

Whistleblowing Policy

The A1 Group are committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. As such an important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the A1 Group to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner.

It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances your manager would be the appropriate person to inform).

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect in 1999 and gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The A1 Group has endorsed the provisions set out below so as to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.

It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the A1 Group nor should it be used to reconsider any matters that have already been addressed under harassment, grievance, and disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside the A1 Group.

The investigating Director should follow these steps:

Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.

- The investigating Director should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible
- The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating Director with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals / bodies.
- The investigating Director will submit their report and recommendations to the HR Consultant who will then make a judgement concerning the validity of the complaint that has been made
- This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to another Director as appropriate. The Director will decide what action to take. If the complaint

is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate A1 Group procedures

- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome
- If appropriate, a copy of the outcomes will be passed to the A1 Group Auditors to enable a review of the procedures. If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating Director, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the HR Consultant
- If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, the A1 Group recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons (such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Audit Commission, or the utility regulators), or, where justified, elsewhere

Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of the A1 Group who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made in:

- 'Good Faith' and
- In the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and
- They make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below)

It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

Confidentiality

The A1 Group will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation.

However, the investigation process could reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of the A1 Group. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

Untrue Allegations

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual.

In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be considered necessary and taken against that individual.

Procedures for Making a Disclosure

Malpractice covers a wide range of concerns. The types of activity that should be disclosed include but are not limited to the following:

- Fraud or corruption
- Unauthorised use of funds
- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Endangering of an individual's health and safety
- A criminal offence
- Failure to follow financial procedures
- Miscarriages of justice
- Deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above

You should raise your concerns with your manager as soon as you suspect malpractice. Remember that the earlier you raise concerns the easier it will be to take action. You (the whistle blower) are a witness to events, not a complainant and so you do not need to wait for proof of malpractice before raising concerns.

When reporting a concern you should provide as much information and detail as possible. In particular you should provide the full names of the people involved or who know about what is happening, including the names of staff or contractors, dates of events and any relevant documentation. This will help the A1 Group to focus its investigation on the main issues quickly.

There may be some cases where it is not appropriate for you to raise concerns with your manager, for example where you suspect your manager already knows about the malpractice and appears to be 'turning a blind eye', or where you suspect your manager may be involved. In those cases, you should report your concerns to your Departmental Director.

On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible to the HR Consultant who has been designated as an independent point of contact under this procedure.

He or she can advise on the implications of the legislation and will also appoint an appropriate Director to investigate the complaint of alleged malpractice.

If it is found that there is evidence of criminal activity then the investigating Director should inform the police. The A1 Group will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder a formal police investigation.

Scope of Policy

This policy is designed to enable employees of A1 Group to raise concerns internally and at a high level and to disclose information, which they individual believe shows malpractice or impropriety. This policy is intended to cover concerns, which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to the use of other procedures e.g. disciplinary. These concerns could include

- Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Criminal activity
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

Timescales

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and / or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations. The investigating Director should ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating Director, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating Director should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.