Whistleblowing Policy

Title	BTC Trust Whistleblowing Policy
Created	March 2020
To be reviewed	April 2028
Version	1. New policy 2. Updates to clarify procedure and support available to individuals. 3. Updated to reflect current whistleblowing legislation and best practice, including removal of "good faith" wording, strengthened protections from detriment, and clearer guidance on raising concerns (including sexual harassment and external disclosures).
Associated Policies	BTC Trust Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy BTC Trust Staff Code of Conduct BTC Trust Conflict Resolution Procedural Guidance BTC Trust Managing Allegations Against Staff Academy Behaviour Policy Academy Anti-Bullying Policy Academy E-Safety and Online Policy SEN Policy
Originator	BTC Trust

Signature of Andy Berry **On behalf of sponsor**		Date 18/06/2026
Signature of Mark Thomas **On behalf of BTC Trust**		 18/06/2026

Review by Audit Committee Approval Date	18th June 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (Trust) is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity, transparency and accountability In line with that commitment, staff and others with serious concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work are encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy document sets out how the Trust will create an environment where staff feel safe and are encouraged to raise serious concerns internally in the knowledge that these will be taken seriously and without fear of reprisals.

1.2 The Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended) provides legal protection for workers who make a qualifying disclosure in the public interest. This includes protection from dismissal and from any form of detriment as a result of raising a concern. This policy builds on the provisions of the Act. Furthermore, all individuals working for or within the Trust have a personal responsibility to raise serious concerns.

1.3 The Trustees of Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust will have responsibility for ensuring the policy is effective and to respond to staff concerns.

1.4 The Trust actively promotes a culture of openness and speaking up. All concerns raised will be taken seriously and considered in line with this policy.

2. Aims and scope of the policy

2.1 This policy aims to:

- Set out the how concerns will be addressed so that all employees feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- Set out the appropriate avenues to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken. Clarify how feedback about a concern raised will be shared with the individual who raised it, and how to pursue the complaint if not satisfied.
- Reassure employees that they will be protected from possible reprisals, detriment or victimisation where they have a reasonable belief that the information disclosed shows wrongdoing and that the disclosure is in the public interest.

2.2 This policy applies to all staff/employees (contracted and non-contracted), all volunteers, agency staff, trainees, peripatetic staff, visitors, some contractors, workers, governors and trustees of the Trust.

2.3 All staff have the right to raise concerns, which could be about the actions of other staff (contracted and non-contracted) contractors, governors, volunteers or outside agencies.

2.4 There are existing procedures in place) which make provision for you to raise a concern relating to your own employment. These are detailed in the Conflict Resolution Procedural Guidance which is available on the Trust website. This policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of that procedure. These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or breach of the law
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice

- Health and safety risks, including actions likely to cause physical danger to any person or to give to a risk of significant damage to property
- Damage to the environment
- The unauthorised use of public funds
- Possible fraud and corruption
- Sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature, other unethical conduct
- Failure to take reasonable steps to report and rectify a situation which is likely to give rise to a significant, avoidable cost or loss of income to the Trust or would otherwise seriously prejudice the Trust
- Abuse of power or the use of the Trust powers and authority for any unauthorised purpose

This policy is intended for concerns that are in the public interest and relate to wrongdoing affecting others or the wider organisation. Concerns relating solely to an individual's own employment should normally be raised through the Trust's Conflict Resolution (Grievance) procedures. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list but it is intended to illustrate the range of issues which might be raised under this Policy.

2.5 Any serious concerns which staff have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of staff or trustees of the Trust (or others acting on behalf of the Trust) can be reported under this whistleblowing policy. This may be something that:

- Causes discomfort in terms of known standards, experience or the standards to which the Trust subscribes to; or
- Is against Standing Order and Trust or Academy Policies; or
- Falls below established standards of practice; or
- Amounts to improper conduct

2.6 Guidance on the standards expected of individuals working in or for the Trust are set out in it's policies, for example:

- Staff Code of conduct
- Disciplinary procedure
- Conflict Resolution procedure
- Managing Staff Allegations policy

2.7 Before initiating the procedure staff should consider the following:

- The responsibility for expressing concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour rests with all staff
- Staff should use line manager or team meetings and other opportunities to raise questions, share feedback and learning as well as seek clarification on issues which are of day-to-day concern
- Whilst it can be difficult to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of a colleague, staff must act to prevent an escalation of the problem and to prevent themselves being potentially implicated.

3. Protections under this policy

3.1 <u>Harassment or Victimisation</u>

As a Trust, we are unequivocally committed to fostering a working environment that is free from harassment and victimisation. We also recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal or detriment from those responsible for the acts of victimisation or harassment. Acts of harassment or victimisation are strictly prohibited, and we will take action to protect staff when they raise a concern in good faith. This does not mean that if a member of staff is already the subject of internal procedures such as disciplinary or redundancy, that those procedures will automatically be halted as a result of that staff member raising a concern under the whistleblowing policy.

