



Whistleblowing Standards

Quarter Three Report
2025/26

Safety, Quality and Risk Team

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NHS Orkney Whistleblowing Standards

Quarterly Report – Q3 2025/26

1. Introduction

NHS Orkney has a clear responsibility to ensure that staff are supported to raise concerns in the public interest and that such concerns are managed consistently, fairly, and with a focus on learning and service improvement. Effective whistleblowing arrangements are a core component of the Board's wider safety, quality and risk framework.

In line with the National Whistleblowing Standards, NHS Orkney routinely monitors whistleblowing activity and performance against the national indicators. This includes the systematic collection and reporting of information from independent contractors delivering NHS services. These arrangements are now established as business as usual and form part of quarterly corporate assurance reporting.

This report sets out whistleblowing activity and performance for the period 1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025, covering Quarter Three of the 2025/26 reporting year.

2. Background

The National Whistleblowing Standards, overseen by the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO), provide a consistent national framework for the handling of concerns that meet the definition of whistleblowing. The Standards set clear expectations for NHS service providers on how such concerns are received, assessed, investigated, and responded to, with an explicit focus on fairness, transparency, and organisational learning.

The Standards apply to all individuals involved in the delivery of NHS services, regardless of contractual status. This includes directly employed staff, students, volunteers, agency workers, contractors, Third Sector organisations, and those working within Health and Social Care Partnerships. NHS Boards are responsible for ensuring that these groups are aware of the Standards, understand how to raise concerns, and know what support is available to them.

A central purpose of the Standards is to strengthen a culture of openness and continuous improvement, ensuring that learning from whistleblowing concerns is identified, acted upon, and embedded within organisational practice. This aligns with NHS Orkney's wider approach to quality improvement and risk management.

Leadership at all levels has a key role in setting the conditions for staff to speak up. Senior leaders and managers are expected to model behaviours consistent with the principles of the Standards, including openness, objectivity, impartiality and fairness.

This leadership approach underpins staff confidence that concerns about safety, quality, or integrity will be taken seriously and managed robustly.

3. Speaking Up

NHS Orkney continues to receive input through the anonymous reporting form, which provides an important channel for staff to raise concerns in situations where they may not feel comfortable using formal or identifiable routes. This mechanism supports a culture of openness and continuous improvement by enabling concerns to be addressed in a timely and constructive manner.

During this reporting quarter, no concerns have been submitted via the anonymous reporting form.

4. Confidential Contacts

During the reporting period, the confidential contacts received one contact. This related to the band five nursing review and the person has been signposted to manage this.

One contact was raised with the Whistleblowing Champion, this related to a grievance and the person was referred to the people and culture team and their Union.

As part of the quarterly review meeting involving the confidential contacts, the Medical Director, the Whistleblowing Champion, and the Head of Patient Safety, Quality and Risk, a discussion was held regarding the recruitment of confidential contacts. A discussion has taken place to look at training the Peer Supporters to also be Confidential Contacts. The lead for this service is supportive of this move and is taking this to the next meeting with the Peer Supporters to gain insight into whether this is something they would be willing to support.

5. Outcomes and Performance Against the Whistleblowing Indicators

The National Whistleblowing Standards outline a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) against which each NHS Board is required to report. These indicators are designed to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the handling of whistleblowing concerns.

This report presents NHS Orkney's performance against these indicators and includes separate reporting for NHS Orkney and its independent contractors. The independent contractors are only required to report against KPI's four – nine. While the indicators are not presented in numerical order, they have been arranged to enhance clarity and readability. For ease of reference, the corresponding indicator number is included alongside each heading.

