

NHS Shetland

Meeting:	NHS Board Meeting
Meeting date:	16 December 2025
Agenda reference:	Board Paper 25/26/54
Title:	Whistleblowing Standards Quarter 2 Report (2025/26)
Responsible Executive/Non-Executive:	Dr Kirsty Brightwell, Exec Lead Joe Higgins, Non-Exec Whistleblowing Champion
Report Author:	Edna Mary Watson Chief Nurse (Corporate)

1 Purpose

This is presented to the NHS Board for:

- Awareness

This report relates to:

- Legal requirement
- Local policy

This aligns to the following NHS Scotland quality ambitions:

- Safe
- Effective
- Person Centred

2 Report summary

2.1 Situation

In Quarter 1, there was 1 new case raised under the formal stages of the Whistleblowing Standards. Due to the complexity of this case, part of it was initially progressed as a Stage 1 whistleblowing case with an additional Investigation being conducted via HR Processes. Following the outcome of the Stage 1 Whistleblowing investigation the case was subsequently progressed and taken forward as a Stage 2 case, in Quarter 2.

During Q2 this case has also been escalated to the Independent Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) and the case and the process conducted by NHS Shetland is now being reviewed by INWO. An additional contact has also subsequently been received by NHS Shetland from another individual raising issues of concern within this service area. As this is now a very complex case, involving both Whistleblowing and HR issues an Independent external investigator is being sought to take forward a service review in this area.

One other contact was made through the Whistleblowing inbox in this quarter, whilst this is not a Whistleblowing issue the individual is continuing to be supported by a Confidential Contact at this time. During Q2, contact had also been made by one further individual via the general information box of NHS Shetland, although this initial contact was made to NHS Shetland in Quarter 2, these concerns have just recently been followed up and will be reported on in Q3.

The Clinical Governance Committee now has a discrete Standing Agenda item regarding governance of clinical actions emerging from any Whistleblowing action plan with update reports expected at each quarterly meeting. Regular updates on progress with the Action Plan in response to the Stage 2 Investigation completed in August /September 2024, continue to be made to the Clinical Governance Committee meetings with the latest update being presented in September 2025. Updates on progress with actions enables the Clinical Governance Committee to maintain oversight and provide assurance to the NHS Board that ongoing progress is being made.

This report has been considered by both the Staff Governance Committee and Clinical Governance Committee at their meetings held on 20 November and 9 December 2025 respectively.

2.2 Background

The Whistleblowing Standards came into force in NHS Scotland on 1 April 2021.

Whistleblowing is defined as:

"when a person who delivers services or used to deliver services on behalf of a health service body, family health service provider or independent provider (as defined in section 23 of the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002](#)) raises a concern that relates to speaking up, in the public interest, about an NHS service, where an act or omission has created, or may create, a risk of harm or wrong doing."

[Definitions: What is whistleblowing? | INWO \(spsso.org.uk\)](#)

A local Whistleblowing Steering group is in place and continues to meet every 12 weeks.

The number of concerns raised by staff, including lessons learnt, will be reported to a public meeting of the NHS Board on a quarterly basis and should highlight any issues that inform decision-making and/ or cut across services.

An annual report will also be presented to the NHS Board each year at it's meeting in June which will report on the KPIs for Whistleblowing as developed by INWO (see Appendix 1).

These reports should inform Board members' discussions on issues in relation to service delivery and organisational culture.

Across the organisation there is a need to continually raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Standards and to increase the support available for staff to enable them to Speak Up when faced by issues of concern.

2.3 Assessment

An organisational Short Life Working Group, under the leadership of the Director of Human Resources and Support Services, was set up to review our organisational policy and practice around 'raising concerns'. Concerns can be raised about a number of issues and these might be progressed under an HR route or via the Whistleblowing process and considered in line with the Whistleblowing Standards.

