

Freedom to Speak Up Vision and Strategy 2025

1. Foreword

Together we will make UHBW the best place to work.

Ensuring colleagues feel confident to speak up is critical to the delivery of safe care. We encourage colleagues to raise concerns so we can become a true learning organisation. Our staff survey data tells us not everyone feels confident to speak up or when they do some feel nothing changes. We need to work harder to listen, to act upon concerns and offer feedback to those who raise them.

*In doing so we will live our values of being **collaborative, innovative, respectful and supportive**. Alongside the People Strategy, this Freedom to Speak Up vision and strategy aims to deliver our promise to place colleagues at the heart of all we do. I welcome this, and its ambitions to make UHBW the best place to work.*

Emma Wood Chief People Officer and Deputy CEO

2. Setting the scene

- 2.1. Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) means being able to voice concerns, but equally ideas or improvements without fear or detriment. Colleagues should feel confident that their voices will be listened to and that they will receive relevant and meaningful feedback. Speaking up creates an open, transparent and safe healthcare culture in which colleagues feel heard, safe and supported to speak up when things go wrong. However, research has repeatedly identified that this national vision is often not realised¹.

Embracing Freedom to Speak Up by listening to and acting on the suggestions and concerns of workers is critical for learning and improvement. The events surrounding the terrible crimes of Lucy Letby are an important reminder of how vital it is for organisations to have a culture in which workers feel safe to speak up about anything that gets in the way of delivering safe and high-quality care. Managers and senior leaders must be welcoming of speaking up and be ready to listen and act on what they hear.

*Maria Caulfield MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Mental Health and Women's Health, 16 November 2023*

- 2.2. Having the freedom to speak up is also fundamental to ensure the right conditions of care for our patients. The recent introduction of 'Martha's Rule' empowers patients and their relatives to 'speak up' where they may have concerns about their care, and our responsibility is to ensure our vision mirrors these same principles.

3. Vision

- 3.1. The vision is set out within the [People Strategy](#), which places colleagues' experience at the heart of our programme of work to ensure UHBW remains a safe, enjoyable and inclusive place to work, together with fulfilling the objective: 'Celebrate and value the contributions of all our colleagues by ensuring they have a voice and are listened to' (*Emma Wood, People Strategy, 2022-2025*).

¹ Lewis, D. (2013) Resolving Whistleblowing Disputes in the Public Interest: Is Tribunal Adjudication the Best that Can be Offered? Industrial Law Journal, Volume 42, Issue 1, March 2013, Pages 35–53. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/indlaw/dwt001>.

- 3.2. Please also read this strategy in conjunction with the Trust's [Respecting Everyone Policy](#) and the Listening Framework².
- 3.3. The vision also aligns with the work of the [National Guardian's Office](#), which, since 2016, has focused on the task of making speaking up business as usual in health. The office leads, trains and supports a network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England, disseminates learning and challenges the whole healthcare system to promote speaking up. The NGO defines speaking up as:
- "...anything that gets in the way of patient care, or that affects your working life. That could be something which doesn't feel right, for example a way of working or a process which isn't being followed, or behaviours of others which you feel is having an impact on the well-being of you, the people you work with, or patients."*
- 3.4. We know from our NHS staff survey responses and national responses over several years³ that colleagues do not always feel safe to raise concerns or believe that their concerns will be heard or acted on. Indeed, despite the introduction of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in 2016, confidence in raising concerns and feeling that they will be taken seriously has remained fairly static both at UHBW, and nationally.⁴
- 3.5. This, of course, is because speaking up happens in lots of different ways – the FTSU Guardian is just one route to raise concerns alongside managers, patient safety colleagues, HR Services, Union reps; staff networks and professional advocates among others. Nevertheless, this strategy's vision is that we have a culture where **all colleagues, including volunteers, students, locum, bank and agency workers, feel safe to speak up and that they have their voices heard** at work. But speaking up only works well when we are listening up and following up too. People who speak up need to see noticeable change in their working experience to feel confident that it is worth taking the risk to use their voice.
- 3.6. Ensuring that colleagues feel safe, supported and confident to raise concerns is fundamental to achieving our collective vision to improve the health of the people and community we serve. It is not something that can be achieved by FTSU alone – but must work with all elements of the broader [People Strategy](#). This aligns with our new 'full-hearted care' approach – in which we aim to ensure we are matching our progressive culture of care for patients, with a progressive culture of care for our staff and communities.
- 3.7. The NHS is a people business; people are at the heart of what we do. This strategy puts our colleagues' experience rather than simply the process at the centre of change, recognising that there is a diversity of views and opinions, we need to be open to new ideas and remain curious about thinking and acting differently. We also need to be vigilant to address the barriers that exist which prevent staff from speaking up.
- 3.8. This Freedom to Speak Up Strategy, alongside the Freedom to Speak Up policy, supports colleagues to know:
- How to raise concerns
 - Who to raise them with
 - How the concern will be investigated
 - How feedback will be given

