



**Scottish  
Ambulance  
Service**  
University National NHS Board



# Annual Whistleblowing Report

## April 2022 – March 2023



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## **Introduction**

It been a challenging year for Health and Social Care in Scotland and as such, the Scottish Ambulance Service and its staff have faced unprecedented pressures. It remains a priority for the Service during these difficult times that staff are encouraged and supported to speak up about any concerns they have.

Scottish Ambulance Service have continued to actively support and promote a healthy culture of openness and transparency by focussing on the promotion and implementation of our organisational values which are aligned with those of NHS Scotland. This report describes the Scottish Ambulance Services response to national Whistleblowing arrangements, the approach taken within the service as well as an overview of the concerns raised through the Whistleblowing route and the themes and organisational learning, as a result of the process to investigate the concerns during the first year of implementation of the standards, from April 2022 to March 2023.

## **Whistleblowing Toolkit**

A Whistleblowing Toolkit (Appendix 1) has been developed and includes a Managers Guide which provides information in relation to the standards, their role in the process, how they should manage concerns. It also explains how a Stage 1 concern should be progressed under the whistleblowing standards. The toolkit provides managers with a suite of template letters to communicate outcomes and advise someone raising a whistleblowing concern of the options available to them should they remain unhappy with the actions taken and wish to progress matters further.

An information pack for investigators has also been developed and provides guidance regarding the processes that should be followed when investigating Stage 2 concerns. In addition to this a Whistleblowing Satisfaction Survey has been developed to allow those involved in the Whistleblowing process to provide some feedback on how they felt their concerns were handled throughout the process.

Work ongoing to improve the communication processes in relation to handling Whistleblowing concerns to ensure improved decision making and more effective reporting and recording mechanisms. Information available to staff whether directly or indirectly employed by the Service and our volunteers is also being refreshed to ensure this continues to meet the Whistleblowing Standards.

## **Whistleblowing Training**

Training on the Whistleblowing Standards and Once for Scotland Policy remains a priority for the Service and details of the online training via TURAS (Appendix 2) is available for all our employees on @SAS. The whistleblowing standards and TURAS training have been widely communicated throughout the Service via staff engagement sessions staff bulletins and the intranet.

Confidential contacts and dedicated whistleblowing investigators to support stage 2 concerns across the organisation from a variety of corporate and clinical services, ensuring system resilience in supporting staff raising concerns have been established. Online



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training via TURAS has been completed by the confidential contacts and the lead investigators. Given the importance of this role the Service will continue to provide update training including the use of information from the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO).

TURAS training is also being undertaken by HR Managers and HR Advisers to ensure they have a good understanding of the standards and the procedure for raising and dealing with concerns.

When the Whistleblowing Standards were implemented, the Service confirmed that line managers will deal with stage 1 (early resolution) concerns. A short on-line session called 'Introduction to Whistleblowing' is included in the induction programme for new managers.

The purpose of this session is:

- To provide an introduction and overview of whistleblowing and the standards, explaining their role.
- To understand the role of the INWO.
- To explain how to identify a whistleblowing concern.
- To summarise the procedure for handling a whistleblowing concern and provide details of the confidential contacts.
- To signpost managers to the comprehensive on-line training modules on TURAS and encourage them to complete them.
- To clarify some of the misconceptions around whistleblowing and support the development of staff understanding of what whistleblowing is and more importantly, what it is not.

### **Whistleblowing Network**

The previous Executive Lead for whistleblowing had developed an effective network of support for the Confidential Contacts and the Lead Investigators when the Standards were implemented. This network remains in place for the organisation, but the regular meetings of this network had not continued while the Executive Lead role for whistleblowing was vacant. These meetings have now been reinstated and will provide training information, peer support and share information from the INWO.

Work will continue to maintain and expand the Whistleblowing network within the service as some members of the network have left the service or moved to new roles and are no longer able to continue in their role. The Service is also reviewing how we can encourage staff with protected characteristics to become part of the whistleblowing network to reduce any additional barriers that may exist for whistle-blowers.

