



**The Guardian  
Service**  
Here to listen

**Board report  
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**Circulation:**

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**Guardian  
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## Contents

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

## 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 10 months.

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.

Between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2025, a total of 31 cases have been recorded, with a noticeable decrease in concerns over the past 2 months compared to the average figures recorded of 20 per month. It is unknown to the Guardians as to why there has been a decrease in numbers.

The Trusts recent initiatives to enhance the visibility of the freedom to speak up service, alongside broader efforts to improve organisational culture, indicates a positive step that may help address concerns of this nature.

Most of the concerns raised have been categorised under "Systems and Process," with 14 cases recorded. This is followed by "Management Issues" with 12 cases. The figures under "Systems & Process" range from recruitment issues, ER case processes taking too long and staff members not adhering to policies and procedures. For the "Management Issues" these concerns are variations of alleged unprofessional and unsupportive behaviours by management.

The themes have been discussed with the relevant departments and leaders, and the Guardians have been made aware of actions the trust wish to take.

The Guardians continue to have a positive relationship with EEAST leaders and work collaboratively.

## 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.

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

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
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 Freedom to speak up concerns within the trust and work in partnership to improve the culture.

The Guardians are aware of the vast geographical area that EEAST covers and spend each month visiting staff at various locations to conduct briefings and promote the service. The Guardians have attended Leadership forums, attended Emergency Operations Centre's and have connected with many Sectors via virtual meetings.

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

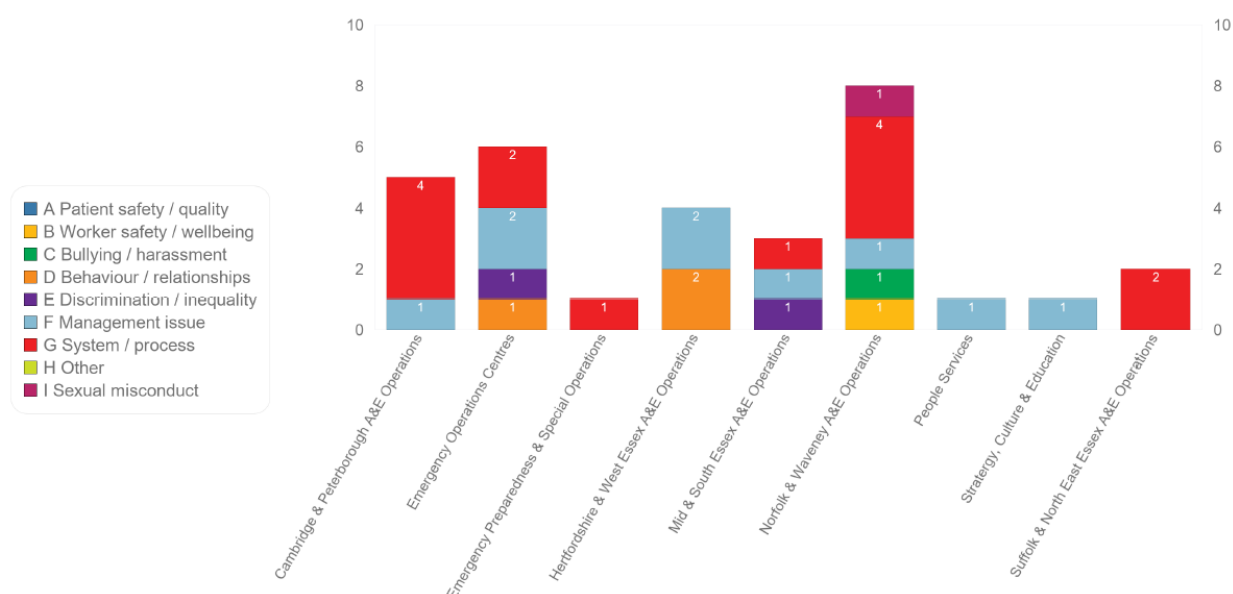
## 7. Themes

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. This data runs between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2025

Theme	Total
A Patient and Service User Safety / Quality	0
B Management Issue	12
C System Process	14
D Bullying and Harassment	1
E Discrimination / Inequality	3
F Behavioural / Relationship	6
G Other (Describe)	0
H Worker Safety	3
Sexual Misconduct	2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>41</b>

The following chart provides a clear view of the themes that have been raised and the directorates they sit within.

Primary Themes by Directorate YTD



## 8. Comments, Suggestions & Recommendations

With the Trusts plans on a communications drive on Freedom to Speak Up, along with the board considering all the recommendations from the annual report provided in April, The Guardians have fewer suggestions as per below.

**Highlighting EEAST FTSU Champions** –Since the introduction to the Champions for EEAST, there seems little interaction with them. EEAST could consider that the champions be reintroduced to promote speaking up within groups, departments and locations – particularly those that may be remote from other parts of the organisation, role modelling the values and behaviours associated with speaking up and listening up.

**Collaboration for October speak up Week-** Freedom to speak up week aims to promote awareness about the importance of creating a culture where individuals feel safe and empowered to voice concerns, ideas and suggestions within their organisations. The Guardians suggest meeting with the communications team in advance, to implement a plan within the trust.