

Freedom to Speak Up (Whistleblowing) Policy



v1.2 Final

Document owner: Temitayo Roberts	Approval date: July 2025	First Published: August 2025
	Next Review date: July 2028	Version: v1.2 -FINAL

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Integrated Care Board, (hereafter referred to as “the ICB”) are committed to ensuring the highest possible standards of service and the highest possible ethical standards in delivering this service. It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that if they become aware that the actions of other employees or officers or anyone working for, with, or connected to it, might compromise this objective, they will be expected to raise the matter.
- 1.2 The ICBs encourage all individuals to raise any concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the organisation, independent contractors, or organisations with which the ICBs have a relationship/contract.
- 1.3 The recommendations of “Freedom to Speak Up”, the independent review commissioned by the Secretary of State and chaired by Sir Robert Francis QC into whistleblowing in the NHS were published in 2015. The purpose of the review was to provide independent advice and recommendations on creating a more open and honest reporting culture in the NHS.
- 1.4 The review recommended a ‘standard integrated policy’, aimed at improving the experience of whistleblowing/speaking up in the NHS.
- 1.5 The ICB’s local process has been integrated into the NHS standard integrated policy resulting in this ICB policy – “Freedom to Speak Up Policy (whistleblowing)”.
- 1.6 The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) 1998 ensures protection for employees who have concerns about the organisation they work for. This policy is to create and encourage a climate of openness and dialogue, recognising that actively encouraging staff to raise concerns about health care, probity and quality matters responsibly and without delay, ensures that the interests of patients are always put first.

2. Scope

- 2.1 In accordance with PIDA, this policy applies to ‘workers’ of the ICBs, including substantive and temporary staff, bank staff, agency staff, contracted staff and trainees. The policy applies to volunteers and students, although they are not covered by PIDA protection
- 2.2 This policy will be applied equally to all staff covered by the policy and in accordance with the ICBs’ Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 2.3 Staff private employment matters such as personal employment contract disputes and grievances are outside the scope of this policy and PIDA.

If in doubt, please speak up. It does not matter if you are mistaken or if there is an innocent explanation for the matters you raise. As an organisation, we will listen and work with you to identify the most appropriate way of responding to the issue you raise.

3 Policy Statement

The ICBs have a responsibility as employers to ensure that staff are aware of their right to raise concerns about potential poor practices or wrongdoing within their organisation this is often referred to as “whistleblowing”.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 Responsibility of the ICB

- To monitor this procedure and the concerns/issues that are raised as a result.
- To provide a point of contact for staff who wish to raise concerns under the provision of this policy and who feel it is inappropriate to raise the matter through their line manager.

4.2 Responsibility of Managers

- Consider staff concerns carefully and (where necessary*) to undertake an investigation*.
- Understand the difficult position that the individual staff member may be in.
- Seek appropriate advice from your line manager if appropriate or a member of the Human Resources Team.
- Take prompt action to resolve the concern or refer it on to the ICB Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.
- Keep the member of staff informed about the ongoing processes and/or proposed solution.
- Regularly review situations that have been reported to them.
- Ensure individuals who genuinely report concerns are not penalised or discriminated against in any way.

4.3 Responsibility of Employees

- Ensuring that the best standards of care are achieved.
- Report their concerns to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian as outlined in this procedure.
- Raising concerns in the public interest with a true belief that poor standards of practice have occurred.

4.3 Responsibility of Human Resources

- To advise the employee of the options open to them and the relevant policy to follow.
- To support any employee who wishes to bring a Whistleblowing complaint to the attention of the ICBs.

5 Speak Up – We Will Listen

- 5.1 Speaking up about any concern you have at work is really important. In fact, it is vital because it will help us to keep improving the services we commission for all patients and the working environment for our staff.
- 5.2 You may feel worried about raising a concern, and we understand this. But please do not be put off. In accordance with our duty of candour, our senior leaders and entire Governing Body are committed to an open and honest culture. We will listen to what you say and escalate concerns on your behalf if unable to do it yourself and feedback responses received.

