

Whistleblowing

This document sets out the Service's procedures to raise matters of concern with Service management using a confidential help line if necessary

OWNER	Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager
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CROSS REFERENCES

Code of Conduct for employees (e-docs 1212)

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PART 1 – POLICY SECTION

Policy Statement

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (The Service) expects the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. Hence employees, who have serious and genuine concerns about any aspect of the Service's work and relationships, should be able to come forward and raise their concerns, without fear of harassment or victimisation.

PART 2 – PROCEDURE SECTION

Introduction

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service values its employees and the services they provide to the people of Cheshire. We are working hard to improve the services we deliver, and we need our employees, partners and contractors to tell us when anything is not working well or when people are not behaving properly.

As a public service organisation, the Fire Authority will use public funds prudently and apply the highest standards of conduct throughout the organisation. This procedure encourages all employees to help maintain these standards, by enabling you to draw attention, within the Fire Authority, to any concerns which you may have. Public disclosure may well be justified at some point, but this should not happen before the Service has had the opportunity to investigate the concern. Premature or unnecessary publicity may impede proper investigations or harm individuals.

The Service has established procedures for employees to raise concerns through their manager or grandparent manager these should be the employee's first recourse. However, should the employee not feel confident about raising the concern through established Service routes the Service has a contract with Safecall, an independent route for raising concerns, this may be done anonymously if necessary.

How to Raise your Concern with Safecall

Safecall has a Freephone telephone line 08009151571 that is open 24/7. The line is managed by experienced call handlers who will take the details of the issue you wish to raise; they may ask questions to ensure that the issues are recorded correctly. You will be given the option to either disclose your name or to remain anonymous. They will take down your contact details as these will be used to feedback the outcomes of the Services investigation into the allegation/s.

Safecall will send a copy of the report by email to the Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager and the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Advisor; the report is password protected so that only these two members of staff will be able to open it.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager or Advisor will decide which Senior Manager is the most appropriate to deal with the issues raised in the report.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager will agree with the manager a deadline for completing any investigation and the feedback to be fed back to you via Safecall if the matter has been raised anonymously.

If you want to raise your concern other than via the Freephone helpline, you can do this orally [i.e., face to face or over the phone], or in writing. If you write, mark the envelope “personal and confidential” and send to Health, Safety and Well-being Manager. Whichever way you choose, please give as much information as you can. Remember also to give your name, job and where you work and say if you do not want to be contacted at work [if so, give your home address and phone number].

The following headings should help you organise your thoughts, but you do not have to follow them exactly:

- Why you are concerned and the background information
- Any other procedures, which you have already used, and what happened
- The people who are involved and where they work
- Dates or periods of time
- The names and jobs of any other people who will [or may] support your concern

The earlier a concern is raised the better. Whilst you will not be expected to prove that allegations are true, you will need to show that you have a reasonable basis for your concern.

You may want to discuss the matter with one or two colleagues first. Their support could be helpful. There is nothing to stop two or more of you putting your names to a concern.

Help with the Procedure

Any of the following will help you to understand the procedure:

Health, Safety and Well-being Manager or Senior Adviser
The Monitoring Officer
The manager for your department/watch
A Senior Employment Advisor
Treasurer to the Fire Authority
A trade union representative

How your Concern will be dealt with

As a start, discreet enquiries will be made by the Health, Safety and Well-being manager to decide whether an investigation is needed and if so, who is most appropriate to conduct the investigation. This will help protect everyone concerned. The overriding principle will be the public interest.

If this first testing stage shows that the concern should be followed up, there will be a full investigation which will if necessary be facilitated by HR. It may be necessary to involve other agencies, for example the police or the external auditors. It may be

possible, of course, to sort out the concern without a detailed investigation.

What you will be told

Within ten working days of your concern being received, the health, safety and welfare manager who handled the initial complaint will write to you confirming:

- What initial enquiries have been made
- How your concern has been or will be dealt with
- How long any further action may take [as far as this can be known]
- What further work is planned and how you may be involved

Updates will be provided to the employee who has registered the concern at regular intervals throughout any investigation.

The amount of contact you have with the people considering the matter will depend on many things. These include the type of concern, the potential difficulties of investigating it and the availability of information. You may need to provide more help.

Safecall have the facility to report back to the person who made the original report if the issue was raised anonymously through Safecall then the feedback will be via that route.

Wherever possible, you will be told the final outcome of the investigation.

PART 3 – GUIDANCE SECTION

What can I report?

