



Report Title	Freedom to Speak Up Report
Author	Sam Bentley – Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Kirsty Holt – Freedom to Speak Up Guardian David O’Brien, Director of Corporate Services and Company Secretary
Accountable Director	Peter Reading – Chief Executive Officer
Previous committees/groups	People and Culture Group People Committee
Recommended action(s) (assurance, approval, information)	Information/Assurance
Purpose of the paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide an overview of the progress of the FTSU function</li> <li>To report on themes arising from the concerns received by the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians</li> <li>To set out next steps for FTSU.</li> </ul>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	
<p>The Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) service continues to strengthen across YAS, with 114 concerns raised between April 25 and March 26.</p> <p>Most concerns related to worker safety and wellbeing, with further themes around behaviours, culture, and a smaller number relating to patient safety/quality.</p> <p>Although reports of detriment and anonymous cases remained low, these still require scrutiny as we have seen more than double the number of anonymous concerns in 2025/26 compared to 2024/25.</p> <p>The themes identified are informing targeted improvement actions.</p> <p>Preparations are underway for the transition of national FTSU oversight to NHS England.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note the progress and developments in the FTSU function</li> <li>Take assurance from the actions underway to strengthen the speaking up culture</li> <li>Support the next steps for FTSU.</li> </ul>
Link to Board Assurance Framework Risks (board and level 2 committees only)	6. Develop and sustain an open and positive workplace culture.

# Freedom To Speak Up Report

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides an update to the Board regarding Freedom To Speak Up (FTSU).

1.2 The paper:

- Provides an overview of the progress of the FTSU function.
- Reports on themes arising from the concerns received by the FTSU Guardians.
- Sets out the next steps for FTSU.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Raising concerns is vital not only for patient safety but also for staff wellbeing. The Trust remains committed to fostering a culture of openness, accountability, and high standards of care. Staff can speak up through multiple channels including line management, Human Resources, Datix, Staff Side representatives, the 'Ask Peter' engagement channel, and via the FTSU Guardians.

2.2 The development of Freedom To Speak Up in the NHS, led by the National Guardian's Office and supported by local Freedom To Speak Up Guardians in each trust, was initiated in response to recommendations made in Sir Robert Francis QC's report "The Freedom to Speak Up"(2015). This review was a follow-up to the public inquiry, also led by Sir Robert, on failings in care at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. The Freedom to Speak Up review found that NHS culture did not always encourage or support staff to speak up about events they witnessed and concerns they harboured, and that patients and staff could suffer as a result.

2.2 The Trust currently has two FTSU Guardians (1.8 whole time equivalents), supported by a network of FTSU Ambassadors embedded in departments around the Trust.

2.3 The Chief Executive is the Trust's designated Executive Lead for FTSU. Although the FTSU Guardians are line-managed by the Director of Corporate Services and Company Secretary, they have direct access to the Chief Executive for any FTSU matters.

2.4 The Board of Directors has a designated Non-Executive Director Lead for FTSU. This is currently Andrew Chang.

2.5 The Trust has adopted the national FTSU Policy developed for NHS trusts by the National Guardian's Office.

- 2.6 By necessity the FTSU Guardians must retain a degree of independence and critical distance from Trust management arrangements. Nonetheless, the Guardians are active stakeholders and participants in relevant Trust processes, policy developments, and groups, including:
- Sexual Safety and Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group
  - Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group
  - People and Culture Group

### **3.0 FTSU CASES: VOLUMES AND THEMES**

#### FTSU Case Volumes Over Time

- 3.1 The FTSU service in this Trust has seen fluctuations in case volumes and themes during the past three years, reflecting both operational pressures and cultural shifts across the organisation.
- In 2023/24 FTSU received 123 concerns, with peaks in Q1 and Q3.
  - In 2024/25 FTSU volumes dipped to 82 concerns, with a sharp drop in Q4 linked to absence within the function from mid Q3.
  - In 2025/26 FTSU volumes have rebounded to 114 concerns surpassing the previous year's total. This suggests renewed engagement with the service and growing confidence in speaking up.

