment as a result of raising an issue.

This policy provides staff with information on how to "whistleblow" or make disclosures and sets out how whistleblowing concerns will be addressed when received by the organisation. This policy applies to all permanent and temporary workers and people working for St Anne's on a casual, voluntary or agency basis

3.0 Main Policy Content

Guiding Principles of Whistleblowing Within St Anne's

St Anne's Responsibilities

St Anne's is committed to preventing any form of malpractice, abuse or illegal activity and will take seriously and investigate all concerns raised under whistleblowing. St Anne's will support any staff or clients directly involved in any whistleblowing case and are committed to learning from any investigations carried out.

St Anne's recognises people's lawful rights to make disclosures to prescribed persons e.g., the Care Quality Commission (CQC) under whistleblowing if they are not satisfied that their report has been properly dealt with internally. St Anne's has a legal duty to protect any staff member making a disclosure from any repercussions including victimisation or harassment from colleagues, providing the disclosure is made in good faith and is not false or vexatious.

The methods used to investigate and resolve concerns will vary according to the complexity of the issue involved. Any member of staff interviewed as part of an investigation can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague unconnected to the investigation. St Anne's and the Trade Unions agree that efforts should be made to resolve allegations of abuse or bad practice quickly in the interest of clients and staff.

Staff Responsibilities

Staff are encouraged to report any concerns at the earliest opportunity and internally in the first instance. St Anne's, and Trade Unions all agree that, wherever appropriate, staff should first exhaust all internal procedures before considering external reporting. Most concerns about work practices are best dealt with in discussions within a staff team or directly between a person registering a concern and that person's manager. Wherever practicable this approach will be encouraged.

Staff have a duty to report concerns if they suspect or become aware of illegal activity, malpractice and abuse. This is a requirement of both an employee's contract and St Anne's PROUD values. St Anne's encourages staff to raise concerns openly: however confidential or anonymous disclosures can be made. Staff members will not suffer any detriment when raising genuine concerns under whistleblowing. Staff have a responsibility to raise concerns in good faith without malicious intent and in a timely manner i.e., at the point they become aware of or suspect any wrongdoing.

"Blowing the Whistle", Public Interest Disclosure **Act (PIDA) and Grievances**

Whistleblowing may also be known as making a disclosure, raising a whistleblowing concern, or blowing the whistle. This may concern a small, localised issue, or a much larger issue affecting the whole organisation. Whistleblowing allows staff to raise matters formally and provides an opportunity for concerns to be investigated.

Where a disclosure is related to: a criminal offence, the breach of a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, danger to the health and safety of any individual, damage to the environment or a deliberate attempt to conceal any of the above, then the additional protection of PIDA will also apply (provided that the individual believes the content of the disclosure is true and is raising the concern in good faith).

Where a staff member is personally involved or affected by the issue, this is unlikely to be considered whistleblowing or to be protected under PIDA. These issues should be managed through St Anne's Grievance Procedure. The following illustrates the potential differences between a grievance and a whistleblowing issue:

Likely to be a grievance if	Likely to be whistleblowing if
There is a matter that the individual feels they are affected by or the victim of, there is a risk to themselves, the individual is seeking a private redress and outcome. There is often a more structured process for investigating a grievance. E.g., pay and conditions, disagreement with co-worker, unfair treatment.	An individual has witnessed something that affects others, the risk is to others or to the organisation, the outcome is for the benefit of others or in the public interest. There is flexibility in how whistleblowing is investigated, depending how a concern is raised and what it involves. E.g., cover ups, abuse of authority, Health and Safety breaches.

The following are examples of concerns employees may raise which St Anne's considers likely to be classified as whistleblowing, rather than as grievances (not an exhaustive list):

- Abuse of a client in any form e.g., physical, sexual, racial, emotional, financial, or institutional
- Clinical negligence such as deliberately administering incorrect medication
- Breaches of legislation such as the Health and Safety at Work Act
- Discriminatory or oppressive behaviour
- Criminal activity such as blackmail, fraudulent activities or theft
- Activities that present a serious risk to the environment, such as pollution
- Modern slavery practices such as human trafficking, forced labour or domestic servitude within the organisation or its supply chains
- Deliberate attempts to cover up any of the above

Whistleblowing and Confidentiality

When staff whistleblow, all concerns will be treated in strict confidence, and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of the whistleblower if it is known. Wherever disclosures are received, efforts will be made to minimise the involvement of unnecessary parties and the number of people aware of the disclosure and its content. There may be occasions where St Anne's is required by law to reveal the details of a whistleblower and the nature of their disclosure, such as matters involving safeguarding or reporting of criminal activities.

