



Latest Update: Aug. 2025

Date of next review: Aug. 2026

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

Oaks Rise has adopted this policy to enable everyone associated to raise concerns internally and in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, a failure to comply with legal obligations, inappropriate behaviour, unethical conduct or any other relevant concerns. This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, directors and contractors, paid and unpaid, working on behalf of Oak Rise. From hereon in, such individuals are referred to as associates.

All associates working on behalf of Oak Rise must acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern, including low-level concerns, to the attention of the Directors and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult, this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

Oaks Rise is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity and expects all directly associated to maintain high standards. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

2. Aims

Oaks Rise's policy on whistleblowing is intended to demonstrate that it:

- will not tolerate malpractice;
- encourages associates to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated, as appropriate;
- encourages a culture of safety and of raising concerns;
- encourages a culture of valuing staff, volunteers, directors and contractors, and of reflective practice;
- respects the confidentiality of any associate raising concerns and will provide procedures to maintain confidentiality so far as is consistent with progressing the issues effectively;
- will provide the opportunity to raise concerns outside of the normal line management structure where this is appropriate;



- will only invoke Oaks Rise's disciplinary procedure in the case of false, malicious, vexatious or frivolous allegations. The policy seeks to reassure staff that they can raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisal, even if they turn out to be mistaken;
- will provide a clear and simple procedure for raising concerns, which is accessible to all formally associated with Oaks Rise.

This procedure is separate from the Oaks Rise procedures regarding staff grievances. Individuals should not use the whistleblowing procedure to raise concerns relating to their own personal circumstances, such as the way they have been treated at work.

This procedure is to enable all associated with Oaks Rise to express a legitimate concern regarding suspected malpractice. Malpractice is not easily defined; however, it includes allegations of fraud, financial irregularities, corruption, bribery, dishonesty, acting contrary to the staff code of conduct, criminal activities, failing to comply with a legal obligation, a miscarriage of justice, creating or ignoring a serious risk to health, safety or the environment (negligence).

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to suspected malpractice within Oaks Rise. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected malpractice affecting any activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this procedure.

If staff and volunteers feel unable to raise an issue with the directors of Oaks Rise or feel that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, they may report their concerns in the first instance to the Oaks Rise HR Advisor who may be reached at: Admin@oakrise.org or alternatively to other whistleblowing channels, such as:

- Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity, previously known as Public Concern at Work (helpline: 020 3117 2502, email: whistle@protect-advice.org.uk, website: www.pcaaw.co.uk).
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline (tel: 0800 028 0285 or email: help@nspcc.org.uk).

3. Confidentiality

We hope that all persons associated with Oaks Rise will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this procedure. However, if you wish to raise a concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know your identity, this will be discussed with you. If there is evidence of criminal activity then the Police will be informed. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if allegations are made anonymously. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should discuss this with a Director of Oaks Rise or if preferred, with the Oaks Rise HR Advisor (at Admin@oakrise.org) and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any



doubt you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are set out above.

4. Raising a whistleblowing concern

We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with an Oaks Rise Director. If you are not comfortable with this you may raise a concern with the Oaks Rise HR Advisor (Admin@Oaksrise.org). You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if preferred. They may be able to suggest a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. If you feel that this has not been satisfactorily resolved, a meeting will be arranged with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this procedure. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information as the concerns raised are investigated. Any concern raised will be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner, and appropriate corrective action will be pursued. You will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. Whenever possible and subject to third party rights, you will be informed of the resolution. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential. If you are not satisfied that your concern is being properly dealt with, you can follow the external procedure below.

5. External Procedures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in Oaks Rise. In most cases, we hope you should not find it necessary to escalate externally. However, where all internal procedures have been exhausted, any staff, director or volunteer shall have a right of access to an external person/body. This may include (depending on the subject matter of the disclosure) HMRC, the Audit Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where the disclosure relates to a child protection issue. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate for you to alert the media.

It should be noted that under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, there are circumstances where a member of staff may be entitled to raise a concern directly with an external body where the individual reasonably believes;

- that exceptionally serious circumstances justify it;
- that Oaks Rise would conceal or destroy relevant evidence;
- where they believe they would be victimised by Oaks Rise;
- where the Secretary of State has ordered it.

We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external.



The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect (see above), operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

6. Malicious Accusations

False, malicious, vexatious or frivolous accusations will be dealt with under Oaks Rise's Disciplinary Procedure.

7. Protection from Reprisal or Victimisation

It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We encourage openness and will support staff and associates who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken. No member of staff or other associates will suffer a detriment or be disciplined for raising a genuine and legitimate concern, providing that they do so in good faith and following the Whistleblowing procedures. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform a Director or HR Advisor immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you may raise it formally using Oaks Rise's Grievance Procedure. You must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. If you are involved in such conduct you may be subject to disciplinary action.