You should report any concerns that you have about the conduct of our employees, volunteers, councillors, or contractors that may affect the services we provide or the reputation of the Fire Service.

Examples of concerns that may be raised under the procedure are:-

Law Breaking

Unauthorised use of money,

Fraud and corruption,

Bullying or abuse of employees or service users,

Breaches of Service policies including health and safety issues,

Any neglect of duty,

Miscarriages of justice,

Damage to the environment

Sexual or physical abuse

Sexual discrimination

Discrimination or abuse arising from sexual orientation

Racial discrimination

Other unethical conduct

The Fire Service considers that normal management channels are sufficiently open and effective for most concerns to be raised that way. But this will not always be appropriate, or possible, and that is why this procedure has been created. It offers the means to raise concerns you may have about any aspect of service provision, or the conduct of staff or elected Members, or other people acting on behalf of the Service. A concern may arise, for example, from worries about failure to observe standards, procedures, or policies being circumvented, or improper conduct.

The procedure does not cover concerns that are covered by other procedures. For example, an employment problem may well be covered by the Grievance Procedure or Dignity at Work procedure. If you are in doubt as to which is the appropriate procedure, you should consult your Line Manager or Employee Relations Team.

Harassment or Victimisation

You may be put off raising a concern because you are worried about reprisals. If you raise a concern in good faith and genuinely believe it to be well founded, you should have nothing to fear. You will be doing your duty to the Fire Authority and the public. The Authority will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation [including

covert pressure] and will do all it can to protect you. Furthermore, if you happen to be involved in any disciplinary or other procedures, these will be kept quite separate from the investigation or any matter you raise under this procedure.

You will not be penalised in any way where you make an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed after it has been investigated [but a concern that is raised frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain may result in disciplinary action].

You may wish to raise such a concern through the Dignity at Work Policy and procedure (edocs1213).

Confidentiality

The preferred route for raising concerns is through the established, Service Management Procedures. Your concern will be treated in strict confidence, within this Procedure, and everything done to keep your identity secret [if this is what you want]. However, you may have to be a witness at some point if matters are taken further, following investigations. It might then not be possible to keep your identity fully secret.

If you want to raise an issue but feel that you can't use the established Service procedures the Service has an arrangement with Safecall that allows staff to raise concerns anonymously if desired.

Anonymous Allegations

An anonymous concern is likely to carry much less weight than one which is signed; the investigating manager would have to decide whether or not to accept it. This decision would depend on the seriousness of the issue, the credibility of the concern and the likelihood of being able to confirm the allegation in other ways. Signed concerns are always better.

Raising a Concern - Who to Approach

When deciding who it would be best to approach, take into account the type of matter, its seriousness and its sensitivity, and who may be involved. Some examples are given: -

- The manager for your department/watch or their manager.
- Your department Manager or another Service department Manager.
- Internal Audit.

- The Monitoring Officer to the Fire Authority for concerns that have servicewide implication or needs to be raised with someone independent of your work area.
- Safecall – Independent, confidential reporting line for concerns about fraud, theft, damage to equipment, harassment/bullying, or concerns involving your manager that you feel you can't raise through Service procedures.
- The Monitoring Officer if your concern is in relation to a member.

Personal Support

The Service will do all it can to minimise any difficulties which you may have because you have mentioned your concern. As far as possible, you will be offered personal support and this will be arranged by a Senior Employment Advisor. For example, if you had to give evidence in disciplinary or criminal proceedings, full advice about the procedure would be given to you.

If you are not satisfied with the Service`s Response

This procedure is meant to give everyone an effective way to raise a concern within the Service [and if possible, to resolve it internally]. You should not feel that you have to take an issue outside the Service to get satisfaction. But if you are still unhappy after using the procedure [and getting a final response], you are entitled to consider taking your concern elsewhere. If you do this, these are some contacts which are available:

- The Service`s external auditors
- A relevant professional or regulatory body
- Your trade union
- A relevant voluntary organisation
- A Citizens Advice Bureau
- The Police

If you raise the matter outside the Fire Authority, you must take into account the rules about disclosing confidential information.

Involvement of your Trade Union or Professional Association

You may ask your trade union or professional association to raise a matter on your behalf. In this case, if you wish, you can remain anonymous when the concern is first raised. But you may have to be involved personally if the matter goes further.

You may also have your trade union, professional association or a friend at any meeting or interview

Contact Details

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Internal Auditor
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You can obtain the Constitution, which includes contract Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and the Scheme of Delegation on the Intranet under Democratic Services.