Staff can choose to add their name to a disclosure and ask for it to be treated openly, put their name to a disclosure and ask for it to be treated confidentially, or raise disclosures anonymously without providing their name.
Staff have the right to raise disclosures anonymously but are encouraged to put their name to any disclosures made, as this makes investigating and responding to concerns easier.

Without knowing the name of the whistleblower, it becomes difficult for St Anne's to investigate the disclosure, reassure the whistleblower, provide them with protection from victimisation, update them on the progress of an investigation or provide them with a response to the concerns they have raised.

Concerns raised anonymously will be considered and investigated at St Anne's discretion. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be considered would include:

- The seriousness of the issue raised
- The timing of the concern i.e., is it new or historic
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of being able to confirm the allegations from other sources or witnesses

If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of a disclosure without the whistleblower providing witness evidence, particularly if no one else has witnessed the incident. In such cases, whistleblowers are likely to be called as witnesses to further proceedings, but their identity as the source of the complaint will be protected and they would be treated as a vulnerable witness in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure.

Protection for Whistleblowers

St Anne's aims to encourage a culture of openness, transparency, and continuous improvement. In order to ensure our services are safe and of a high quality, we must be open to learning from poor practice. Only by encouraging staff to come forward when they witness malpractice or abuse will St Anne's be able to keep staff and clients safe.

No staff member will suffer any detriment as a result of whistleblowing, whether this is raised internally or externally. St Anne's has a responsibility to protect whistleblowers from any repercussions as a result of making a disclosure. This includes not being subjected to bullying, harassment, victimisation or being unfairly dismissed, as a result of whistleblowing.

There is an expectation that any concerns raised by staff are made in good faith, believed to be true and without malicious intent. If it is later proved that information provided when raising a concern was knowingly false or with malicious intent, disciplinary action may be considered.

Where a staff member is found to have bullied, harassed, victimised or unfairly treated an employee as a result of them raising a whistleblowing concern, disciplinary action may be considered.

As an additional support measure a whistleblower can be provided with an independent "point of contact" after making a disclosure. This point of contact may be a Trade Union representative, member of HR, a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian or an impartial manager who has not been involved in the disclosure or its investigation. The role of the point of contact will be to maintain contact with the whistleblower after the disclosure has been made to ensure the staff member is not suffering any detriment or suffering adverse repercussions as a result of making a disclosure. A point of contact will only be assigned to a whistleblower upon the whistleblower's own request.

Who Can I Whistleblow To?

St Anne's encourages staff to raise concerns internally wherever possible. However, there may be occasions where staff have previously reported a concern which has not been acted upon, or that involves their line manager or another member of staff.

All incidents and concerns, including those relating to clients, should be recorded on Nourish wherever possible, in line with the EIA Policy requirement for timely and accurate reporting. Nourish provides the formal record needed for monitoring, escalation and learning. However, as Nourish is not an anonymous system, the EIA Policy recognises that some staff may feel unable to raise a concern through this route. In these circumstances, staff should use the alternative escalation pathways outlined below and speak with the appropriate person, ensuring that no concern goes unreported and that early intervention can still take place.

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There are a number of routes for a staff member to raise a whistleblowing concern both internally and externally:

Line Management

Initially staff should look to raise any concerns directly with their line manager, or if the disclosure relates to their manager, the matter should be raised with their line manager's manager. Most concerns about work practices are best dealt with in discussions within a staff team or directly between a person registering a concern and that person's manager and can likely be resolved quickly and easily. In the event the concern is of a serious nature, line managers can support staff with raising disclosures at a more senior level.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians (FTSUGs)

FTSUGs provide staff with an alternative route outside of line management or central departments to raise concerns. FTSUG's work within their organisation to identify and tackle barriers to speaking up, such as issues of bullying cultures, poor levels of awareness and processes that place an undue burden on individuals when they raise concerns.

