

Whistleblowing Policy

1. Introduction

CoST, the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative, is a registered charity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. As such, CoST has a responsibility to ensure compliance with the UK regulations, including safeguarding and other related matters. This document is part of CoST's safeguarding framework. The other documents in this framework are:

- Code of conduct
- Complaints procedure
- Safeguarding policy
- Safeguarding procedure and
- Anti-trafficking policy and plan

2. Policy statement

At CoST, it is vital that everyone who works for our partners or us maintains the highest standards of conduct, integrity and ethics, and complies with local legislation. This includes all CoST Board members, all CoST International Secretariat staff, contractors (associated personnel), and sub-grantees (delivery partners).

If an associated person has any genuine concerns about malpractice in a CoST-related environment, this policy encourages them to voice them responsibly and effectively, without fear of reprisals, and with the knowledge that they will be protected from victimisation and dismissal.

We would also encourage CoST Members, specifically the host organisation and the Multi-Stakeholder Group, to develop a whistleblowing policy that reflects their local legal and regulatory environment and, where relevant, to draw on it.

3. Purpose

This policy shows CoST's commitment to listening to the concerns of its associated personnel and recognises that where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within CoST, then this information should be disclosed internally, independently of line management, in the form of 'Whistleblowing'.

This policy does not form part of any terms and conditions of contract and may be subject to change at the discretion of management, as it aims to create an open, transparent, and safe environment where employees feel able to speak up.

4. Scope

The UK Employment Rights Act 1996, amended by the 1999 Public Interest Disclosure Act, provides legal protection to employees against dismissal or penalisation by their employers for publicly disclosing certain serious concerns, so no one should feel disadvantaged for raising legitimate concerns. To be covered by law, an individual making a disclosure must reasonably believe that they are acting in the public interest (thus, personal grievances and complaints are not usually covered by whistleblowing law) and that the disclosure shows past, present, or likely future wrongdoing. These could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Financial wrongdoing, including theft, bribery, fraud, money laundering and aid diversion

- A failure to comply with any legal obligations
- Abuse of position
- Personal abuse, exploitation, violence, and/or harassment (including when these are sexual in nature) or neglect against members of the affected community.
- Personal abuse, exploitation, violence, and/or harassment (including when these are sexual in nature) in the workplace against another staff member or associate.
- Breach of CoST security policy
- Danger to the health and safety of individuals
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Activity which would bring the organisation into serious disrepute
- The deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the matters listed above

5. Procedures for Whistleblowing

5.1 Communication

The communication of the whistleblowing procedure is integral to the procedure itself and reflects CoST's commitment to its values. Please note that there are specific procedures for managing safeguarding incidents.

5.2 Who to alert

The individual wishing to voice a grievance should raise concerns to the appropriate person. This would usually be to the Safeguarding Lead unless:

- The complaint of malpractice is against the CoST Member manager or is in any way related to the actions of the CoST Member manager; the complaint should be passed to the Chair of the CoST Member Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG).
- The complaint of malpractice is against the CoST Member MSG or is in any way related to the actions of the MSG; the complaint should be passed to the regional manager for referral.
- If the complaint of malpractice is against the Safeguarding Lead or is in any way related to the actions of this individual, the complaint should be passed to the CoST International Executive Director for referral.
- If the complaint of malpractice is against the actions of the Executive Director, concerns should be raised with the Chair of the CoST Board of Trustees.
- If the complaint of malpractice concerns the actions of the Chair, it should be raised with the Safeguarding Trustee.

The accusations will then be investigated by the person (the investigator) to whom the information has been disclosed.

CoST recognises that the responsibility for reporting serious incidents rests with the charity's trustees. In practice, this may be delegated to someone else within the charity; all trustees hold ultimate responsibility for ensuring their charity makes a report and does so in a timely manner. Consequently, as soon as a disclosure is made, the appropriate trustee will be notified. It is then the trustees' responsibility to report any incident to the Charity Commission, as the Commission's regulatory role is to ensure that the CoST manages the incident responsibly, taking steps to limit its immediate impact and, where possible, prevent it from happening again. A trustee can refer to the government guidelines on whistleblowing procedure for trustees [here](#).

It can be reported as a serious incident at: RSI@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk

5.3 Investigating Procedure

The investigator should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained through a meeting with the whistleblower.
- An investigator or investigation team should be appointed. This must include at least one senior member of staff who is not implicated in the allegations. If necessary, this could involve an external commercial agent to investigate the disclosure.
- The investigator 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 these procedures.
- The investigator should consider the involvement of the auditors and the Police at this stage and should consult with the Executive Director and Trustees (if appropriate). The Charity Commission and the relevant and appropriate funding partners should be contacted. The investigator should also consider informing the appropriate funding partners of the incident and allegations raised.
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigator with the assistance, where appropriate, of other individuals/bodies.
- A judgment concerning the complaint and the validity of the complaint will be made by the investigator. 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 the Executive Director/Chair, whoever is most appropriate.
- The Executive Director/Chair will decide what action to take. If the complaint is found justified, they will invoke disciplinary or other appropriate procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly addressed by the investigator, they have the right to raise it in confidence with another designated person, as described above.

