



**The Guardian  
Service**  
Here to listen

**First 6 months at EEAST  
Board report  
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**Guardian  
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Contents

<b>1. Executive summary</b> .....	2
<b>2. Background to Freedom to Speak Up</b> .....	3
<b>3. The Guardian Service</b> .....	3
<b>4. Access and Independence</b> .....	3
<b>5. Categorisation of Calls and Agreed Escalation Timescales</b> .....	3
<b>6. Purpose of the paper</b> .....	4
<b>7. Themes</b> .....	4
<b>8. Comments, Suggestions &amp; Recommendations</b> .....	5

## 1. Executive summary

The Guardian Service Limited was engaged to deliver the Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) service for the East of England Ambulance Trust (EEAST) commencing on 5th August 2024 and has now been in place for six months. This report presents the first six-month review of the service.

As requested, the Guardian Service will provide a summary update to the bimonthly public board of EEAST. Additionally, comprehensive six-month and annual reports are submitted in April and November each year to align with the reporting cycle of the National Guardian's Office.

The Trust continues to actively promote The Guardian Service and remain positive and collaborative. The Guardians have spent considerable amounts of time meeting more and more staff of all levels, both in person and virtually, attending regular meetings and forums, as well as offering open diaries for all staff to book in for virtual discussions.

Since 5th August to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, a total of 87 cases have been recorded, with a noticeable increase in concerns month on month. December it is usual for us to see a dip in the number of concerns raised and this is due to the time of year and the festive period. The constant increase can be attributed to the FTSU Guardian Service being independent with staff members saying they can trust in the service more than they felt they could before.

Most of the concerns raised have been categorised under "Systems and Process," with 40 cases recorded. This is followed by "Behaviour and Relationships" (26 cases) and "Management Issues" (18 cases). These figures suggest that staff concerns predominantly relate to how processes are kept to, with many expressing a perception of unfair treatment by both colleagues and management.

Patient or Worker safety concerns that have been raised (3 cases) and recorded as urgent (red), the trust has been quick to respond and understand the urgency required around them.

"Systems and Process" concerns encompass a broad range of issues, including dissatisfaction with HR or recruitment procedures and how managers or trainers handle internal matters. Several concerns raised by staff have specifically highlighted experiences with recruitment processes, particularly regarding the perceived fairness in how these processes were conducted. This area of concern has been discussed with the Chief of Staff and Director of People Services. A meeting was held to enable the Guardians to present a detailed analysis of the feedback, allowing the Trust to identify potential areas for improvement.

Just under half (47%) of the staff members choosing to contact the Guardian service are wanting to keep their concerns confidential and not be escalated, wishing for impartial support. Over 30% have raised a concern before, but do not feel they have been listened to and over 20% have said to be fearful of reprisal.

The agreed RAG protocol is set so that the Guardian receives a response from the trust on behalf of the staff member. Majority of concerns that have been raised have been responded to within the agreed times scales, with only a couple requiring a reminder email from either the Guardian or a more senior member of EEAST.

Cases that remain open are due to a few factors, including staff members, reflecting escalation decisions. 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. 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.

## 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 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 EEAST's Board to promote and comply with the NGO national reporting requirements.

The Guardian Service Ltd (GSL) was implemented in EEAST on the 5<sup>th</sup> of 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 they would be more likely to Speak Up and contact The Guardian Service due to the service being 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

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

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 later 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 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.

The purpose of this paper is to brief EEAST on the first 6 months of working in partnership with GSL

The Guardians are aware of the vast geographical area that EEAST covers and have spent the month of August visiting staff at various locations to conduct briefings. The Guardians have attended Leadership forums, attended Emergency Operations Centre's and have connected with many Sectors via virtual meetings. Guardians have attended 'ride along' to gain further understand of operational staff. The commissioning phase included meetings with Senior Leaders from The GSL & EEAST, which includes collaborating with marketing and introductions with the Chair and NED's.

These visits will continue on a regular basis, so the Guardians remain visible and accessible to all staff members.

## 7. Themes

Concerns raised are broken down into themes, the total figure will not match as the primary and multiple themes together are logged. This can mean that 1 concern can have more than 1 theme recorded to it.

Theme	Total
A Patient and Service User Safety / Quality	3
B Management Issue	18
C System Process	40
D Bullying and Harassment	7
E Discrimination / Inequality	2
F Behavioural / Relationship	26
G Other (Describe)	1
H Worker Safety	15
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>87</b>

Directorate of Themes

Screen shot of YTD Directorates to show the main areas of concern.

## 8. Comments, Suggestions & Recommendations

**Reflective Guide/Tool kit** - The FTSU Guardians encourages EEAST to use and share the reflection and planning tool. This tool has been shared with the services main contact. 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. This document is to be shared with the Chief of Staff . The Completion of the Board reflection tool is part of well lead in a CQC inspection.

**Review of Recruitment process** – Due to the high number of concerns on recruitment, it might be useful to review the processes used to see if there are any areas of improvement. The addition of a feedback inbox so that candidates can share their experiences could also be beneficial so that staff member feel able to contribute and feel heard.

**Highlighting EEAST Open culture** – The Guardian service has observed in other trusts and services that displaying posters of all ways in which staff members are able to speak up, are beneficial and are a clear way to express the trusts commitment to highlight/ a continued open culture, offering all employees the support that the trust has to offer.

**Management speak up/listen up Sessions. LOM/LAM upwards** - Management workshops on speaking up and listening up can be provided to support those in a management position.

**Communication** – the Communications team to work with and share their communications plan with the Guardians. Continue with regular conversations with the Director of Communications and engagement to keep sharing ideas on how to raise awareness of freedom to speak up.