This review has considered our policy and practice to date from the perspective of the individual raising the concern, any staff subsequently asked to participate/provide information in to an Investigatory process, the Investigating Manager and the Commissioner's perspective with an aim to ensure that going forward all parties involved feel supported, they understand what is required of them and what they can expect to receive in return.

The Short Life Working Group has reviewed all responses received and has developed some resources to support Line Managers with recognition and responding to concerns when raised within teams. The SLWG concluded in September 2025 and the output from this work was presented to the Staff Governance Committee at its meeting on the 20 November 2025.

The Whistleblowing Steering Group has continued to meet regularly and discuss general awareness raising, training and support for the Confidential Contacts and all staff.

The meetings of the Confidential Contacts, Non- Exec Whistleblowing Champion, and Executive Lead also continue with a meeting being held in August, where the main topic for consideration was planning for Speak Up week 2025. These meetings aim to maintain an organisational focus on whistleblowing and to support skills development amongst the Confidential Contacts.

Speak Up Week is an annual campaign designed to promote a culture where staff feel safe, supported, and empowered to raise concerns within the NHS in Scotland (INWO, 2025).

This year's Speak Up week was held 29 September to 3 October and a range of activities were undertaken to promote this locally. This included regular communications highlighting Speak Up week being carried in the organisational weekly bulletin in the run up to the week and in addition Speak Up being the Headline news in the Corporate Newsletter in September. The All Organisational Briefing also had a session from Joe Higgins, Non-Exec Director/ Whistleblowing Champion on the importance of staff feeling able to Speak Up about any matter of concern, encouraging staff to raise any issues with their line manager in order that matters can be resolved as quickly as possible for all.

The theme for this year's Speak Up week was Listen, Act, Build Trust with the Independent National Whistleblowing Office (INWO) hosting 3 webinars on 29 and 30 September and on the 1 October that focussed on these 3 key areas.

The first of the webinars was a discussion session between Elaine Cameron, Head of Investigations, INWO and Robbie Pearson, Chief Executive, Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) where they explored the importance of having a positive Speak Up culture where all staff feel safe and able to raise concerns, without detriment, in order to increase the overall safety of services for patients and staff.

The second webinar was a group discussion with a range of staff and explored the challenges and additional barriers that may be present for specific sectors of the workforce when wishing to raise a concern eg students, staff from ethnic minority backgrounds, non-clinical staff. Our approach to these sectors of our workforce will be considered at the next Whistleblowing Steering Group and Whistleblowing Champion, Exec Lead and Confidential Contacts meetings.

The third webinar focussed on having had concerns raised the importance of taking action in a timely way to address these concerns, and the important role that this plays in helping to build trust in the processes for staff and hence supports a positive reporting culture.

The webinars were promoted to local staff and for those who missed the chance to watch these webinars live, the recordings are all on the INWO site and can viewed at [Speak Up Week 2025 | INWO](#)

As well as promotion of the national events the local Confidential Contacts held an open session in the GBH Canteen at lunchtime on 1 October. This provided an opportunity to speak directly with staff, share information on Speaking Up and promote the availability and role of Confidential Contacts. Over 100 leaflets were issued to staff and it was pleasing to note a general higher level of awareness of Speaking Up amongst staff, greater understanding of the process as well as having an opportunity to gain some feedback on challenges faced by staff when Speaking up from staff who had raised issues of concern both locally and at other organisations.

The Confidential Contacts have also attended key management meetings, Hospital Management Team and Community Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic meeting, to discuss Speaking Up, with a further dedicated session planned for Hospital Management Team members to explore what further actions could be taken to support a positive culture of speaking up.

An offer has been made to all teams for a Confidential Contact to attend Team meetings to discuss their role and the Speak Up/Whistleblowing process. Details of the current Confidential Contacts are displayed in areas across the organisation or they can be reached by emailing the generic Whistleblowing inbox at shet.whistleblowing@nhs.scot.

Following reports of issues with staff not being able to access the whistleblowing inbox, unless they used an NHS Scotland email address, this has been revised to allow open access from any email address and an appropriate out of office message has been placed on the email address to help support and direct individuals to the correct email address when trying to provide various different types of feedback to NHS Shetland.