If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, CoST recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed regulators, such as the Charity Commission. It should be noted that CoST will inform the Charity Commission and the relevant and appropriate funding partners when the disclosure is made, but the whistleblower may also choose to notify them themselves.

If a whistleblower believes they have been treated unfairly for blowing the whistle, they may decide to take their case to an employment tribunal. The process for this would involve attempted resolution through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) early conciliation service.

5.4 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 set precise timescales for such investigations. The investigator should, as soon as practicable, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing on the outcome of the investigation, the timescale for action, and the proposed action. CoST is committed to responding within a fortnight of the disclosure being raised to the appropriate person.

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

5.5 Feedback

The response the whistleblower receives will include feedback on the steps the organisation will take. Whilst it remains with CoST to determine whether the matter has been resolved, it is also CoST's responsibility to communicate clearly and promptly with the whistleblower regarding the disclosure and any and all actions taken. CoST appreciates that feedback is vital so that whistleblowers understand how their disclosure has been handled and to improve communication between the organisation and the whistleblower.

5.6 Monitoring

CoST will keep records of the number of whistleblowing disclosures we receive and of their nature. Records will be maintained of the date and content of feedback provided to whistleblowers.

6. Protection

This policy is designed to protect individuals who disclose such concerns, provided the disclosure is made in good faith and follows the correct procedures. It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose *not* to follow the procedure and make malicious or false allegations.

7. Confidentiality

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

8. Evidence

No evidence is required from the whistleblower for CoST to look into the concerns raised.

9. Anonymous allegations

If the individual wishing to voice a concern would like to remain anonymous, then they should detail this in writing, addressed to the appropriate person marked 'Private and Confidential- to be opened by addressee only'

However, this policy encourages individuals to put their names to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but may be considered at CoST's discretion. It should be noted that anonymous whistleblowers will ordinarily not receive feedback, and any action taken in response to a disclosure may be limited.

10. 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 taken against that individual.

11. Grievances

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 CoST

nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, disciplinary or other procedures. Personal grievances and complaints are not covered by whistleblowing law and should be treated under the internal Grievance Procedures or Complaints Policy.

12. Culture

CoST recognises that although this policy establishes good practice and reflects an internal commitment to accountability and transparency, this must also be demonstrated elsewhere. For this reason, CoST is committed to the following statements:

- CoST recognises that associated personnel, including board members, staff, contractors, and sub-grantees, are valuable ears and eyes.
- CoST assures its board members, staff, contractors, and sub-grantees that there will be no reprisal as a result of making a disclosure.
- CoST assures its board members, staff, contractors, and sub-grantees that action will be taken if a disclosure is made.
- CoST is committed to treating all disclosures fairly and equally.
- It is within CoST's best interests to deal with whistleblowing disclosures when they are first raised by staff, contractors, or sub-grantees¹.
- Whistleblowing is an important source of information that allows managers to make better-informed decisions and control risk.
- Victimisation of a whistleblower is not acceptable. Any instances of victimisation will be taken seriously and managed appropriately.

13. Training and support

CoST is responsible for implementing training, mentoring, advice and other support systems so that its associated personnel are comfortable, confident and aware of their ability to make a disclosure.

During the whistleblowing period, support will be provided to staff, contractors, suppliers, and associated partners through access to mentoring, advice, and counselling (where appropriate).

14. Prescribe person

Where a whistleblower feels unable to make a disclosure to CoST management or to the board of trustees, there is a list of prescribed persons to whom an individual may make a disclosure without losing their rights under whistleblowing law. A complete list of prescribed persons can be found [here](#).

If an individual chooses to go to the media, they can expect, in most cases, to lose their whistleblowing law rights.

This Policy will be reviewed every five years by the Board.

Approval date	Changes made	Review date
24/11/2025	Adapting the content using recommended good practice	07/05/2025

¹

Annex: Glossary of Terms

Safeguarding

In the UK, safeguarding means protecting people's health, well-being, and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.²

Safeguarding means taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from occurring; to protect people, especially vulnerable adults, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.

Misconduct

Include those that are not of a physical, emotional or sexual nature – such as fraud, corruption, or abuse of alcohol and drugs during working hours.

Code of conduct

Sets out the conduct expected of associated personnel. Associated partners include, but are not limited to, the following: CoST Member host organisation staff, partners, MSG Members, volunteers, and programme visitors, including academics, journalists, and public officials.

Whistleblowing policy

This policy outlines CoST's commitment to non-retaliation against individuals who report malpractice and the procedures for investigating such reports.

Complaints policy

This policy sets out CoST's commitment to receive and respond to complaints.

Procedures for response to safeguarding concerns

This is a set of procedures outlining how to handle reports of breaches of the CoST safeguarding policy.

² NHS 'What is Safeguarding? Easy Read' 2011