#### FTSU Themes Over Time

- 3.2 Concerns are categorised according to the National Guardian's Office reporting framework. Worker Safety and Wellbeing remained the most consistently reported theme across all years, with staff regularly raising concerns about psychological safety, workload, and support. The highest quarterly count was 34 cases in Q3 2023/24, with a similar peak of 33 in Q3 2025/26, indicating persistent pressures.
- 3.3 Inappropriate Attitudes or Behaviour showed a marked increase in 2024/25 and 2025/26, rising from 7 cases in Q1 2023/24 to 16 in Q3 2025/26. This trend highlights the need for continued focus on respectful workplace culture and leadership behaviours.
- 3.4 Bullying or Harassment remained a recurring theme, with 8 cases in Q1 2023/24, 7 in Q2 2024/25, and 8 in Q3 2025/26. While not escalating, the consistency suggests this remains a concern for staff and requires ongoing attention.
- 3.5 Patient Safety/Quality concerns were fewer but steady, with 9 cases in Q3 2023/24, 5 in Q3 2024/25, and 4 in Q3&Q4 2025/26. These cases reinforce the link between staff wellbeing and safe delivery of care.
- 3.6 Detriment was rarely reported, with only 5 cases across three years. While low, any instance of detriment is significant and warrants scrutiny to ensure that staff feel protected when speaking up.
- 3.7 Anonymous Reporting remained low overall, with a slight rise in Q3 2025/26 (7 cases). This may reflect increased use of the service by staff who are still building trust in the process.

## FTSU Themes 2025/26

- 3.8 Between April and March 2026 the FTSU Guardians received a total of approximately 113 concerns, with a steady increase quarter-on-quarter except for Q4 which in line with previous years falls from Q3 each year: 13 in Q1, 31 in Q2, 42 in Q3, and 27 in Q4. The numbers reflect growing staff awareness of the service and increasing confidence in speaking up.

Quarter 25/26	Number of cases	Anonymous	Element Patient safety/quality	Element Worker safety/wellbeing	Element Bullying or Harassment	Element Inappropriate attitudes or Behaviour	Detriment
Q1	13	1	2	9	5	2	1
Q2	31	2	4	26	4	9	0
Q3	42	7	4	33	8	16	1
Q4	28	2	5	21	3	6	2

- 3.9 The proportion of anonymous concerns remained low, with only 12 cases submitted anonymously. This suggests that most staff feel safe identifying themselves, which is a positive indicator of trust in the process and the Guardians.
- 3.10 The most frequently reported theme this year to date has been Worker Safety and Wellbeing, accounting for 88 cases. This highlights the ongoing pressures faced by staff and the importance of psychological safety.
- 3.11 Inappropriate Attitudes or Behaviour saw a notable rise in Q3, with 16 cases, indicating a need for continued focus on respectful workplace culture. Bullying or Harassment was cited in 20 cases, with a slight increase at times, warranting close monitoring and proactive intervention.
- 3.12 Patient Safety/Quality concerns were raised in 14 cases, underscoring the link between staff wellbeing and safe care delivery. Detriment as a result of speaking up was reported in 3 cases. While these figures are low, this remains a critical area for vigilance and assurance.
- 3.13 Analysis of these themes has is used to inform targeted actions, including leadership engagement, culture improvement initiatives, and tailored support for teams. The FTSU Guardians continue to monitor trends and escalate concerns appropriately to ensure timely resolution and learning.

## **4.0 FTSU E-LEARNING**

- 4.1 The Trust makes available to staff three FTSU e-learning modules that were collaboratively created by the National Guardian's Office and Health Education England. The three modules are called 'Speak Up', 'Listen Up', 'Follow Up'. Each module is important in helping to understand the important roles that staff, managers, and leaders play in fostering a healthy speak up culture.