Peer support and training & development for Confidential Contacts is being achieved by being part of the national Speak Up Network hosted by NHS Lothian. This provides a forum for learning and development with external topic specialist speakers invited on a regular basis as well as forming a peer support network for Confidential Contacts. All current Confidential Contacts are now part of this network.

One new staff member is currently undergoing a bespoke programme of training to become a Confidential Contact. This new member of the team will enable us to offer individuals with an issue of concern a Confidential Contact of the gender of their choice. This will be a positive development for the team.

Unfortunately, due to pressures of workload, in this last quarter one of our long standing Confidential Contacts has stepped down from the role. We hope that this will be a temporary measure and would wish to acknowledge the contribution of that individual both to supporting the development of the agenda across the organisation and the support they have provided to individual staff members over many years.

Within NHS Shetland whilst all staff are encouraged to undertake the Whistleblowing modules available on TURAS, these are not considered to be mandatory nor form part of our core statutory/mandatory training requirements. The modules are highlighted to staff as part of the Corporate Induction programme, as well as being promoted as part of the Speak Up week activities which have been carried out each year.

Based on the data within TURAS Learn, NHS Shetland report the following:

Category	Numbers prior to 31 March 2025	Numbers completed between 1 April – 30 June 2025	Numbers completed between 1 July – 30 Sept 2025
No of Staff who completed training – WB Overview	63	1	2
No of Managers who completed training – Line Manager	26	1 1 (in progress)	0
No who completed Senior Managers training	Not recorded	1	2

Whilst the modules are not mandatory, training rates continue to be very low so further consideration needs to be given as to whether this is impacting especially on Line Managers knowledge and skills in managing concerns raised and the decreasing perception that concerns raised will be responded to and followed up.

The Patient Safety Leadership Walkrounds also provide an opportunity to explore staff awareness of the Whistleblowing process and to get a feel for their ability to speak up. It is pleasing to note that the majority of staff know how to, and feel able to, raise concerns with their managers or another senior leader in the organisation but they also reflect an increasing concern regarding lack of apparent response / feedback following raising a concern.

A whistleblowing session, hosted by the Confidential Contacts, continues to be delivered as part of the Corporate Induction process to bring the Whistleblowing Standards to the attention of all new staff. This session continues to be delivered consistently at the twice monthly Induction sessions.

There is a process within Datix to record and report any concerns raised. This is a confidential space with restricted access. A thematic analysis of issues raised is presented to the Risk Management Group on a regular basis to ensure that there is organisational oversight of issues raised, lessons learnt and in order to put in place any further remedial actions necessary.

The Independent National Whistleblowing Officer introduced Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Whistleblowing in June 2023. As the number of cases is low the KPIs are only reported on annually as part of the Annual Report. The KPIs are provided in Appendix 1 for information.

There are regular communications to the HSCP staff, independent contractors, University and Third Sector Organisations to raise awareness of the Standards as the standards apply to all services contracted out as well as encompassing students, volunteers and Local Authority staff working within or alongside NHS services.

This involves requesting regular reports of any issues raised. Table 1 details the quarterly requests and returns from those organisations with which we work closely.

Table 1: NHS Shetland 2024/2025 Annual Whistleblowing return summary:	
Area	Return Q3 2024/2025
Independent Contractors – GP Practices	Response received - no cases
Independent Contractors - Optometry	iCare –response received – no cases Spec Savers - response received – no cases
Independent Contractors - Pharmacy	Response received - no cases
PEF Under graduates	Response received - no cases
PEF Nursing student	Response received - no cases
Community Health and Social Care	Response received - no cases
Dental	Response received - no cases

2.3.1 Quality/ Patient Care

Learning from whistleblowing as well as encouraging staff to speak up will result in maintaining and / or improving quality and patient care.