All members of the Whistleblowing Network have been invited to join the Scottish Speak Up Network. This network meets monthly and provides a valuable forum for members of our network to share learning across the wider NHS.

The new Whistleblowing Executive Lead and the Whistleblowing Champion will continue to meet regularly to feedback on organisational learning and developments through the Whistleblowing Champions network.



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## **Governance and Assurance**

The Cabinet Secretary wrote to the Service on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 requesting an update in different aspects of our whistle blowing processes and the assurance role of Liz Humphreys, our nonexecutive Whistleblowing Champion. This provided an opportunity for the Service to describe the measures taken in the last year to actively support and promote a healthy culture of openness and transparency by focussing on the promotion and implementation of our organisational values which are aligned with those of NHS Scotland.

In terms of how SAS ensures there is clear process in place for raising concerns, including those relating to Board members, details of the Confidential Contacts within SAS are available on both the intranet and public facing website. This includes information on how confidential contacts support staff by providing an initial point of contact for people wishing to raise a concern, provide information and advice, and assist and support people to raise a concern through the most appropriate route.

We continue to monitor staff views of our Whistleblowing information on our intranet and use of the toolkit and report this in our quarterly Whistleblowing report which is discussed at our Clinical Governance Committee. We have plans to further review the effectiveness of the toolkit as part of Learning in Practice programme as part of our mandatory and statutory training programme.

At present we record all concerns via our Datix system, to ensure confidentiality a very limited staff group have access to this information. This allows us to track themes and trends and to collate investigations and reports efficiently and effectively. Our reporting systems are in line with the governance sections of the Whistleblowing standards although we will be reviewing our processes to ensure we are making improvements wherever possible. We have plans to link learning from concerns raised to our Learning from Events work to ensure we share opportunities for continuous learning and development. The process of developing a fully mature 'speak up' culture, including building confidence in the whistleblowing process is ongoing.

## **Speak Up Week 2022**

The Service undertook several initiatives during Speak Up Week in October of 2022. The benefits of speaking up were highlighted at Partnership Forums and Regional and Sub Regional Team Meetings. Posters were distributed throughout stations to raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Standards and the Confidential Contacts within the Service that staff should contact should they require support and guidance in raising a concern.

Two virtual events were held, a "Speak Up" Coffee Morning on the 4th of October and a "Speak Up" Afternoon Tea on the 6th of October. Speak Up Week was also promoted on SAS's social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). Staff across the organisation have also been signposted to the Whistleblowing Training available via TURAS.



As part of a Chief Executive's Engagement Session, Liz Humphreys delivered a presentation on Whistleblowing with one of our Confidential Contacts. The presentation highlighted the Whistleblowing Standards, and the benefits of the Standards were discussed to ensure that staff understood that these ensure a safe and confidential process that protects people to be able to raise concerns without fear of detrimental treatment, and that promotes healthy workplace culture. The importance of ensuring everyone has the chance to speak up, raise a concern and be treated with dignity and respect was re-enforced and Staff were encouraged to speak up about patient safety issues, poor practice, unsafe working conditions, abusing authority and fraud.

