

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Meeting Date	11 March 2026
Title	Speaking up (whistleblowing) policy update
Author(s)	Patricia Morrissey, Head of Governance
Executive Sponsor	Claire Amor, Executive Director of Corporate Affairs
<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>At its meeting on 20 November 2025, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) considered the outputs of a light-touch review of the HCPC speaking up (whistleblowing) policy that was undertaken to consider the learning points highlighted in the NMC report on the handling of the whistleblower. At this meeting the ARAC supported a number of changes to the policy that were later approved by the Council at its meeting on 4 December 2025.</p> <p>This paper provides an update on the actions identified as part of the policy review that required a longer timeframe to complete and to seek approval of a further update to the policy to reflect forthcoming legislative changes related to whistleblowing arising from the new Employment Rights Act 2025. Whistleblowing is one element of our wider speaking up arrangements supported by our Speak Up Guardians.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>The ARAC is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the further work undertaken to strengthen our speaking up arrangements and ensure that colleagues are aware and confident in using the various routes available to them; and • agree to recommend the proposed change to the speaking up (whistleblowing) policy to the Council for approval. 	
Action required	The Committee is asked to consider and recommend the proposal or recommendation.
Previous consideration	The ELT considered this paper at its meeting on 24 February 2026.

	The speaking up (whistleblowing) policy was approved by the Council in December 2025 following a recommendation by the ARAC in November 2025.
Next steps	This policy is published on the HCPC intranet alongside information about the Speak Up Guardians. The next full review of this policy is due to take place in October 2026.
Financial and resource implications	None
Associated strategic priority/priorities	Build a resilient, healthy, capable and sustainable organisation
Associated strategic risk(s)	5.b Our organisational values are not reflected at all levels of the organisation, leading to staff not feeling supported/trusted/listened to
Risk appetite	People - open
Communication and engagement	The update to the policy will be communicated to staff via a news story on the intranet. Our new speaking up (whistleblowing) training already includes a reference to the legislative change. We have recently added a new section to our Pulse survey conducted each quarter dedicated to speaking up so that we are able to track employee awareness of the routes to speak up and the level of confidence that colleagues have that concerns raised will be addressed.
Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) impact and Welsh language standards	The processes and safeguards set out in the policy will support all employees in raising concerns, including those relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and support an open culture, with positive impacts for all protected groups. As an internal-facing document, we do not consider this engages the Welsh language scheme.
Other impact assessments	Not applicable
Reason for consideration in the private session of the meeting (if applicable)	Not applicable

Speaking up (whistleblowing) policy update

1. Strengthening our speaking up arrangements

1.1 At its meeting on 20 November 2025 the Committee noted that there were a number of actions identified as part of the review of our Speaking up (whistleblowing) policy that required a longer timeframe to complete. Further work has now been undertaken and an update on each action is set out as follows:

- Cross check references within existing policies to ensure that any relevant policies correctly cross-refer to and signpost the speaking up (whistleblowing) policy: In progress – this is being addressed as each policy is reviewed and as part of our current project to develop a central policy register and more actively manage the policy review process.
- Develop a mandatory fit for purpose training session for managers: Complete – with input from the Speak Up Guardians, we have developed and rolled out new mandatory speaking up (whistleblowing) training for all colleagues with a separate module for managers to ensure that they know how to recognise and deal with such concerns, and how whistleblowers should be treated. This training went live on 9 February 2026 as part of our annual compliance package. The training covers all avenues to speak up.
- Consider our routes of escalation for whistleblowing concerns and ensure that these are effective and appropriate: Complete – we have developed a new whistleblowing procedure that underpins the policy. The procedure is clear on routes of escalation for serious whistleblowing concerns to the ARAC and Council as well as establishing regular reporting to the Chief Executive and consideration of whether reporting to another prescribed regulator is required. The policy also includes a risk assessment template to ensure that the risks of detriment or to confidentiality are captured and can be monitored as a case continues.
- Consider the feasibility of establishing a confidential email address or another confidential channel for senior employees with shared mailboxes where confidential information around whistleblowing can be shared: Complete: A confidential Microsoft Teams channel will be established as required for each case so as to avoid sending confidential information via shared email accounts. A confidential folder has also been created for retaining corporate records with rights of access restricted to the Chief Executive and the Head of Governance.

1.2 We have also taken out corporate membership of Protect, the UK's whistleblowing charity. Becoming a member of Protect goes beyond compliance; it demonstrates that we are a responsible and accountable employer, committed to best practice. It also sends a strong signal to stakeholders that the HCPC takes whistleblowing seriously. As part of our membership, we were able to test how well our whistleblowing systems are working, using Protect's online assessment tool. Using the tool, we were able to evaluate our arrangements

across Governance, Operations and Engagement. Our overall scanner score was 83% and we scored highly in Governance (92%) and Engagement (91%) which is encouraging, as Engagement is an area that many organisations find more challenging. For Operations we scored 66%, with a key gap being the lack of a written procedure for dealing with whistleblowing concerns. A new detailed procedure has been developed which includes a focus on key elements such as providing feedback to the whistleblower as an essential stage of the whistleblowing process and obtaining feedback in a systematic way from whistleblower's who have used our arrangements, to ensure they feel supported through the process of raising concerns. Doing these well will lead to better trust and confidence in the arrangements overall.

- 1.3 We also acted to better understand colleague awareness about raising concerns and for the first time our Q3 pulse survey included questions asking colleagues if they know how to raise concerns and if they are confident that concerns raised will be addressed. 265 colleagues responded to the survey and 85% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they were aware of the different avenues available to raise a concern. 68% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they felt confident that any concerns raised would be addressed. The results of the pulse survey are consistent with the Protect whistleblowing scanner score, and we will continue to track the results with a view to seeing that staff knowledge and confidence is increasing, particularly as more staff complete the new speaking up (whistleblowing) mandatory training.

2. Policy update

- 2.1 The new Employment Rights Act 2025 further strengthens protections for whistleblowers and amends the Employment Rights Act 1996 to make clear that workers who 'blow the whistle' on sexual harassment can benefit from whistleblowing protections against detriment (adverse treatment) and unfair dismissal.
- 2.2 Previously, victims had to frame their complaints under broader, less specific categories like "danger to health and safety" or "breach of a legal obligation". The new law makes it explicit that sexual harassment is a stand-alone, valid reason for whistleblowing. The change aims to encourage employees to report incidents earlier, breaking the culture of silence that often allows toxic environments to persist.
- 2.3 The HCPC has delivered sexual harassment training for staff since 2023, and this was updated to reflect changes under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which came into force on 26 October 2024. This introduced a preventative duty to take reasonable steps for safeguarding our employees from harassment, fostering a safe and supportive work environment, and nurturing a workplace culture founded on mutual respect. An engaged, motivated, and productive workforce is crucial to our success. Sexual harassment in the workplace can have significant impacts on the well-being and productivity of employees and will not be tolerated.

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- 2.4 The new measure will commence on 6 April 2026 and we are therefore seeking the Committee's approval of a further amendment to the policy to reflect this change and for the revised policy to be published on the intranet on 6 April 2026.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is asked to:

- note the further work undertaken to strengthen our speaking up arrangements and ensure that colleagues are aware and confident in using the various routes available to them; and
- agree to recommend the proposed change to the speaking up (whistleblowing) policy to the Council for approval.