We want to hear about any concerns you have, whichever part of the organisation you work in.

6 Policy

6.1 What concerns can I raise?

6.1.1 You can speak up about anything that gets in the way of patient care or affects your working life. That could be something which doesn't feel right to you: for example, a way of working or a process that isn't being followed; you feel you are being discriminated against; or you feel the behaviours of others is affecting your wellbeing, or that of your colleagues or patients.

Speaking up is about all of these things and we will listen and work with you to identify the most appropriate way of responding to the issue you raise.

You can raise a concern about risk, malpractice or wrongdoing you think is harming the service we commission. Just a few examples of this might include (but are by no means restricted to):

- unsafe patient care
- unsafe working conditions
- inadequate induction or training for staff
- lack of, or poor, response to a reported patient safety incident
- suspicions of fraud (which can also be reported to our local counter-fraud team: [Phillip Leong phillip.leong@miaa.nhs.uk](mailto:phillip.leong@miaa.nhs.uk))
- Further details at: <https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/about/how-we-work/anti-fraud-bribery-and-corruption/how-can-i-help-to-fight-fraud-bribery-and-corruption-against-the-nhs/>
- Employees who wish to speak with complete confidentiality can also contact the NHS Fraud and Corruption Reporting Line on 0800 028 40 60 or www.reportnhsfraud.nhs.uk to report their concerns. Callers may remain anonymous if they wish.
- a bullying culture (across a team or organisation rather than individual instances of bullying).

For further examples, please see the [Health Education England video](#).

6.1.2 Remember that if you are a healthcare professional you may have a professional duty to report a concern. **If in doubt, please raise it.**

6.1.3 Do not wait for proof. We would like you to raise the matter while it is still a concern. It does not matter if you turn out to be mistaken as long as you are genuinely troubled.

6.1.4 Speaking up, therefore, captures a range of issues, some of which may be appropriate for other existing processes (for example, HR/employment issues dealt with under the Grievance policy) That's fine. As an organisation, we will listen and work with you to identify the most appropriate way of responding to the issue you raise.

7 Feel Safe to Raise Your Concern

7.1 If you raise a genuine concern under this policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of reprisal as a result. **This is in alignment with the Detriment guidance 2025 by the National Guardians Office - [Detriment-guidance.pdf](#)** . We will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a concern. Nor will we tolerate any attempt to bully you into not raising

any such concern. Any such behaviour is a breach of our values as an organisation and, if upheld following investigation (carried out by an external person*), could result in disciplinary action.

- 7.2 Provided you are acting honestly, it does not matter if you are mistaken or if there is an innocent explanation for your concerns.
- 7.3 We do not however extend this assurance to someone who maliciously raises a concern that they know is untrue. Any such conduct may be liable to disciplinary action or other appropriate action.
- 7.4 Raising a concern will not, in itself, halt any ongoing disciplinary action or redundancy procedure that may have already started.

8 Confidentiality

We hope you will feel comfortable raising your concern openly, but we also appreciate that you may want to raise it confidentially. This means that while you are willing for your identity to be known to the person you report your concern to, you do not want anyone else to know your identity. Therefore, we will keep your identity confidential, if that is what you want, unless required to disclose it by law (for example, by the police). You can choose to raise your concern anonymously, without giving anyone your name, but that may make it more difficult for us to get in-depth information and give you feedback on the outcome.

8.1 Who can raise concerns?

Anyone who works (or has worked) in the NHS, or for an independent organisation that provides NHS services can raise concerns. This includes agency workers, temporary workers, students, volunteers and governing body members.