² https://uhbristol.sharepoint.com/sites/AnnualCheck-inAppraisalConversation/_layouts/15/viewer.aspx?sourcedoc={0680eba9-f711-485d-a209-c39931d8783b}

³Nationally, only 62.31% of people completing the NHS staff survey in 2023 felt safe to speak up about concerns and only 50.7% were confident their organisation would address those concerns.

⁴In 2018, 71.5% of staff who responded to the NHS staff survey (UH Bristol) said they would feel secure raising concerns and 61% would be confident that the concerns would be addressed.

- How we learn from concerns.
- 3.9. The standard operating procedure for escalating concerns raised with the FTSU Guardian is included at Appendix A. This outlines the process and suggested timeframes for the Guardian and for senior leaders to respond to concerns and what steps will then be taken.

4. Where have we got to

- 4.1. Despite the NHS adopting the 20 principles from Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up review in 2015⁵ to guide the development of a healthy speaking up culture, some of our colleagues still describe reluctance to speak up – often based on fear or a sense of futility.
- 4.2. The following are quotes from colleagues who have raised concerns in 2023/4:
- "[The process] left me so mentally exhausted and drained that I am not sure what I will do. Bank contracts really make you feel like you can be chewed up, spat out, and walked on"
- "Only by speaking up can we bring about change. But I really hope change in behaviour happens rather than just tick boxing"
- "Could not fault the [Freedom to Speak Up] process in any way. Situation now resolved and it wouldn't have been if we had not been supported and helped along the way"
- "I feel dissatisfied because nothing has changed yet"
- "8/10 is not a reflection in the work of the guardians! The issues we have raised require a massive shift in the culture of the organisation and involve a lot of people to take part"
- "I am not afraid to speak up anymore as I no longer feel intimidated"
- "I was seen by someone quickly and I felt my concerns were listened to"
- "I am 100% happy with the outcome which was within the Freedom to Speak Up [Guardian's] jurisdiction. The element I'm not happy with is outside both our control".
- 4.3. A lack of confidence is set against a backdrop of challenging conditions in the NHS: a series of recent NHS inquiries, including the Fuller⁶ and Ockenden⁷ inquiries, has noted that staff are justified in having these concerns because speaking up is not always welcomed and poor behaviours and leadership can mean patient safety is severely compromised. The Thirlwall inquiry's terms of reference⁸ include examination of the way concerns are raised and investigated in hospital trusts.
- 4.4. The first UHBW Freedom to Speak Up Strategy was implemented in 2019. This strategy had three objectives and associated actions for the FTSU Guardian. A summary of the objectives and achievements to date is included as Appendix B.

5. Where we want to be

- 5.1. Based on feedback from 'speaking up stakeholders'⁹ across the organisation, the objectives of the 2019 strategy were translated into five new priorities. Additionally, the Board met in September 2024 to re-examine all the sources of information from speaking up routes within UHBW (both workers and patients) to explore whether the right assurance is in place to

⁵ [Freedom to Speak Up \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/freedom-to-speak-up/)

⁶ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6565d4c762180b0012ce82e8/HC310-fuller-inquiry-phase-1-report-web-accessible.pdf>

⁷ https://www.ockendenmaternityreview.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL_INDEPENDENT_MATERNITY_REVIEW_OF_MATERNITY_SERVICES_REPORT.pdf

⁸ <https://thirlwall.public-inquiry.uk/document/terms-of-reference/>

⁹ FTSU Champions; wellbeing leads; HR representatives; learning and development; patient experience team; EDI lead; patient safety; risk team; unions; NED and executive leads;

ensure concerns are being heard and acted on. It was agreed that improvements in how this data is triangulated are required to better understand where there might be 'hot spots' and to provide targeted action. FTSU data will be included in this triangulation work as outlined below.