Any member of staff acting as a FTSUG will be provided with formal training via the National Guardian training programme. St Anne's will aim to develop its network of FTSUGs to have sufficient FTSUGs to cover its operational services and central teams. St Anne's objective is to have a minimum of 3 FTSUGs in place at any one time however, more may be appointed. A list of FTSUGs will be published regularly (and at least annually), including an outline of the role of a FTSUG, as a reminder for staff.

People Partnering Team

Concerns can be raised with the People Partnering Team face to face, by telephone or in writing. If staff are not sure whether their concern falls under the Whistleblowing Policy or the Grievance Procedure, People Partnering Team can be contacted for advice in the first instance. People Partnering Team can be contacted in the following ways:

- Calling the People team on People Team <PeopleTeam@st-annes.org.uk>
- Sending an email to the internal whistleblower inbox which is managed confidentially by the HR Team: concerns@st-annes.org.uk
- Writing to HR Team, Unit 5 Fountain Court, 12 Bruntcliffe Way, Morley, Leeds LS27 0JG

The Director of People is the Designated Officer for monitoring St Anne's Whistleblowing Policy.

Directors and St Anne's Board of Trustees

If a staff member wishes to raise a whistleblowing concern regarding the conduct, practice or behaviour of a director they can raise the concern to the Chief Executive Officer.

If the whistleblowing concern relates to the Chief Executive Officer or a Trustee, staff are able to raise concerns directly with the Board. Concerns should be raised by contacting the Chair of St Anne's Board, John Cleland:

- Chair of St Anne's Board: john.cleland@st-annes.org.uk

In the case that a whistleblowing concern relates to the Chair of St Anne's Board, staff are able to raise concerns directly to the CEO and / or Vice Chair of Board (Trustee), who will determine the most appropriate person to investigate.

External Reporting

There are several external routes for a staff member to raise a whistleblowing concern. "Prescribed Persons" are organisations that have been designated as places that workers can approach outside of their workplace to report suspected or known wrongdoing. They are organisations that whistleblowing concerns can be raised with, due to their oversight of a sector, often as regulators. A list of prescribed persons can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2

St Anne's believes the most appropriate Prescribed Persons for its sector to be The Care Quality Commission (CQC) and The Charity Commission. Their details can be found below:

- The CQC www.cqc.org.uk
- The Charity Commission: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

In addition to being able to report whistleblowing concerns to Prescribed Persons, if staff do not feel comfortable raising concerns and would like external advice, the following organisations provide confidential advice and support. They will not handle disclosures, but they will be able to advise on the best course of action.

- Speak Up Direct: https://speakup.direct/
- Health Assured EAP: 0800 028 0199

Staff are also able to report concerns to their Local Authority Safeguarding Team.

How Will My Whistleblowing Concern be Handled?

Levels of Whistleblowing Concerns

The reporting of any suspected wrongdoing, concerning conduct or behaviour is encouraged by St Anne's. However, it is recognised that not all concerns will require in depth investigation or formal outcomes. Whistleblowing is considered to be a positive aspect of culture within St Anne's services, which supports continuous improvement and high-quality care and keeps staff and clients safe. Upon receiving concerns, St Anne's will assess the level of concern based on seriousness, nature of the concern, seniority of the subject of the concern, timing, credibility and the ability to confirm the details of the concern. Using this information, St Anne's will look to place concerns into one of the following levels:

Level of Concern	Deciding Factors and Possible Examples
Low	Low-level concerns are usually raised directly with line managers and relate to minor misconduct, wrongdoing, or malpractice. An information gathering exercise may be required at this stage. Low-level concerns will not necessarily be recorded or logged centrally unless they are received by HR or originate from an external source. These concerns are unlikely to fall within the scope of PIDA. Examples of low levels disclosures include reporting errors in record keeping, single acts of failing to administer medication, failure to hold team meetings or appropriate PDRs.
Medium	Medium level concerns are those that require an investigation by a staff member independent from the concern. They may also be low level concerns that have not been addressed or have been repeated. Medium level concerns will usually be raised with staff outside of their line manager, through HR or an external source. They may or may not be considered as coming under PIDA. Medium level concerns will be recorded and tracked centrally and reported to the Board on a bi-monthly basis. Examples of medium level concerns include reporting of comments or behaviours that harass or discriminate, reports of single acts of abuse or negligence, low level H&S breaches and theft.
High	High level concerns are concerns that are deemed serious enough to immediately report to ELT and the Board once received. All members of St Anne's Board and ELT would be made aware of these concerns being received, unless it is inappropriate to do so i.e., if the relate directly to ELT or the Board. They may be reported internally, externally or directly to the Board and are likely to be considered as coming under PIDA. High level concerns will be investigated and reported on in the same manner as medium level concern. Examples of high-level concerns include Gross misconduct of Senior Managers or Directors, blackmail, reports of pre-meditated or systematic abuse carried out by individuals or groups, deliberately covering up criminal acts.

