



WHISTLE BLOWING

Athena Policies

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1.0 Scope

Manchester Athena (Athena) is a partnership of 16 social housing providers operating in Greater Manchester.

As place-based organisations who are key stakeholders within communities across GM, Athena looks to use the strength and breadth of its partnership to remove barriers to employment for its members customers.

The Whistleblowing policy applies to all elements of Athena' delivery.

2.0 Policy Aims

Key Definitions (as defined by The Department for Business Innovation and Skills):

“Whistleblowing” means; the term used when a worker passes on information concerning wrongdoing: “making a disclosure” or “blowing the whistle”. The wrongdoing will typically (although not necessarily) be something they have witnessed at work.

“Whistleblower” means: An individual who makes a Whistleblowing disclosure.

Whistleblowing is viewed by Athena as a *positive* act that can make a valuable contribution to Athena's business. It is important that our teams feel able to raise concerns. Athena is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service and the highest possible ethical standards in all of its' practices.

It is important to Athena that individuals can raise concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or any form of disadvantage.

This Whistleblowing Policy provides a framework of protection for individuals who disclose information to expose risk, misconduct, malpractice, wrongdoing and matters of similar concern. In short it protects Whistleblowers from victimisation and dismissal.

Therefore, this Policy aims to:

- encourage individuals to feel confident in raising serious concerns at the earliest opportunity and to question and act upon concerns about practice.

- provide avenues for individuals to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.
- ensure that such individuals receive a response to their concerns and that they are made aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied.
- reassure individuals that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have made any disclosure in good faith.

3.0 Principles of the Policy

This Policy is intended to enable those individuals connected with Athena, who become aware of a potential wrongdoing to report their concerns in confidential and supported manner so that any such matter can be objectively and confidentially investigated.

The Whistleblowing Policy sits alongside other Athena policies and is not intended to replace other existing policies or procedures.

If a concern relates to an individual's own treatment as a colleague, it should be raised in accordance with the Athena's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

If a Athena client (those who receive the services of Athena) has a concern about the services provided to them, then any such concerns or issues should be raised in accordance with the Athena Compliments and Complaints Policy.

Any disclosure made by an individual in relation to this Whistleblowing Policy should be made under the process set out in Appendix A.

A Whistleblower is protected by the law via the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This law provides protection for those who voice genuine and legitimate concerns and provide protection for Athena's colleagues and others against false, vexatious, and malicious accusations. Any Whistleblower will not be treated unfairly or be disadvantaged in any way if they make a disclosure.

Under the above Disclosure Act, a worker who makes a disclosure must reasonably believe two things;

1. That they are acting in the public interest.
2. That a worker must reasonably believe that the disclosure tends to show past, present, or likely future wrongdoing.

The categories of wrongdoing referenced above can include (but are not limited to):

- A criminal offence that has been committed or is likely to be committed.
- Non-compliance with company policies which could result in loss to the company.
- Undue favor being granted to another party with whom Athena does business.
- A failure to comply with legal / regulatory obligations.
- A miscarriage of justice.
- Actions which endanger health and safety.
- Actions which could cause damage to the environment.
- Actions which are fraudulent, corrupt or involve potential or suspected bribery (see Anti-Bribery, Corruption and Fraud Policy)
- Bullying of an individual or a bullying culture across a team (or across the organisation) which an individual feels unable to be raised through other channels.
- Concerns about a member of staff's conduct towards vulnerable people (for example, a child or an adult with care and support needs), whilst carrying out their work.
- Information that suggests a colleague, sub-contractor, agency worker or volunteer is unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults.
- Belief that senior managers and the designated safeguarding lead have failed to take appropriate action in response to safeguarding concerns.
- An attempt to cover up any of the above

The process for making a disclosure / whistleblowing is attached at Appendix A to this Policy.

4.0 Responsibilities

All Athena colleagues; Adherence to this policy and law

Line Managers; Ensuring awareness and compliance of colleagues with this policy.

Athena Board: Responsible for overall management / conduct against this policy, review, dissemination and approval of policy.