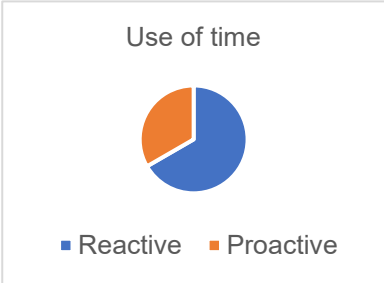
5.2. The first three new priorities include actions for the FTSU Guardian. The last two are priorities for the Trust Board to take forwards.

Priority	What this means	How we measure success
Raise awareness	That anyone who works at UHBW is aware of the routes to raise concerns	Mandatory Speak Up core training compliance of 95% across the divisions Pulse surveys Diversity of FTSU champion network
Inspire confidence	Anyone who works at UHBW understands the FTSU process and feels confident to use it as a route to raise concerns	Number of cases recorded and closed Regular reporting to Board/People Committee including themes from FTSU triangulated with other sources 95% satisfaction rate from feedback relating to FTSU process Case studies/learning published Reduction in external concerns reported
Remove barriers	Anyone who works at UHBW, regardless of their protected characteristics or their role in the organisation, feels safe to speak up – and the right environment is fostered to ensure they can access FTSU or other channels	Capture protected characteristics of those speaking up and if their protected characteristics are a reason for them speaking up Improve routes for speaking up and monitor Numbers and staff groups speaking up and their locations
Demonstrate leadership and accountability	Promote compassionate leadership across the Trust Build trust by encouraging open professional debate and welcoming constructive feedback	Senior leaders complete compassionate leadership training and all three modules of the NGO's Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up training Commitment to regular team/department meet and greet opportunities Use of values-based recruitment Pulse surveys
Show that we are learning from concerns	Wherever possible issues raised as concerns do not recur	Evaluate the other routes to raise concerns across the organisation and where themes/data is collected Learning from staff stories at Board Demonstrate tangible action to thematic concerns raised via FTSU and other routes Continued upward trend in NHS Staff Survey scores around speaking up

6. What we need to get there

- 6.1. We believe we have the foundations in place for delivering an efficient and effective FTSU service. This strategy sets out the programme of work that is being delivered against the three new priorities within current resources (what we are doing now), in addition to the core task of the FTSU Guardian to handle concerns. A SWOT analysis is included as Appendix C.
- 6.2. A more ambitious future plan of work (where we want to be) can only be achieved with more resource, but this would require a separate business case. Appendix D includes an outline of what could be achieved along with proposed actions to be considered with the FTSU Guardian at North Bristol NHS Trust as we move forward towards a group hospital model.

Priority	What we are doing now
Raise awareness	<p>Participating in corporate induction</p> <p>Presenting team/department meetings (ad hoc)</p> <p>Participating in meet and greet opportunities across the divisions (ad hoc)</p> <p>Recruiting and training FTSU champions from across UHBW (to create a network of listeners who can support and signpost to further information work alongside the Guardian to raise awareness and promote the value of speaking up)</p> <p>Attending staff network meetings / providing allyship at events</p>
Priority	What we are doing now
Inspire confidence	<p>Thanking individuals who have spoken up and providing feedback on concerns</p> <p>Communicating FTSU outcomes (ad hoc) to the FTSU champion network and wider organisation</p> <p>Contributing FTSU data to triangulation work</p> <p>Linking with wellbeing leads and other routes for support (e.g. divisional managers) in communicating importance of raising concerns</p> <p>Finalising and publishing/ publicising the manager guide to speaking up</p> <p>Providing opportunity to feedback on FTSU service</p> <p>Adhering to SOP around FTSU concern escalation</p>
Priority	What we are doing now
Remove barriers	<p>Promoting the FTSU service as one of the routes to raise concerns at UHBW – improve routes to speak up, exploring</p> <p>Training FTSU champions from across the organisation – focusing on known gaps in representation (age, ethnicity, banding)</p> <p>Capturing data on protected characteristics of those raising concerns and whether concerns relate to protected characteristics</p>
Resources	What we are doing now
	<p>Senior lead FTSU (no ring-fenced time)</p> <p>1 x B7 1 WTE (working 0.8)</p>