9 Who should I raise my concern with?

- 9.1 In many circumstances the easiest way to get your concern resolved will be to raise it formally or informally with your line manager. If raising it with your line manager does not resolve matters, or you do not feel able to raise it with them, you can contact one of the following people.
- 9.2 Our Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Lead Temitayo Roberts, at Temitayo.Roberts@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk, 07748111754

Freedom to Speak Up Guardian is an important role identified in the Freedom to Speak Up review to act as an independent and impartial source of advice to staff at any stage of raising a concern, with access to anyone in the organisation, including the Accountable Officer, or if necessary, outside the organisation.

9.3 Speaking up externally

If you do not want to speak up to someone within your organisation, you can speak up externally to:

- [Care Quality Commission](#) (CQC) for quality and safety concerns about the services it regulates – you can find out more about how the CQC handles concerns [here](#)
- [NHS England](#) for concerns about:
 - GP surgeries
 - dental practices

- optometrists
- pharmacies
- how NHS trusts and foundation trusts are being run
(this includes ambulance trusts and community and mental health trusts)
- NHS procurement and patient choice
- the national tariff.

NHS England may decide to investigate your concern themselves, ask your employer or another appropriate organisation to investigate (usually with their oversight) and/or use the information you provide to inform their oversight of the relevant organisation. The precise action they take will depend on the nature of your concern and how it relates to their various roles.

Please note that neither the Care Quality Commission nor NHS England can get involved in individual employment matters, such as a concern from an individual about feeling bullied.

- [NHS Counter Fraud Authority](#) for concerns about fraud and corruption, using their [online reporting form](#) or calling their freephone line **0800 028 4060**.

If you would like to speak up about the conduct of a member of staff, you can do this by contacting the relevant professional body such as the General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council, Health & Care Professions Council, General Dental Council, General Optical Council or General Pharmaceutical Council.

Appendix 1B contains information about making a 'protected disclosure'

10 Process

10.1 How should I raise my concern?

You can raise your concerns with any of the people listed above in person, by phone or in writing (including email). Whichever route you choose, please be ready to explain as fully as you can the information and circumstances that gave rise to your concern.

10.2 What will we do?

We are committed to the principles of the Freedom to Speak Up review and its vision for raising concerns and will respond in line with them, as appropriate (see Appendix 4). If your concern relates to a patient safety event this should be captured via the Learning From Patient Safety Event System, if you are not aware of how to complete this please liaise with the central Patient Safety Team via icbcentralteam.patientsafety@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk. These incidents will be considered and responded to via a proportionate patient safety response to identify areas for system improvement in line with the Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF).

We are committed to listening to our staff, learning lessons and improving patient care. On receipt, the concern will be recorded, and you will receive an acknowledgement without unreasonable delay. The central

record will record the date the concern was received, whether you have requested confidentiality, a summary of the concerns and dates when we have given you updates or feedback.

10.3 Resolution

10.3.1 We support our managers/supervisors to listen to the issue you raise and take action to resolve it wherever possible. In most cases, it's important that this opportunity is fully explored, which may be with facilitated conversations and/or mediation.

According to section 4.2 above, under the responsibility of managers, there might be cases, where taking action requires for them to carry out an investigation, this will be objective and conducted by someone who is suitably independent (this might be someone outside your organisation or from a different part of the organisation) and trained in investigations. It will reach a conclusion within a reasonable timescale (which you will be notified of), and a report will be produced that identifies any issues to prevent problems recurring.

Any employment issues that have implications for you/your capability or conduct identified during this process will be considered separately under the appropriate processes.

10.3.2 We may decide that your concern would be better looked at under another process; for example, our process for dealing with bullying and harassment and we will discuss this with you if necessary.

10.4 Communicating with you

10.4.1 We will treat you with respect at all times and will thank you for speaking up. We will discuss the issues with you to ensure we understand exactly what you are worried about. This will be raised on your behalf to the highlighted leads/managers to take action. Responses received from the leads/managers identified will be feedback and an opportunity given to you to feedback on the FTSU process.