### **Whistleblowing Concerns and Themes**

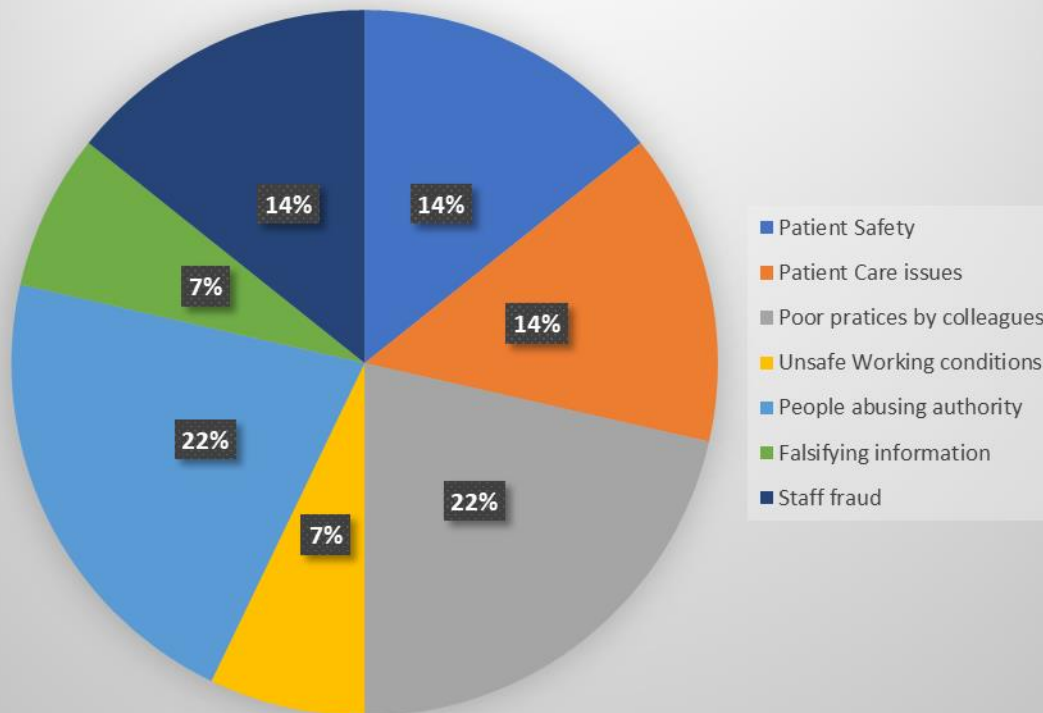
There have been eleven formal reports of whistleblowing from April to March 2023. These incidents were all investigated, ten of which were a Stage 1 and one as a Stage 2. These were all investigated by the local line manager and resolved apart from the Stage 2 concern which is still ongoing. The whistle-blowers were kept apprised of progress regularly by the Lead Investigator and supported by the Confidential Contact throughout these investigations.

Of all the concerns, 7 have been taken forward following business as usual processes. We have identified the following learning / actions.

- A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for use by all staff including ACC, to provide guidance under what circumstances single crews should be paired up, e.g., skill mix, geographical area, operational coverage for that area and a risk assessment based on demand in the area. This would allow a better understanding for all staff involved and to give ACC and operational crews the confidence when pairing up that an SOP is being utilised and followed.
- Reinforcing that local management teams will review coverage daily and utilise relief to relocate to any stations that are struggling with a high abstraction rate, where possible, prior to the shift starting. Consideration for supporting secondments to relief where there is a known longer abstraction in order to backfill vacant shifts.
- Consideration for relief staff to provide rotational periods at rural stations, ensuring fairness of allocation to those relief staff who live further away.
- The Scottish Ambulance Service is now taking steps to put in place additional guidance and risk assessments that require to be in place to provide further support to investigating managers in relation to the playing of recordings during an investigation. The work to develop these processes is being led by Human Resources Team.



## Whistleblowing Theme 22/23



### Organisational Culture

We have also undertaken work in terms of the wider healthy culture of our organisation including our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-24. As an organisation we know that supporting and improving health and wellbeing is multifactorial and requires a focus on increasing staff engagement, job satisfaction and morale. We are intent on promoting strong leadership and supportive managers with good people management skills and the confidence and competence to support others' wellbeing. We are working to further our culture of openness that enables people to speak up and have conversations about difficult issues. We believe that strong support networks and effective teamwork give our staff a sense that they are listened to, have control over their work and are involved in decisions that affect them. We have been developing policies which promote good working conditions, healthy work-life balance and opportunities for growth and development. We are working to equip our staff with the awareness, knowledge, confidence, and tools to look after their own health and wellbeing and of those around them. Work is ongoing to identify





barriers to speaking up, both for all staff and specifically for minority groups. This issue is complex and nuanced and will require collaboration with stakeholders to ensure the Service delivers this appropriately. This will include ensuring that we have an appropriately wide range of confidential contacts to support individuals to speak up.

