

Charles Dickens Museum

Whistleblowing Policy

The Charles Dickens Museum Limited acting as the sole trustee of The Dickens House and the Dickens House Fund.

This Policy was reviewed by the Board in March 2025.

1. What is 'whistleblowing'?

Whistleblowing occurs when an individual raises concerns about a workplace danger or illegality that affects others. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 is the key piece of UK legislation protecting individuals who 'blow the whistle' in the public interest. Examples of wrongdoing that may lead to whistleblowing include:

- a criminal offence, e.g. fraud or theft;
- the breach of a legal obligation;
- someone's health and safety is in serious danger;
- risk or actual damage to the environment;
- alleged miscarriage of justice;
- unethical conduct, e.g. unauthorised use of funds;
- a deliberate attempt to conceal any of the above.

2. Complaints that don't count as whistleblowing

Personal grievances (e.g. bullying, harassment, discrimination) are not covered by whistleblowing legislation. Personal grievances are covered by the Museum's Grievance Procedure, which is outlined in the Staff Handbook.

3. Policy

The Whistleblowing Policy sets out the framework for dealing with allegations of illegal and improper conduct. This policy applies to all Museum employees, volunteers, work experience placements, interns and contractors.

The Museum is committed to the highest standards of transparency, probity, integrity and accountability.

This policy is intended to provide a means of making serious allegations about standards, conduct, financial irregularity or possible unlawful action in a way that will ensure confidentiality and protect those making such allegations in the reasonable belief that it is in the public interest to do so from being victimised, discriminated against or disadvantaged.

This policy does not replace other policies and procedures such as the complaints and grievance procedures and other specifically laid down statutory reporting procedures.

4. Reporting

The Museum recognises that the decision to make an allegation can be a difficult one to make. However, whistle-blowers who make serious allegations in the reasonable belief that it is in the public interest to do so have nothing to fear because they are doing their duty either to the Museum and/or to those for whom the Museum, or they, are providing a service.

The Museum will take appropriate action to protect a whistle-blower who makes a serious allegation in the reasonable belief that it is in the public interest to do so from any reprisals, harassment or victimisation.

5. Confidentiality

All allegations will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal a whistle-blower's identity unless the whistle-blower otherwise requests. However, if the matter is subsequently dealt with through other Museum procedures such as the disciplinary procedure. Similarly, if the allegation results in court proceedings, then the whistle-blower may have to give evidence in open court if the case is to be successful. The Museum will not, without the whistle-blower's consent, disclose the identity of a whistle-blower to anyone other than a person involved in the investigation/allegation.

6. Anonymous Allegations

This procedure encourages whistle-blowers to put their name to an allegation wherever possible as anonymous allegations may often be difficult to substantiate/prove. Allegations made anonymously are much less powerful but anonymous allegations will be considered at the discretion of the Director or Board as appropriate.

In exercising discretion to accept an anonymous allegation, the factors to be taken into account:

- the seriousness of the issue raised;
- the credibility of the allegation; and
- whether the allegation can realistically be investigated from factors or sources other than the complainant.

7. Untrue Allegations

No disciplinary or other action will be taken against a whistle-blower who makes an allegation in the reasonable belief that it is in the public interest to do so even if the allegation is not substantiated by an investigation. However, disciplinary action may be taken against a whistle-blower who makes an allegation without reasonable foundation and belief that it is in the public interest to do so (e.g. making an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain where there is no element of public interest).

8. Procedure for Making an Allegation

It is preferable for allegations to be made to an employee's immediate manager to whom they report. However, this may depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if the whistle-blower believes that management is involved it would be inappropriate to raise it directly with them. The whistle-blower may then make an allegation direct to any of the following:

- Museum Director
- Chair of the Board

If either of the above receives an allegation s/he will consider the allegation and may discuss with either the Museum Director or other Board members. The line manager (or either/or both of the above), after consideration, will discuss with the whistle-blower, and if they wish to proceed with the allegation, it will be investigated.

9. Allegation

Whether a written or oral report is made it is important that relevant information is provided including:

- The name of the person making the allegation and a contact point;
- The background and history of the allegation (giving relevant dates and names and positions of those who may be in a position to have contributed to the allegation);
- The specific reason for the allegation. Although someone making an allegation will not be expected to prove the truth of any allegations, they will need to provide information to the person they have reported to, to establish that there are reasonable grounds for the allegation.

Someone making an allegation may be accompanied by another person of their choosing during any meetings or interviews in connection with the allegation. However, if the matter is subsequently dealt with through another procedure the right to be accompanied will at that stage be in accordance with the relevant procedure.

Action on receipt of an Allegation: the line manager will record details of the allegation gathering as much information as possible, (within 5 working days of receipt of the allegation) including:

- The record of the allegation;
- The acknowledgement of the allegation;
- Any documents supplied by the whistle-blower.

The investigator will ask the whistle-blower for his/her preferred means of communication and contact details and use these for all communications with the whistle-blower in order to preserve confidentiality.

If the allegation relates to fraud, potential fraud or other financial irregularity, the Chair of the Board will be informed within 5 working days of receipt of the allegation. The Chair will determine whether the allegation should be investigated and the method of investigation.

If the allegation discloses evidence of a criminal offence it will immediately be reported to the Board and a decision will be made as to whether to inform the Police. If the allegation concerns suspected harm to children or vulnerable adults, the appropriate authorities will be informed immediately.

10. Timetable

- An acknowledgement of the allegation in writing within 10 working days with
 - An indication of how the Museum proposes to deal with the matter
 - An estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
 - An indication of whether any initial enquiries have been made
 - Information on whistle-blower support mechanisms
 - Indication whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

Where the allegation has been made internally and anonymously, obviously the Museum will be unable to communicate what action has been taken.

11. Support

The Museum will take steps to minimise any difficulties which may be experienced as a result of making an allegation. For instance, if a whistle-blower is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings the Museum will arrange for them to receive advice about the procedure and advise on the support mechanisms that are available. The Museum accepts that whistle-blowers need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, it will inform those making allegations of the outcome of any investigation.

12. Responsibility for the Procedure

The Museum Director and Chair of the Board have overall responsibility for the operation of this Procedure and for determining the administrative processes to be followed and the format of the records to be kept.

13. Monitoring

A Register will record the following details:

- The name and status (e.g. employee) of the whistle-blower;
- The date on which the allegation was received;
- The nature of the allegation;
- Details of the person who received the allegation;
- Whether the allegation is to be investigated and, if yes, by whom;
- The outcome of the investigation;
- Any other relevant details.

The Register will be confidential and only available for inspection by the Board.

The Museum Director will report annually to the Board on the operation of the policy and on any whistleblowing allegations made during the period covered by the report.