An agreeable mode of meeting (phone, email, face-to-face etc.) to meet up and feedback FTSU concerns will be discussed at the onset when concerns are raised and expectations managed.

(while respecting the confidentiality of others and recognising that some matters may be strictly confidential; as such it may be that we cannot even share the outcome with you).

10.5 How will we learn from your concern?

We want speaking up to improve the services we provide for patients and the environment our staff work in. Where it identifies improvements that can be made, we will ensure necessary changes are made, and are working effectively. Lessons will be shared with teams across the organisation, or more widely, as appropriate.

Review

We will seek feedback from workers about their experience of speaking up. We will review the effectiveness of this policy and our local process annually, with the outcome published and changes made as appropriate.

10.6 Executive Leadership Oversight

On behalf of the ICB the Executive Leadership Team will be given high level information about all concerns raised by our staff through this policy and what we are doing to address any problems. We will include similar high level information in our annual report. The ICB supports staff raising concerns and wants you to feel free to speak up.

10.7 Safeguarding concerns

10.7.1 Any potential issues/concerns relating to the safety and welfare of a child and/or adult at risk will be referred for advice and guidance to the ICB safeguarding lead for children and/or adults.

10.7.2 Where it is considered that a child and/or adult is at risk of abuse or neglect a referral to the Local Authority must be made in line with the agreed multi-agency safeguarding policies and procedures.

11 Advice and Support

Advice & support is available from:

- The NHS and Social Care Whistleblowing Helpline on 08000 724 725. This service offers free, confidential advice to all staff within the NHS and Social care. The helpline will be able to clarify whether you have a whistleblowing concern and talk you through the processes to raise your concern; or will advise you on how to escalate the concern, if you feel that the issues raised have not been dealt with appropriately.
- Public Concern at Work, now called 'Protect' helpline on 020 3117 2520
- Your professional body or trade union representative

You can find out about the local support available to you within the ICB at [We Are Safe And Healthy \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

You can also access a range of health and wellbeing support via NHS England:

- [Support available for our NHS people.](#)
- [Looking after you: confidential coaching and support for the primary care workforce.](#)

NHS England has a [Speak Up Support Scheme](#) that you can apply to for support. You can also contact the following organisations:

- [Speak Up Direct](#) provides free, independent, confidential advice on the speaking up process.
- The charity [Protect](#) provides confidential and legal advice on speaking up.
- The [Trades Union Congress](#) provides information on how to join a trade union.
- [The Law Society](#) may be able to point you to other sources of advice and support.
- [The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service](#) gives advice and assistance, including on early conciliation regarding employment disputes.

National Guardian Office Freedom to Speak Up webpage has loads of information and provide support to people raising concerns too.

12 Associated Documentation and References

12.1 Relevant Legislation

Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA)
Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998)
Fraud Act 2006
Freedom of Information Act Equality Act (2010)
Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014

12.2 Associated Policies and Guidance Documents

Disciplinary Policy
Grievance Policy
Complaints Policy
Incident Reporting

13 Equality and Diversity

- 13.1.1 The ICBs are committed to an environment that promotes equality and embraces diversity in its performance as an employer. It will adhere to legal and performance requirements and will mainstream equality and diversity principles through its policies, procedures and processes. This policy should be implemented with due regard to this commitment.
- 13.1.2 To ensure that the implementation of this policy does not have an adverse impact in response to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 this policy has been screened for relevance during the policy development process and a full impact assessment conducted where necessary prior to consultation. The ICBs will take action when necessary to address any unexpected or unwarranted disparities and monitor workforce and employment practices to ensure that this policy is fairly implemented.
- 13.1.3 The ICBs will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate any employee with particular equality and diversity requirements in implementing this policy and procedure. This may include accessibility of meeting venues, providing translation, arranging an interpreter to attend meetings, extending policy timeframes to enable translation to be undertaken, or assistance with formulating any written statements.