## **Reflections**

Whilst the numbers of concerns raised within the service remains low this should not necessarily be viewed as a positive reflection of performance or quality within the Service. Further work is required to explore the impact of culture, attitudes and behaviours in relation to whistleblowing. The Service is working hard on staff wellbeing and culture which could have an impact on people feeling they are able to speak up and whistle blow. There is an ongoing need to continually learn and reflect on the evolving whistleblowing processes within the Service. This includes developing our engagement with the whistle blower during the investigation to ensure their welfare and ensuring we are able to meet the timeframes within the standards.

## **Next Steps**

- Ongoing exploration and discussion around the impact of any additional barriers to speaking up for staff with protected characteristics.
- Progress the Whistleblowing support networks locally and nationally.
- Continue to refine the whistleblowing processes based on learning and feedback.
- Explore the opportunities to continue to share learning from whistleblowing concerns whilst maintaining confidentiality.
- The Exec and Non-Exec lead for whistleblowing will present a session on whistleblowing during Wellbeing week in June 2023.
- Plans for Speak Up week in 2023 are underway to continue sharing information with staff on whistleblowing.
- Explore how to further promote training on Whistleblowing for staff and the potential for this to become part of the organisations MAST modules.

## **Conclusion**

Meaningful progress has been made since the introduction of the Whistleblowing Standards within the Service in terms of setting up the network, training staff and sharing information. Further development is needed to refine processes using learning to ensure staff feel confident to speak up and people receiving the concerns are clear on what they should do to support the whistle-blower. The Service will focus on using internal and external sources of learning to improve and develop our whistleblowing information and processes in the coming year.



## APPENDIX 1

**Whistleblowing Toolbox**

Mark Bargon (SAS)  
WEB & INTRANET ANALYST DEVELOPER

**Managers Guidance**

- Manager Guidance
- Appendix 1 - does not fall within whistleblowing standards
- Appendix 2 - acknowledgement of Stage 1
- Appendix 3 - outcome of Stage 1
- Appendix 4 - acknowledgement of stage 2
- Appendix 5 - outcome of Stage 2
- Appendix 6 - Stage 2 20 day extension

**Investigator Guidance**

- Investigator Information Pack
- Appendix 1 - acknowledgement of stage 2
- Appendix 2 - Terms of Reference
- Appendix 3 - record of contact
- Appendix 4 - outcome of stage 2
- Appendix 6 - 20 day extension
- Appendix 7 - Whistleblowing Investigation Report
- Whistleblowing Investigator Flow Chart

[Satisfaction Survey](#)





## APPENDIX 2



### National Whistleblowing Standards training

Search...

- All
- National Whistleblowing Standards training

[Learn home](#) > National Whistleblowing Standards training

#### National Whistleblowing Standards training

- Whistleblowing : an overview >
- Whistleblowing : for line managers >
- Whistleblowing : for senior managers >
- Training resources for Confidential Contacts >

[Add to favourites](#)

This training is for anybody who provides services on behalf of the NHS in Scotland, including students, contractors and volunteers.

In these modules you will learn about the National Whistleblowing Standards (the Standards) and the role of the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO).

The Standards came into force on 1 April 2021 and are a step change in how whistleblowing concerns are dealt with in the NHS. They describe how organisations must provide protection and support for people who speak up about harm or wrong doing.

The modules have been provided by the INWO and are set out in 3 different learning programmes for:

- people who need an overview of the Standards;
- people who are line managers or work in a similar role, who are likely to receive concerns from colleagues in their day-to-day work; and
- senior managers who are involved with not only receiving concerns, but also investigating, responding to, and reporting on whistleblowing concerns to the board.

#### Training resources for Confidential Contacts

At the bottom of this page, boards will find a link to case study based training resources for Confidential Contacts.