2.3.2 Workforce

Speaking about the Whistleblowing Standards can empower staff to take responsibility for issues where they see a potential risk.

Notification and monitoring allows the collection of data to inform staff and the organisation on potential gaps and risks.

2.3.3 Financial

Nil.

2.3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

There is a risk that the Confidential Contacts' confidence erodes over time and/or that they chose to no longer provide this service. During 2024/2025 for personal reasons, and due to workload, we lost 2 of the confidential contacts. Initial discussions were held at the last meeting of the Whistleblowing Champion, Exec Lead and Confidential Contacts regarding undertaking a recruitment campaign to increase the number of Confidential Contacts. One further volunteer put themselves forward and is currently undergoing a bespoke training programme to enhance their knowledge and skills for the role.

INWO have developed training materials which can be used for development purposes. Unfortunately a lack of in-house capacity to progress leading this training means that all Confidential Contacts will actively participate in the national Speak Up Network to ensure ongoing access to training, support and development.

There is a risk that the information about raising concerns through the Confidential Contacts will be undermined with staff turnover. This will be monitored by the steering group.

There is a risk that awareness in the organisation erodes over time. This will be monitored by the steering group and appropriate action taken.

There is a risk that as the number and complexity of issues raised under the Standards increases that the work undertaken by the Clinical Governance and Risk Team to support the Whistleblowing process will be unable to be sustained without an investment in capacity within the Team.

There is a risk that the non-adherence to timeframes as outlined in the Whistleblowing Standards makes staff lose confidence in this as a way of raising issues of concern which are in the public interest and that lessons learnt fail to be recognised and implemented in a timely way, leading to the potential for further harm.

There is also a risk to the organisation if remedial actions are not followed through that this compromises investigations, and creates a lack of clear follow through on issues of concern raised thus increasing concerns about the merit in speaking up .

There is also the potential that INWO consequently review the process of how Whistleblowing concerns are managed within NHS Shetland.

2.3.5 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

Due regard requires to be paid by the organisation at all times to assure the Board that it can meet its Public Sector Equality Duty, Fairer Scotland Duty, and the Board's Equalities Outcomes.

Monitoring of the issues raised under the Whistleblowing Standards will enable us to have oversight of whether there are any equality and diversity issues arising. These will be actioned and reported accordingly.

2.3.6 Other impacts

There are no other impacts to report at this time.

2.3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

The Board has carried out its duties to involve and engage external stakeholders where appropriate:

State how this has been carried out and note any meetings that have taken place.

- Independent Contractors (dental, GP, community pharmacy, opticians): email quarterly.
- University – local coordinator for University of Aberdeen medical students (email quarterly).

2.3.8 Route to the Meeting

- This report has been shared in draft with both the Steering Group and Confidential Contacts in order that the groups can have both the opportunity to inform the development of the content and to agree the report prior to submission to the Committee.

2.4 Recommendation

- **Awareness** – For Members' information only.

3 List of appendices

Included with this report is the following appendix:

- Appendix 1, INWO Whistleblowing Key Performance Indicators

Appendix 1

Key Performance Indicators	
KPI 1	a statement outlining learning, changes or improvements to services or procedures as a result of consideration of whistleblowing concerns
KPI 2	a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure (where this can be provided without compromising confidentiality)
KPI 3	a statement to report on levels of staff perceptions, awareness, and training
KPI 4	the total number of concerns received
KPI 5	concerns closed at stage 1 and stage 2 of the whistleblowing procedure as a percentage of all concerns closed
KPI 6	concerns upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld at each stage of the whistleblowing procedure as a percentage of all concerns closed in full at each stage
KPI 7	the average time in working days for a full response to concerns at each stage of the whistleblowing procedure
KPI 8	the number and percentage of concerns at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days
KPI 9	the number of concerns at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a percentage of all concerns at stage 1
KPI 10	the number of concerns at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a percentage of all concerns at stage 2

Reference

Good Practice Guidance for Annual Whistleblowing Reporting issued by Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO), June 2023.