14 Review

The policy will be reviewed every three years unless changes to employment legislation require a review to take place sooner.

Appendix 1: Process for Raising and Escalating a Concern

Step one

If you have a concern about a risk, malpractice or wrongdoing at work, we hope you will feel able to raise it first with your line manager, lead clinician or tutor (for students). This may be done orally or in writing.

Step Two

If you feel unable to raise the matter with your line manager, lead clinician or tutor, for whatever reason, please raise the matter with our local Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Lead Temitayo Roberts Temitayo.Roberts@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

If you want to raise the matter in confidence, please say so at the outset so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Step three

If these channels have been followed and you still have concerns, or if you feel that the matter is so serious that you cannot discuss it with any of the above, you can raise concerns formally with external bodies listed in Section 9.3 above.

Appendix 1A: What will happen when I speak up?

We will:

- Thank you for speaking up
-
- Help you identify the options for resolution
-
- Signpost you to health and wellbeing support
-
- Confirm what information you have provided consent to share
-
- Support you with any further next steps and keep in touch with you

Steps towards resolution:

- Engagement with relevant senior managers (where appropriate)
-
- Referral to HR process
-
- Referral to patient safety process
-
- Other type of appropriate resolution

Outcomes:

The outcomes will be shared with you wherever possible, along with learning and improvement identified

Escalation:

If resolution has not been achieved, or you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can escalate the matter to the senior lead for FTSU or the non-executive lead for FTSU (if you are in a NHS Trust)

Alternatively, if you think there are good reasons not to use internal routes, speak up to the external body, such as the CQC or NHS England

Appendix 1B: Making a ‘Protected Disclosure’

A protected disclosure is defined in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This legislation allows certain categories of worker to lodge a claim for compensation with an employment tribunal if they suffer as a result of speaking up. The legislation is complex and to qualify for protection under it, very specific criteria must be met in relation to who is speaking up, about what and to whom. To help you consider whether you might meet these criteria, please seek independent advice from the [Protect](#) or a legal representative

Appendix 2: The Role of the Speak Up Guardian

This person has been given special responsibility and training in dealing with whistleblowing concerns. They will:

- treat your concern confidentially unless otherwise agreed.
- ensure you receive timely support to progress your concern.
- escalate to the board any indications that you are being subjected to detriment for raising your concern.
- remind the organisation of the need to give you timely feedback on how your concern is being dealt with
- ensure you have access to personal support since raising your concern may be stressful.

If you want to raise the matter in confidence, please say so at the outset so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Appendix 3: Acting Upon Your Suspicions – The Do's and Don'ts

If you suspect fraud, corruption or malpractice within the workplaces, there are a few simple guidelines that should be followed:

DO

- 1. Make an immediate note of your concerns:**
Note all relevant details, such as what was said in telephone or other conversations, the date, time and the names of any parties involved.
- 2. Convey your suspicions to someone with the appropriate authority and experience listed above.**
- 3. Deal with the matter promptly, if you feel your concerns are warranted.**
Any delay may cause the ICBs to suffer financial loss, or injury to fellow colleagues or patients depending upon the nature of the concern/allegation.

DON'T

- 1 Ignore it.**
- 2 Be afraid of raising your concerns.**
You will not suffer any recrimination from your employer as a result of voicing a reasonably held suspicion. The ICBs will treat any matter you raise sensitively and confidentiality.
- 3 Approach or accuse any individuals directly.**
- 4 Try to investigate the matter yourself.**

There are special rules surrounding the gathering of evidence for use in criminal cases. Any attempt to gather evidence by people who are unfamiliar with these rules may destroy the case.

5 Convey your suspicions to anyone other than those with the proper authority

Appendix 4: A Vision for Raising Concerns in the NHS



Source: Sir Robert Francis QC (2015) *Freedom to Speak Up: an independent report into creating an open and honest reporting culture in the NHS*.