3.2 Confidentiality

Maintaining the confidentiality of employees who have raised concerns is a cornerstone of this whistleblowing policy. We recognise the sensitivity of the information provided in a whistleblowing case and are dedicated to protecting privacy through the reporting and investigation process. Where the concerns raised need to be addressed through another procedure, e.g. disciplinary procedures, you may be asked to provide further information to other managers within the Trust. All disclosed information will be handled discreetly and shared only with those directly involved in the investigation. Breaches of confidentiality will be treated with the utmost seriousness and may result in disciplinary action. In rare cases (such as concerns about potential criminal activity) the Trust may have to disclose the identity of the employee without their consent, although this will be discussed with the employee first.

3.3 Anonymous Allegations

Employees are encouraged to put their name to an allegation. Anonymous concerns can be more difficult to investigate; however, they will be taken seriously and considered based on the information provided. In exercising the discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

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

3.4 Untrue Allegations

If an individual raises a concern with a reasonable belief that it is true, but it is not substantiated by investigation, no action will be taken against them. Where there is clear evidence that an individual has knowingly made a false or malicious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken.

3.5 Unfounded Allegations

Following investigation, allegations may be confirmed as unfounded. This outcome will be notified to the employee who raised the concern, who will be informed that the Trustees deem the matter to be concluded and that it should not be raised again unless new evidence becomes available.

3.6 Support for employees

It is recognised that raising concerns can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support will be made available, as appropriate to both the employee(s) raising the concerns and the employee(s) subject to investigation.

4. How to raise a concern

4.1 As a first step, an employee should normally raise concerns with their first or second line manager. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues and who is involved. For example, if an employee believes that their first- or second-line manager is involved, they should approach the Headteacher, Head of People or Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

An employee (including the Headteacher and members of the leadership team) can by-pass their line managers and the CEO or Trustees if they feel the overall management of an Academy is engaged in an improper course of action. In this case, please refer to Raising Concerns out of the Trust below.

4.2 Concerns can be raised in any format; however, concerns are better raised in writing to avoid any misinterpretation. The individual should set out the background and history of the concerns, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reasons why they are particularly concerned about the situation. If an employee does not feel able to put the concern in writing, they should telephone or meet the appropriate person. It is important that, however the concern is raised, the employee makes it clear that they are raising the issue via the whistleblowing procedure. Individuals do not need to prove wrongdoing but must have a reasonable belief that the concern relates to a qualifying disclosure in the public interest.

4.3 The action taken by the Trust will depend on the nature of the concern:

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- Be investigated by the Chair of the Audit Committee or other senior leader within the Trust
- Be referred to the police
- Be referred to an external auditor
- Form the subject of an independent inquiry
- Be dealt with under a more appropriate Trust procedure

4.4 In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and if so what form it should take. The overriding principle which the Trust will have in mind is the *public interest.* Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues or financial irregularities) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

4.5 The amount of contact between the people considering the issues and the employee will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from the individual(s) raising the concern.

4.6 The Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties experienced by an individual as a result of raising a concern. For example, if the individual is required to give evidence, BTCT will arrange for advice to be given about the procedure.

5. The process for dealing with concerns

5.1 All investigations will be conducted sensitively, as quickly as possible, and under this procedure. The investigation should be concluded within three months of the matter being raised, though some scenarios may result in a longer timeframe. While the Trust cannot guarantee that the outcome will be as the individual may wish, the matter will be handled fairly and in accordance with this policy.

5.2 Once line management or another appropriate person has been approached about a concern they must inform their Headteacher or a member of the Trust Executive Leadership Team immediately of the concern, maintaining confidentiality if this has been requested by the individual who raised the matter.

5.3 In the case of an anonymous concern, a decision will be made as to whether it is possible to take any further action. When making this decision, senior leaders should take the following factors into account:

- the seriousness of the issue(s) raised;
- the credibility of the concern(s) and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation(s) from attributable sources

5.4 The Headteacher/Executive Leadership Team member must report all whistleblowing concerns to the Chair of the Audit Committee, the CEO and the Head of People and OD, even if it is identified that the matter should be managed under a different policy or appears to have no substantive basis.

5.5 Once a concern has been raised by an individual with their line manager, a meeting may be arranged with them to gather further details that will inform determine how the concern should be taken forward. A representative from the People team should be present at this meeting and the individual will be advised:

- who their concern will be shared with internally for purposes of making a decision on response.
- how they will be updated during and at the end of the process; and that a written response will be sent out within ten working days of the conclusion of any investigation.
- that their identity will be protected as far as possible but should the investigation into the concern require the employee to be named as the source of information, that this will be discussed with the employee before their name is disclosed.
- That the Board of Trustees will do all that it can to protect the employee from discrimination and/or victimisation;
- That if the employee's concern, though raised in good faith, is not confirmed by the investigation, no punitive action will be taken against them.