Appendix A: Whistleblowing Process

1. Principles of Confidential Reporting

1.1 We know that it is never easy to report a concern, particularly one that may relate to fraud, bribery or corruption. However, it is of vital importance to our business that any individual can come forward with any concerns at an early stage and before problems have a chance to become serious. In certain parts of the business, an individual may also have a professional duty to report a concern.

1.2 An individual may invite a work colleague, or trade union representative, to be present during any meeting(s) or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.

1.3 We will support all colleagues who have a legitimate concern and protect them from reprisals or victimisation. If an individual comes forward with a concern, they can be confident that this will not affect their career or enjoyment of their job.

1.4 We will take all reasonable steps to respect and protect an individual's confidentiality. Any individual can raise concerns anonymously. There may be instances where allegations are made relating to the conduct of a colleague, sub-contractor, agency worker or volunteer, in connection with a child, young person or an adult with care and support needs, where it is assessed as necessary that Athena notify the designated Safeguarding Officer of the allegations.

1.5 If anyone tries to discourage an individual from coming forward to express a legitimate concern, this will be treated as a disciplinary offence. Should anyone criticise or victimise an individual after a concern has been expressed, this will also be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure.

2. Disclosure Process:

2.1 Internal Disclosures

2.1.1 If a disclosure is to be made, the individual should, if appropriate, approach their line manager and explain what is causing their concern for the public interest. It is important that (when raising any such disclosure) that an individual should try to capture their concerns in as objective a manner as possible with clear examples of evidence so that the issue can be addressed as efficiently and effectively as possible. If you believe that your line manager or more senior members of staff are the subject of the disclosure, then 2.1.2 should be followed.

2.1.2 In the event that any disclosure by an individual relates to the line manager or senior members of staff, then the disclosure should be made to the Chair of Athena in order to begin the process of investigation. Alternatively, should your concern relate to that person, then the deputy Chair of Athena can be contacted, and they will manage any investigation.

2.1.3 Whilst we would always encourage you to report any concerns internally in the first instance, in addition, or alternatively, in the UK you can also approach Protect, an independent organisation, for confidential and independent advice at: Protect, <https://protect-advice.org.uk/> 020 3117 2520, The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9DA.

2.2 External

Where a disclosure is received by a colleague from an external source, details should be reported immediately to the Chair of Athena as well as an executive director of the business to which the disclosure relates.

3. Athena's Response

3.1 If a colleague makes a disclosure, Athena will investigate it carefully and thoroughly. Only those with a need to know will be notified of the disclosure. However, a high-level report may be produced at the Athena Board level which highlights the areas any disclosure concerns and actions to be taken but not disclosing the details of the discloser unless it is necessary as part of any investigation / action to be taken. We must be fair to our colleagues, but also to any others involved; If an individual is potentially being accused of misconduct, we have to understand their side of the story as well, without disclosing a disclosers details / identity. In any investigation, we will consider and respect any concerns the disclosing party may express regarding their safety or career.

3.2 A referral of a concern will be acknowledged within seven business days, with an indication of how Athena proposes to proceed with the matter and an indicative timescale.

3.3 If it is not possible to complete the initial enquiries within seven business days, then Athena will explain why and what the next steps are.

3.4 If a decision is made not to investigate, then clear reasons will be stated and given to the disclosing party for such.

3.5 If the disclosing party requests it, Athena will, if reasonably possible, let the disclosing party know the results of the investigation and any action that is proposed to be taken by Athena. However, in doing this, Athena must respect the confidentiality of other colleagues as well and ensure that any feedback provided does not breach any law in the jurisdiction the disclosure and investigation regards.

3.6 The action that will be taken by Athena will depend on the nature of the concern and will be dealt with through the Athena disciplinary process.

3.7 Should the investigation concern the actions of a third party related to Athena such as a subcontractor or supply chain partner, then any actions to be taken will be governed by the legal remedies available under their contract and the applicable law in their jurisdiction.

3.8 Where the disclosure requires the engagement of a recognised third party such as the police, then Athena will fully co-operate with their enquiries.

3.9 Concerns or allegations raised, which fall within the scope of established policies or procedures, will be referred for consideration under such.

Any individual who makes a disclosure will be given feedback on the outcome of any investigation conducted, subject to the constraints of Athena's duty of confidentiality to service users and colleagues or any other legal constraints.