The indicators are as follows:

1. Learning from concerns raised
2. Experience for those raising concerns
3. Staff awareness and training
4. The total number of concerns received
5. Concerns closed at each stage in the process
6. Concerns upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
7. Average times
8. Number of concerns closed at each stage with the set timescales
9. Number of cases where extension was authorised

Staff Awareness and Training (indicator 3)

Count of Learning Status				2025/26			
Course Title	Completed all time	In Progress all time	Total	Completed Q1	Completed Q2	Completed Q3	Completed Q4
Whistleblowing: an overview	106	0	106	0	2	2	
Whistleblowing: for managers & people who receive concerns	7	0	7	0	0	0	
Whistleblowing: for senior managers	28	0	28	0	0	0	

Whistleblowing training is not currently included in NHS Orkney's mandatory learning provision. However, managers and team leaders who may be required to address concerns will be expected to complete the relevant training module to ensure clear understanding of their role and responsibilities regarding whistleblowing. This requirement will be incorporated into the development of the new Managers' Programme.

Concerns and Management of Concerns (indicators 4-9)

NHS Orkney

Indicator	Performance 2025/26			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
The total number of concerns raised	0	0	0	
Concerns closed at each stage of the process	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Concerns upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Average times (working days)	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Number of concerns closed at each stage within the set timescales	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of cases where extension was authorised	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Independent Contractors

Indicator	Performance 2025/65			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
The total number of concerns raised	0	0	0	
Concerns closed at each stage of the process	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Concerns upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Average times (working days)	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of concerns closed at each stage within the set timescales	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of cases where extension was authorised	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Due to the tight turnaround time from the end of the quarter to the submission of this report, four of the private contractors have not yet returned their information. If there is any change from the information given above it will be highlighted in the next quarter report.

Learning From Concerns Raised (indicator 1)

No whistleblowing concerns were raised during either quarter one, quarter two or quarter three of the 2025/26 reporting year.

Engagement with independent contractors has continued. Further work is required to ensure comprehensive understanding of the National Whistleblowing Standards and the associated expectations across all contracted service providers.

Experience For Those Raising Concerns (indicator 2)

No whistleblowing concerns were raised during the reporting period; therefore, no direct feedback has been sought from whistleblowers.

6. Action plans and Progress on Upheld Concerns

There are no outstanding action plans carried forward into this reporting period. All previously identified actions have been completed or closed following appropriate review and resolution processes.

As such, there are no further updates under this section for quarter two. The absence of outstanding actions reflects the timely management and closure of whistleblowing-related concerns raised in earlier periods. NHS Orkney will continue to monitor and report on action plan status in future quarters to ensure transparency and accountability in the handling of whistleblowing matters.

7. Executive Assurance Summary

This Quarter Three report provides assurance that NHS Orkney's whistleblowing arrangements remain in place, operational, and proportionate to current activity. No whistleblowing concerns were raised during the reporting period by NHS Orkney staff or independent contractors, and there were no upheld cases, action plans, or outstanding matters requiring escalation. On that basis, there are no identified risks relating to the management of whistleblowing concerns arising from this quarter.

Activity through confidential contacts remained low, with the limited issues raised being redirected promptly to more suitable organisational processes, including grievance and workforce support routes. This reflects both clarity in the application of the National Whistleblowing Standards and effective working relationships between the Medical Director, Whistleblowing Champion, confidential contacts, and the Patient Safety, Quality and Risk team. These relationships support early advice, proportionate handling, and consistent decision-making.

Engagement with independent contractors has continued, with whistleblowing reporting now embedded within routine quarterly processes. While a small number of contractor returns were outstanding at the point of reporting due to timescale constraints, this does not alter the overall assurance position for the quarter and will be followed up through established arrangements.

Training uptake remains limited, although this reflects the absence of active cases rather than a lack of organisational capability. The planned inclusion of whistleblowing within the forthcoming Managers' Programme provides a clear opportunity to strengthen awareness and reinforce roles and responsibilities in a targeted and sustainable way.

Looking ahead, NHS Orkney will continue to focus on maintaining awareness of whistleblowing routes, strengthening relationships across the system, and enhancing support mechanisms. Planned work to expand and diversify the pool of confidential

contacts, including exploring alignment with Peer Supporters, is expected to further strengthen accessibility and resilience of the arrangements over the coming year.

Overall, the position at the end of Quarter Three provides assurance that whistleblowing governance is functioning as intended, aligned with national standards, and supported by effective leadership and collaborative working.