<div> <div>Use of time</div>  <div> ■ Reactive ■ Proactive </div> </div>	Work type	Task	Hours (day)	Hours (week)
	Reactive	Concern handling	3	12
	Reactive	Internal / external meetings	2	8
	Proactive	Champion training, recruitment	1.5	6
	Proactive	Engagement activities	1	4

Glossary

The Board: we use this term to describe the executive and non-executive directors (the executive Board includes: Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nurse and Midwife, Chief People Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Managing Director Weston General Hospital, Chief Financial Officer and Joint Chief Digital Information Officer).

Senior leaders: we use this term when we mean executive and non-executive directors.

Colleagues: we use this term to mean everyone in the organisation including agency workers, temporary workers, students, volunteers and governors.

Speaking Up: encompasses matters often referred to as raising concerns, making suggestions for improvement, whistleblowing and protected or qualifying disclosures.

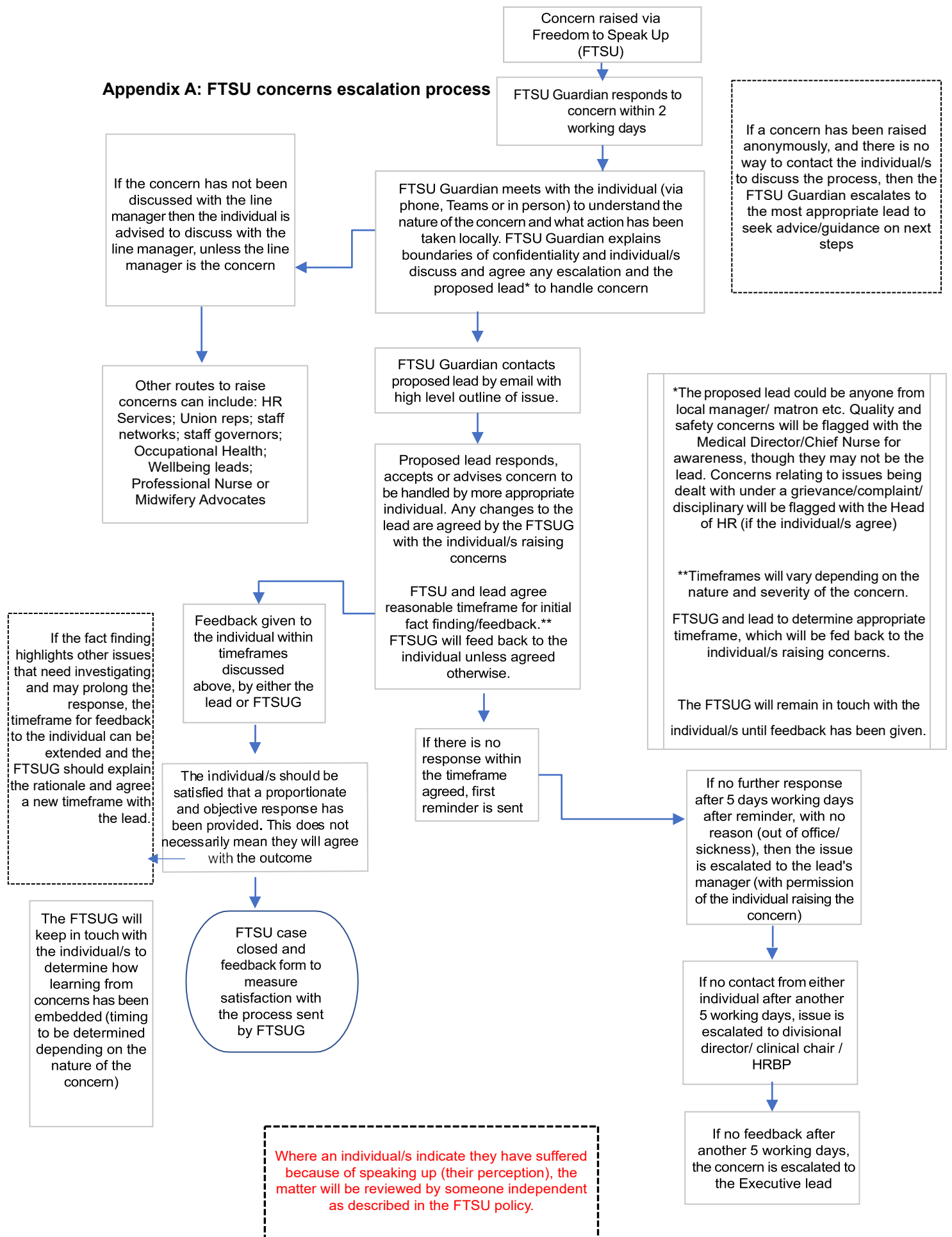
Acronyms and Abbreviations

FTSU: Freedom to Speak Up

FTSUG: Freedom to Speak up Guardian

NGO: National Guardian Office

Appendix A: FTSU concerns escalation process



Appendix B: Update against the objectives of the 2019 FTSU Strategy

Objective 2019	Actions 2019	Situation 2024
Improve awareness of the Speaking Up programme	All new starters are made aware of Speaking Up at corporate induction or at local training	The FTSUG has a presence at corporate induction (both Bristol and Weston) to talk to new starters and share information supplementary to the presentation.
	All staff will be issued with a simple guide to Speaking Up as part of the recruitment process	Information about speaking up and contact information is included in the onboarding process (First Day Kit)
	A rolling communications programme ensures all workers are made aware of the Speaking Up programme through marketing materials in all areas of the hospital, regular email updates and face to face communications	Marketing materials to promote the FTSU service (including posters, cards, leaflets) are in all hospital sites and continue to be distributed through the FTSU champion network. Ad hoc communications via newsletters and walkabouts