4.2 Completion figures for the three FTSU e-learning modules are monitored by the Guardians. The levels of completion at the end of 2025/26 were as follows.

Module	Applicable to	Frequency	Completion Rate		
			2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Speak Up	All Staff / Managers / Senior Leaders	3-yearly refresh	91.7%	93.4%	87.8%
Listen Up	Managers / Senior Leaders	3-yearly refresh	83.4%	89.1%	92.1%
Follow Up	Senior Leaders	3-yearly refresh	55.3%	64.3%	81%

4.3 Although the completion rates improved for all three modules during 2024/25, the completion rate for the Speak up for all workers has decreased in 2025/26. Completion rates for the Listen Up module have continued to increase, and the Follow Up module shows the highest increase in completion rate. Note that the Follow-Up module for senior leaders is now included in the training requirements for all Board members, including Non-Executive Directors and Associate Non-Executive Directors.

## 5.0 STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 The NHS Staff Survey includes two questions about staff confidence regarding speaking up about any concerns. The 2025 staff survey results published recently show that for both questions YAS has improved its score for four consecutive years and now has the highest score in the ambulance sector. Appendix A sets out more detail about this.

5.2 The Staff Survey also includes two questions about staff confidence in speaking up about clinical safety concerns. In the 2025 survey the YAS score improved for both questions. YAS is top in sector for one question and second in the sector for the other.

## 6.0 NEXT STEPS

### Nationally

6.1 The National Guardian's Office (NGO) was established in October 2016 alongside the requirement for all NHS provider organisations to appoint a Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Guardian. While the NGO is scheduled to close in June 2026, the principles and expectations of FTSU will remain. Planning is underway for its transition into NHS England and subsequently the Department of Health and Social Care.

## For the Trust

6.2 The Trust will continue to embed FTSU principles by:

- Strengthening leadership accountability and responsiveness to concerns
- Enhancing training and awareness across all staff groups
- Improving data capture and thematic analysis to inform Board-level assurance
- Preparing for the transition of oversight from the NGO to NHS England
- Responding to learning and improvement opportunities identified as part of the Well-Led developmental review (Freedom To Speak Up is one of the eight Well-Led domains)

## For the Guardians

6.3 The Guardians will:

- Continue bi-annual thematic reporting to the Board and additional groups
- Increase collaboration with teams such as Human Resources, Safeguarding, and Quality and Professional Standards to ensure concerns lead to meaningful change
- Continue to increase their visibility and engagement across the Trust to maintain momentum and build confidence

## **7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any future resource requirements linked to service development will be considered through standard planning processes.

## **8.0 RISKS**

8.1 Key risks include:

- Staff reluctance to speak up due to fear of reprisal or lack of confidence in follow-up
- Inconsistent responses to concerns across departments
- Potential loss of momentum during the NGO transition

8.2 Mitigations include continued Guardian visibility, leadership engagement, and robust governance oversight.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 Note the progress and developments in the FTSU function
- 9.2 Take assurance from the actions underway to strengthen the speaking up culture
- 9.3 Support the next steps for FTSU.
- 9.4 Monitor compliance with FTSU Training modules

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Appendix A: Staff Survey 2025 – Speaking Up Culture

## APPENDIX A

### STAFF SURVEY 2025 – SPEAKING UP CULTURE

#### Question 25e

**“I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in this organisation”**

- YAS score increased from 58.2% to 60.6% (an increase of 2.4 percentage points)
- YAS score has increased in each of the last four consecutive years
- YAS score is now the highest in the ambulance sector
- YAS score is seven percentage points higher than the sector average
- YAS now marginally above the national average for all trusts (60.3%)

#### Question 25f

**“If I spoke up about something that concerned me I am confident my organisation would address my concern”**

- YAS score increased from 43.9% to 47.8% (an increase of 3.9 percentage points)
- YAS score has increased in each of the last four consecutive years
- YAS score is now the highest in the ambulance sector
- YAS score is seven percentage points higher than the sector average
- YAS now marginally above the national average for all trusts (47.6%)

The national average across all trusts for these two questions decreased by 1.5 and 1.9 percentage points respectively: so the YAS increases have bucked the national trend.