Investigating Whistleblowing Concerns

Upon receipt of a disclosure, it shall be reviewed to confirm it is a whistleblowing concern and not a grievance and assessed what level of concern the disclosure is considered to be. The following steps shall then be taken to investigate a Medium or High-level disclosure:

Acknowledgement- If the concern is not raised anonymously, it shall be acknowledged by the organisation within 10 working days. The acknowledgement will confirm how the concern will be investigated and who will carry out this investigation and an estimated timescale for receiving a response. It will state how the whistleblower is to be kept updated and provided an outcome and where they can receive independent advice. It may not be possible to acknowledge anonymous disclosures.

Recording- Details of the disclosure will be recorded centrally by the People Team. The Senior Management Team (SMT), the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), and the Board will be informed when a high-level concern is received as appropriate.

Investigate- An investigation relevant to the level and seriousness of the disclosure will be carried out. St Anne's will aim to complete investigations into disclosures as soon as possible. Where the whistleblower is not anonymous, the investigator will give an update as to when the investigation may be concluded. Any member of staff interviewed as part of an investigation can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague unconnected to any investigation. Relevant departments across St Anne's will be engaged to support the investigation where necessary.

Review- Following the completion of an investigation and where possible, an outcome will be provided to the whistleblower. St Anne's shall determine if there is to be any further action such as disciplinary investigations or reporting matters to external bodies. It may not be possible to share all the outcomes of an investigation with a whistleblower, but as much feedback shall be given as possible.

Reflect - St Anne's will also undertake de-briefs of complex whistleblowing investigations to create actions plans in response to any poor practice identified and to share learning. St Anne's will aim to follow up with the whistleblower 6-8 weeks after an outcome is provided to them.

Training and Monitoring

On a quarterly basis, a report on whistleblowing concerns received by the organisation shall be presented to the Board via its Quality and People Committee. This will detail the number of medium and high-level concerns received, the outcomes of investigations, learning from investigations and highlighting any trends.

People Partnering Team receive specific training on safeguarding concerns, supporting whistleblowers, and PIDA.

Support and Guidance

St Anne's understands that reporting concerns under Whistleblowing can be difficult to do and therefore would like to remind staff that they can contact Health Assured for independent advice and support 24 hours a day. Health Assured provide a confidential Employee Assistance Programme, including counselling sessions for all of our employees either online at www.healthassured.co.uk or by telephone on 0800 028 0199.

4.0 Effects

The anticipated effects of the whistleblowing policy being in place include:

- **Increased openness and accountability** which reinforces the organisation's commitment to transparency and continuous improvement.
- **Staff are heard and supported:** whistleblowers are empowered to raise concerns without fear.
- **Enhanced governance**: whistleblowing enables the early detection of behaviours of concern and allows St Anne's to act promptly to prevent harm to clients, staff, or its reputation.

Update: Expanded Scope (Effective April 2026)

In line with the Employment Rights Act 2025 provisions effective April 2026, the scope of protected disclosures now explicitly includes environmental and human rights concerns. Staff are encouraged to raise these matters under whistleblowing procedures.

Update: Sexual Harassment Disclosures

From 6 April 2026, disclosures relating to sexual harassment are considered protected disclosures under PIDA. Staff making such disclosures will receive full legal protection.

Update: Additional Prescribed Persons for Sanctions Reporting

The following authorities have been added as prescribed persons for sanctions-related disclosures: HM Treasury, Secretary of State for Business & Trade, and Secretary of State for Transport. Staff may report concerns involving sanctions breaches to these bodies.

Update: Confidential Reporting and Manager Training

St Anne's commits to maintaining clear and confidential reporting systems and providing ongoing training for managers to comply with ERA 2025 requirements effective April 2026.

Update: Future Legislative Changes

St Anne's will monitor the progress of the Office of the Whistleblower Bill. If enacted, the policy will be updated to integrate its provisions, including any new reporting channels or support mechanisms.

5.0 Appendix

None