	There is clearly accessible information about Speaking Up and how to raise concerns on Connect	Information about FTSU is available on the intranets.
	Speaking Up staff champions will be available in all areas of the organisation and from a range of backgrounds and roles.	There is a network of 80 trained FTSU champions (voluntary role) across UHBW – on all hospital sites. The network is largely representative of the workforce.
Improve confidence in speaking up	Individuals will all have the opportunity, and adequate time, to discuss their concerns with the Guardian or champion.	The FTSUG or champions are available for workers to discuss their concerns – satisfactory internal audit of FTSU (Oct 2022)
	The number of cases raised and resolved, and key themes of concerns will be reported to staff on a regular basis through the champion network and existing communication channels	The number of concerns and themes are reported quarterly to the Board and People Committee; and via quarterly champion meetings
	Wherever possible, case studies will be developed and communicated to share outcomes from investigations	Three case studies have been published and shared across the Trust to help demonstrate outcomes from speaking up. Case studies shared with champions as part of Champion Reflection and Learning event in March 2024
	Annual review of Freedom to Speak Up policy and strategy to ensure they are fit for purpose.	The FTSU policy was updated in April 2023 and is due to be reviewed in April 2026 to ensure it remains fit for purpose
		Concerns are dealt with promptly, independently and confidentially – satisfactory internal audit of FTSU (Oct 2022)

Objective 2019	Actions 2019	Situation 2024
		SOP for concern handling is in place (see Appendix A)
		Those who raise concerns receive feedback and can themselves feedback anonymously on the process.
Support all leaders and managers to understand their own behaviours		<p>Mandatory training on leadership behaviours is now in place in UHBW (since November 2023)</p> <p>Mandatory Speak Up training on FTSU has achieved overall compliance of 88%.</p>

