

Agenda item:	7
Date of meeting:	20 May 2026
Report to the:	Trust Board
Title of report:	Freedom to Speak Up Annual Report 2025-26
Report author:	Sarah Feal, Company Secretary and Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
Executive sponsor:	Anita Pisani, Chief People Officer and Deputy Chief Executive
Recommendation:	Approve

Assurance level:	Substantial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reasonable <input type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal <input type="checkbox"/>
Rationale:	The Trust has an approved action plan in place, which is monitored for delivery, the 2025 annual NHS staff survey results 'We each have a voice that counts'.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Speaking up is about raising any concerns that may impact the delivery of safe, high-quality care or an employee's working experience. When things go wrong, it is essential that we learn lessons and drive improvement. Equally, where there is a risk that something may go wrong, all staff should feel confident to speak up to help prevent potential harm.
- 1.2 Even where services are performing well, there is always opportunity to improve. Staff should feel encouraged to share ideas and suggestions, with confidence that these will be valued and used to support continuous improvement.
- 1.3 Freedom to Speak Up is fundamental to creating a positive and open culture in which staff feel safe to raise concerns and know that their voices will be heard and acted upon. Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up is a core element of the Group's culture and underpins our commitment to learning and improvement.
- 1.4 The Trust Board is asked to **Approve** the Annual Report 2025-26.

2.0 How the report supports tackling Health Inequalities

- 2.1 A strong Freedom to Speak Up culture supports the identification and reduction of health inequalities by enabling staff to raise concerns about inequitable care, highlight barriers experienced by different patient groups, and contribute to more inclusive and responsive service design.

3.0 Board Assurance Framework and Trust Risk and Issue Registers

- 3.1 **3915:** There is a risk that staff morale may reduce as we work to develop and implement single support service structures, which in turn could impact on the level of service delivered to our clinical teams.
- 3.2 **3699:** There is a risk that staff morale and engagement may be adversely affected whilst we culturally align our new organisation.
- 3.3 **3916:** There is a risk of a reduction in staff wellbeing and increased staff sickness absence levels due to growing levels of demand on our services, which could impact on the delivery of patient care.

4.0 Legal and Regulatory requirements

- 4.1 The following legal and regulatory frameworks are applicable:
- Employment Rights Act 1996.
 - Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
 - NHS People Promise.

5.0 Previous consideration by Committee or Executive

- 5.1 21 May 2025, Group Trust Board

6.0 Report

6.1 How to Speak Up

The Trust provides a range of channels to support staff in speaking up. In addition to raising concerns with their line manager or through Human Resources, staff may also speak directly with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian or access the network of Freedom to Speak Up Champions. In March 2026 the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian for Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust left the organisation. Sarah Feal, Company Secretary from Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust took on the role for both organisations to ensure continuity.

The Champions are volunteers based across different services who offer confidential support and guidance.

Both organisations have aligned the Freedom to Speak Up policy to the national policy and will be looking to harmonise this in quarter 1 of 2026-27 for the new organisation.

6.2 Freedom to Speak Up Champions

There is currently **70** Freedom to Speak Up Champions across the Trust who have volunteered to act as advocates for staff and have completed the relevant training. The Champions are supported by the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, who is the Company Secretary.

The Champions met together as part of their annual review on 16 October 2025 to discuss themes and learning, and to inform the agreed actions for the forthcoming year.

6.3 Trust Board Leadership

The work is also supported by Anita Pisani, the Chief People Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, and David Crawford, Non-Executive Director who may provide independent support if required. Both joined the session on 16 October 2025.

6.4 Themes and Trends

On a quarterly basis, the Trust reports all concerns raised through the Freedom to Speak Up route to the National Guardian's Office. The Office provides leadership, training and support to the network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians across England and undertakes speaking up reviews to promote learning and improve organisational culture within the healthcare sector. All returns have been submitted to the National Guardian's Office within the required timescales.

Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust	Quarter 1 April-June	Quarter 2 July-September	Quarter 3 October-December	Quarter 4 January-March	Total
2024-25	0	4	8	4*	16
2025-26	3	7	6	4	20

Table 1 - * Cases are calculated by numbers of individuals involved.

Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust	Quarter 1 April-June	Quarter 2 July-September	Quarter 3 October-December	Quarter 4 January-March	Total
2025-26	13	14	11	7	45

(2024-25 – 52 cases overall)

The highest theme across the Group related to **attitudes and behaviours**.

6.5 NHS Staff Survey

The annual NHS Staff Survey also provides an important mechanism for staff to share their views and experiences.

A central theme of the NHS People Promise is “**We each have a voice that counts**,” reinforcing the Trust’s commitment to ensuring that all staff feel heard and valued. The ‘We each have a voice that counts’ theme in the NHS Staff Survey is measured through a set of questions covering staff confidence in speaking up, their ability to contribute ideas, and whether they feel listened to and able to influence change within their teams and organisation.

People Promise Area	Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust 53% response rate (61% 2024)	Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust 62% response rate (67% 2024)	Sector average	Best result for sector
We each have a voice that counts	2025 – 7.34 2024 – 7.32	2025 – 7.15 2024 – 7.23	6.98	7.34

6.6 Mandatory Training

All staff are required to complete ‘Speak Up’ mandatory training as part of their induction to the Trust. This core training is essential for all employees and provides an overview of what speaking up means, why it is important, and how staff can raise concerns. It also sets out what individuals can expect when they do speak up.

The Group’s compliance target for this training is **90%**. This target was consistently achieved in every month throughout 2025-26. The table in **Appendix A** summarises compliance levels by calendar month.

Appendices

Appendix A: Compliance figures per calendar month across the Group