That YAS is now marginally above the national averages for all trusts is significant because the ambulance sector has historically performed much lower on these questions than acutes and other trusts.

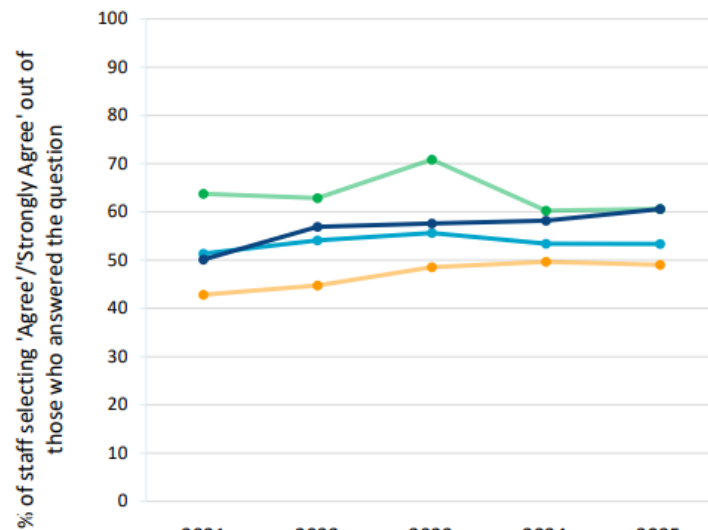
**Charts overleaf....**



People Promise elements and theme results – We each have a voice that counts: Raising concerns

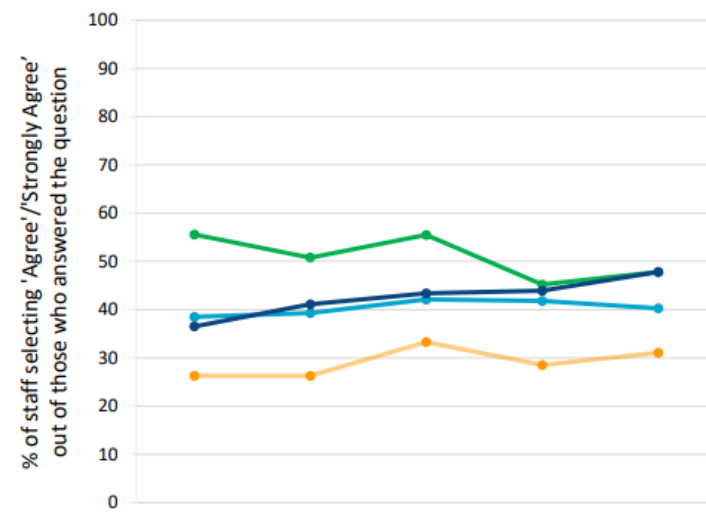


Q25e I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in this organisation.



	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Your org	50.12%	56.90%	57.60%	58.18%	60.59%
Best result	63.74%	62.86%	70.85%	60.27%	60.59%
Average result	51.34%	54.11%	55.63%	53.43%	53.38%
Worst result	42.83%	44.75%	48.54%	49.65%	49.03%
Responses	1913	1985	3109	3168	4659

Q25f If I spoke up about something that concerned me I am confident my organisation would address my concern.



	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Your org	36.50%	41.13%	43.37%	43.94%	47.79%
Best result	55.56%	50.76%	55.49%	45.20%	47.79%
Average result	38.50%	39.27%	42.11%	41.82%	40.26%
Worst result	26.30%	26.31%	33.27%	28.51%	31.05%
Responses	1908	1984	3107	3163	4671