Appendix C: SWOT analysis

What we are doing now

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Concerns are handled and majority are completed within timeframes</p> <p>Feedback around FTSU service from those raising concerns is largely positive</p> <p>Core group of FTSU champions are supporting colleagues to raise concerns¹⁰</p> <p>Data collection around protected characteristics</p> <p>Information about FTSU is available for staff from start day, at induction, through mandatory training, on the intranet, UHBW website and through ad hoc communication/marketing</p> <p>FTSU Guardian provides allyship to staff networks and Wellbeing team / divisional wellbeing leads</p> <p>FTSU activity is reported regularly to the Board/People Committee</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Awareness of FTSU post induction is limited – communication about FTSU is ad hoc</p> <p>Marketing materials do not align with new Trust brand and are outdated (e.g. FTSU video)</p> <p>Proactive (engagement) work is ad hoc and stood down when number of concerns increases</p> <p>Support for FTSU champions as a network is limited (quarterly meeting as a minimum) – limiting the reach to/engagement with staff across the organisation</p> <p>Learning from FTSU not shared consistently (no communications plan and resource)</p> <p>Core training for all staff only one off Speak up module every three years</p> <p>A focus on the number of FTSU concerns does not elucidate the true picture of organisational concerns</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Closer working with NBT as group hospital model – opportunities for learning and benchmarking</p> <p>Learning from new FTSU models emerging at other large Groups including Manchester</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Single point of failure with only one Guardian having ring-fenced time (0.8 WTE) for all FTSU activities</p> <p>Themes of concerns from reports are not listened to by senior leaders and are repeated where learning is not shared effectively across the organisation. There is a lack of action / noticeable change</p> <p>Speak Up / Listen Up training (provided by the NGO) is not adapted to suit the organisation</p> <p>Lack of analytical software limiting efficiency of reporting and opportunities to pick up trends from data</p> <p>Lack of resource to deliver a more ambitious and robust programme of improvement relating to the FTSU service</p> <p>Risk that not learning from FTSU concerns may impact reputation of Trust (internally/externally)</p>

¹⁰ Feedback from July 2024 on the impact of the work of a FTSU champion: “A few months back I was going through a pretty tough time - xx constantly lent me her ear, always checked in on me in a non-intrusive way, gave me genuine empathy, signposted me to all sorts of useful resources that I had no idea existed, and generally just gave me a very neutral, safe space to talk, be heard and feel supported in my team. Our wellbeing catch ups made a real difference to my work/life balance and overall happiness”

Appendix D: What could be achieved with more resource / potential actions for group model working

Priority	Where we want to be	Actions for group model
Raise awareness	<p>Refresh marketing materials in line with new branding, to include videos and posters</p> <p>Develop communication plan to deliver regular updates from the Guardian team to the champions and wider organisation – combining face to face meetings and use of Viva Engage</p> <p>Review mandatory training (currently one-off Speak Up training for all staff) and potential follow up programme</p>	<p>Align communication/ marketing materials with NBT</p> <p>Align mandatory training requirements, evaluate and review effectiveness</p>
Priority	Where we want to be	Actions for group model
Inspire confidence	<p>Regularly share FTSU outcomes with wider organisation (as part of communications plan)</p> <p>Develop programme of targeted support from the FTSUG in line with outcomes from 'Team development' triangulation work with Organisational Development and Education and Training leads</p> <p>Identify teams to work with using the managers' handbook in line with outcomes from 'Team development' triangulation work. Revise handbook based on feedback. Upskill managers to handle concerns skilfully</p> <p>Share staff stories around speaking up in reporting</p>	<p>Share case studies or similar across the group model</p> <p>Share resources (e.g. manager handbook / training)</p>
Priority	Where we want to be	Actions for group model
Remove barriers	<p>Further develop the champion network to build a truly representative community (across protected characteristics and banding/job roles) that consistently and actively supports the promotion of positive speaking up workplaces through provision of regular check in, training and development</p> <p>Strengthen links with patient safety, patient support and patient voice leads as part of triangulation work</p> <p>Invest in agile system to better capture both quantitative and qualitative data (would require separate business case)</p> <p>Highlight any gaps or trends in data reported (via People Committee or Board)</p>	<p>Share FTSU champion training /development programme</p> <p>Align data being captured in FTSU cases with NBT</p> <p>Share feedback mechanisms</p>
Priority	Where we want to be	Actions for group model
Resources	Align resource allocated to FTSU service with North Bristol NHS Trust as a minimum	Board reporting is aligned (though case management remains separate)