

## **Freedom to Speak Up**

6.47 A formal process to support speaking up in the NHS was implemented following the Mid Staffordshire enquiry in 2013 and is described in F2SU: Whistleblowing policy for the NHS.

6.48 The Trust has recently (July 2022) revised its Freedom to Speak Up (F2SU) policy. It is in line with national expectation: they have a named NED in place, a named Guardian and a reporting structure in line with national policy.

6.49 The number of concerns raised through the process are reported to be lower than expected – that isn't necessarily a sign of concern and there is evidence of active engagement within the organisation to make staff aware of the F2SU role and encourage reporting.

6.50 The F2SU Guardian (F2SUG) role is currently vested in the Company Secretary role with the current postholder at the time of this review 'inheriting' it when they took up the Company Secretary role in 2021. It is supplemented by an additional F2SUG, the CQC Compliance Officer. Whilst both are experienced, and committed to the principles of F2SU, there are some questions that this raises:

- It was pointed out that there is an advantage to the F2SUG role being held by staff "close" to the senior team and Board. However, the perception of impartiality could be damaged by that closeness.
- Neither postholder would claim to be close to, or indeed demonstrably very familiar with, frontline services. Again, this could impact the perception of their accessibility and understanding of issues. 63
- Capacity is clearly an issue. Benchmarking the resource available needs to take account of other variables to make the capacity appropriate and will form part of the national review: however, concern was expressed at the lack of capacity and accessibility of the current resource available.
- There was a plan to recruit F2SU Champions. This would mean staff in a range of roles identified and trained to support the Guardians and increase access, but this appears to have faltered.

6.51 In November 2022 the Trust agreed, following consultation, a revised approach including the appointment of a new F2SUG with additional resource supported by a network of F2SU champions. They are in the process of recruiting to that role. It has shared its revised arrangements with the national F2SU Guardian.

6.52 NEAS has recently been included in a national review of F2SU in ambulance trusts and acknowledges it may need to look again at its revised arrangements once that review is published.

6.53 We note that one of the aims of the new operational management structure is to provide additional support to developing a speaking up culture.

## **Conclusions**

6.54 NEAS did seek to improve the culture to enable staff to speak up in recent years but there was a lack of collective ownership of the approach being taken which undermined it. We believe the Trust would benefit from engaging with the wider national review arising from the National Guardian's recommendations into 'speaking up' in ambulance trusts published in 2023.

6.55 Systems and processes were not in place that would enable best practice in reporting and, investigation. Thereby potentially hindering staff from speaking up and issues being addressed. These systems deteriorated because of the dissonance within the senior team.

6.56 Whilst data suggests staff will report concerns in that they know it is expected of them, they lack confidence in actions being taken, and still perceive a punitive approach in some cases.

6.57 Work to improve culture is actively ongoing; it would benefit from broader ownership, for example, the formal engagement of staff side in monitoring the plan. New operational leadership structures provide an opportunity to support cultural development further. 6.58 Revised F2SU arrangements have been agreed and are being implemented.

6.59 The Board has undergone considerable change and faces more with the appointment of a new Medical Director and Director of Quality and Safety.