5.6 If a meeting is arranged, the employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative or a colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates. If the employee prefers, the meeting can be conducted over the telephone or Microsoft Teams rather than face to face. Notes will be taken at this meeting to ensure that there is an accurate record of concerns and to inform decision making on next steps.

5.7 Once the Chair of the Audit Committee has been approached about a matter of concern, they will formally acknowledge receipt of the concern within five working days to either the line manager, the Headteacher/Executive Leadership Team member or direct to the employee, depending upon who referred the concern to them originally. Within 10 working days they will also confirm in writing:

- how it is proposed to deal with the matter;
- Whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- whether further investigations will take place, or if not deemed appropriate, why this decision has been made;
- an estimate of how long it might take to provide a final response;
- what support can be offered to the individual raising the concern.

5.8 The Chair of the Audit Committee will discuss the concern with the CEO and Head of People and OD. A decision will be made on whether the concern should be investigated internally under this policy or the Grievance, Disciplinary or another policy, as appropriate. It may also be decided that the matter should:

- be referred to the Police, and/or
- be referred to the external auditor, and/or
- be the subject of an independent inquiry; or
- have no further action taken.

5.9 Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for formal investigation. If urgent action is required, this may be taken before any investigation is conducted.

5.10 The Trust may decide that no further action will be taken under this policy in the following (not exhaustive) set of circumstances:

- if, after investigation, there is no evidence that malpractice within the meaning of this procedure has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
- if the matter concerned is already the subject of legal proceedings, or has already been referred to the police or other public authority;
- if the matter is already, has already been, or should be, the subject of proceedings under one of the other Trust procedures.

5.11 The Trust will provide regular and proportionate updates to the individual raising the concern, taking into account the nature of the investigation and any confidentiality constraints.. At the conclusion of the process, the individual will be informed that the matter has been addressed and, where appropriate, provided with a summary of the outcome.

5.12 Once the investigation has concluded, the individual will receive an explanation about how the matter has been addressed. If there are legal constraints, e.g. in a criminal investigation, the individual will receive sufficient information about the outcome of any investigation to enable them to be informed that the concern has been dealt with. If no further action is proposed the Chair of the Audit Committee will inform the reasons for this in writing to the individual who has raised the concern. The Trust will consider any lessons learned from whistleblowing concerns and, where appropriate, take action to improve practices, systems or controls.

5.13 If the investigation is not completed within three months or in the time originally estimated for the investigation, the investigating manager or other appropriate senior leader will provide regular updates as agreed with the individual.

5.14 Throughout any investigation, the employee will still be expected to continue their duties/role as normal unless deemed inappropriate.

6. Raising a concern outside of the Trust

6.1 This whistleblowing policy is intended to provide employees with a procedure for raising concerns and resolving these within the Trust. However, we recognise the role of external scrutiny in upholding accountability and ethical standards. If an employee is not satisfied with the Trust response, they will be made aware how they can raise the matter externally. The following list are suggested routes that individuals may wish to pursue if they choose to raise their concerns externally after the internal processes have been exhausted:

- Protect is a registered charity that employees can contact for advice to assist them in raising concerns about poor practice at work. The charity also provides advice to employers as to the possible ways to address these concerns. They can be reached by phone at 020 3117 2520 or the other contact options listed on their website (protect-advice.org.uk)
- The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline is available for all staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally. Staff can call: 0800 028 0285 line is available from 8.00am to 8.00pm. Monday to Friday and email: help@nspcc.org.uk
- Their Trade Union
- The Trust External Auditor
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- A solicitor

A "Prescribed Person" (as defined by legislation), such as the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted, or the Health and Safety Executive.

6.2 If the individual chooses to take the matter outside of the Trust, they should ensure that they do not misuse confidential or sensitive information. Any of the bodies listed above should be able to provide advice on this point and failure to manage Trust information in line with relevant legislation may result in disciplinary action.

6.3 The provisions within this policy as well as the legislation relevant in whistleblowing cases, provide protection for individuals who raise concerns internally. We recognise that there may be circumstances where individuals feel the need to bring their concerns to the attention of the media (newspapers, TV, radio, social media, etc.). We emphasise the significance of exhausting internal avenues to address concerns first and employees who raise concerns with the media may not be protected by the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act unless specific legal conditions are met.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The CEO will be responsible for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. Anonymised data on whistleblowing concerns, themes and outcomes will be reported to the Audit Committee to support oversight and organisational learning.

CEO