



**The Guardian  
Service**  
Here to listen

**Bi-Monthly Board Report  
August – September 2025**

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## 1. Executive summary

The Guardian Service Limited (GSL) began providing the Freedom to Speak Up Service for the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST) on the 5th August 2024.

Between the period of 1<sup>st</sup> August – 30<sup>th</sup> September, a total of 40 concerns were raised to The GSL.

The most recent efforts by the Trust to help promote the GSL is reflected in the growing number of concerns received by the Guardians. Staff members have shared that they felt comfortable to raise concerns via the GSL due to colleagues who have previously used the service and had a positive experience.

Concerns received are recorded by the GSL against specific themes which are Management Issues, System & Process, Bullying & Harassment, Discrimination & Inequality, Behaviour & Relationship and Patient Safety/Quality and Worker Safety.

Over the past two months the top two job groups raising concerns were Allied Health Professionals (17) and Additional Clinical Services (13)

The most common themes for new cases were System & Process (13) and Behaviour & Relationship (14). There was 1 patient safety case raised in August.

Norfolk & Waveney A&E Operations is still indicated as the highest number of concerns raised. This should be viewed as encouraging and that staff are comfortable to speak up.

No staff member reported that they suffered a detriment because of speaking up however, staff members raising concerns anonymously has risen and three have been in the past two months.

There are a few recommendations detailed at the end of this report that the Trust is asked to consider.

## 2. Background to Freedom to Speak Up

Following the Francis Inquiry<sup>1</sup> 2013 and 2015, the NHS launched 'Freedom to Speak Up' (FTSU). The aim of this initiative was to foster an open and responsive environment and culture throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-of-the-mid-staffordshire-nhs-foundation-trust-public-inquiry>

NHS enabling staff to feel confident to speak up when things go or may go wrong; a key element to ensure a safe and effective working environment.

### 3. The Guardian Service

The Guardian Service Limited (GSL) is an independent and confidential staff liaison service. It was established in 2013 by the National NHS Patient Champion in response to The Francis Report. The Guardian Service provides staff with an independent, confidential 24/7 service to raise concerns, worries or risks in their workplace. It covers patient care and safety, whistleblowing, bullying, harassment, and work grievances. We work closely with the National Guardian Office (NGO) and attend the FTSU workshops, regional network meetings and FTSU conferences. The Guardian Service is advertised throughout EEAST as an independent organisation. This encourages staff to speak up freely and without fear of reprisal. Freedom to Speak Up is part of the well led agenda of the CQC inspection regime. The Guardian Service supports the East of England Ambulance Service Trust's Board to promote and comply with the NGO national reporting requirements.

The GSL was implemented in the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST) on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

Communication and marketing have been achieved by meeting with senior staff members, joining team meetings, site visits, the Intranet and the distribution of flyers and posters across the organisation. All new staff will become aware of the Guardian Service when undertaking the organisational induction programme.

### 4. Access and Independence

Being available and responsive to staff are key factors in the operation of the service. Many staff members, when speaking to a Guardian, have emphasised that a deciding factor in their decision to speak up and contacting GSL was that the Guardians are not EEAST employees and are external to the Trust.

### 5. Categorisation of Calls and Agreed Escalation Timescales

The following timescales have been agreed and form part of the Service Level Agreement.

| Call Type | Description                                                                                   | Agreed Escalation Timescales        |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Red       | Includes patient and staff safety, safeguarding, danger to an individual including self-harm. | Response required within 12 hours   |
| Amber     | Includes bullying, harassment, and staff safety.                                              | Response required within 48 hours   |
| Green     | General grievances e.g. a change in work conditions.                                          | Response required within 72 hours   |
| White     | No discernible risk to organisation.                                                          | No organisational response required |

For this date period, all escalated cases were responded to within the agreed RAG protocols.

Open cases are continually monitored, and regular contact is maintained by the Guardian with members of staff who have raised a concern to establish where ongoing support continues to be required. This can be via follow up phone calls and/or face to face meetings with staff who are in a situation where they feel they cannot escalate an issue for fear of reprisal. Guardians will also

maintain contact until the situation is resolved or the staff member is satisfied that no further action is required. Where there is a particular complex case, setbacks or avoidable delays in the progress of cases that have been escalated, these would be raised with the organisational lead for the Guardian Service at regular monthly meetings.

Escalated cases are cases which are referred to an appropriate manager, at the request of the employee, to ensure that appropriate action can be taken. As not all employees want their manager to know they have contacted the GSL, they either progress the matter themselves or take no further action. There are circumstances where cases are escalated at a later date by the Guardian. A staff member may take time to consider options and decide a course of action that is right for them. A Guardian will keep a case open and continue to support staff in such cases. In a few situations contact with the Guardian is not maintained by the staff member.

## 6. Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to detail the progress and development of the Speak Up service within EEAST and to identify learning from the themes arising from the cases received by the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians.

This report provides an overview of themes and issues raised through the Guardian Service from 1st August to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The report also sets out some learning points and makes recommendations for consideration.

The report follows the guidance from the NGO on the content FTSU Guardians should include when reporting to their Board which include Assessment of cases, Action taken to improve speaking-up culture and Recommendations.

## 7. Comments & Recommendations

- The FTSU Guardians encourages the trust to use and share the reflection and planning tool. This guide has 3 stages and is designed to help you identify strengths in yourself, your leadership team and your organisation. This should be used alongside Freedom to speak up and promoting the Guardian Service.
- The FTSU Guardian encourages the Trust to embed Speaking up further by making it mandatory for all staff to complete the 'Freedom to Speak Up in Healthcare' modules - *Speak Up*, *Listen Up* and *Follow Up*, introduced by the NGO.

1. *Speak Up* covers what speaking up is and why it matters. It helps staff understand how they can speak up and what to expect.

2. *Listen Up* focuses on listening to concerns and understanding the barriers to speaking up. It helps Managers to understand what speaking up is and how they should respond when someone speaks up to them.

3. *Follow Up* was developed for senior leaders throughout healthcare – including executive and non-executive directors, lay members and governors. The module aims to promote a consistent and effective Freedom to Speak Up culture across the system, which enables workers to speak up and be confident they will be listened to and action taken.

- The Trust maintains a network of Freedom to Speak Up Champions who promote the Freedom to Speak Up initiative and direct staff to the Guardian Service. The Trust may wish to consider how they want to engage with their champions and invest additional resources to enhance support for these Champions.