

News | September 2026

Ombudsman's update

This month I have published two public interest reports; one relating to the care and treatment of a patient within NHS Lothian and another about patient safety risk within NHS Highland's vascular service.

Complaint over nursing failures within NHS Lothian

[My report on NHS Lothian](#) highlights serious concerns about the way the Board reviewed the death of a patient who developed staphylococcus aureus bacterium (SAB, a type of bloodstream infection) while in hospital.

My investigation found that the circumstances clearly met both national and local criteria for a Significant Adverse Event Review (SAER), yet no SAER was carried out.

I also found failings in nursing care relating to cannula management, which was believed to be the origin of the infection. As a result, I have asked NHS Lothian to urgently review its SAER procedures and undertake audits of cannula care, record keeping and the treatment of SAB infections, alongside reviewing staff training needs.

I remain concerned that my office continues to find substantive issues in the way health boards conduct SAERs. A [public interest report issued by my predecessor](#) identified similar shortcomings in the SAER process.

While I recognise and commend the revised Framework introduced by Healthcare Improvement Scotland in February 2025, I consider more needs to be done by health boards to address the situation and to ensure SAERs are being carried out in line with the revised Framework.

[Read case 202400753](#)

Whistleblowing report on NHS Highland's Vascular Service

I have also published [a whistleblowing report on NHS Highland's](#) handling of concerns about risks in its vascular service.

Arterial surgery was stopped in 2025 within NHS Highland due to staffing challenges. This led to patients requiring referral to other NHS Boards for surgery under mutual aid arrangements. Concerns were subsequently raised about the management of risks within the service and their impact on patients and staff.

I upheld concerns that NHS Highland had not taken reasonable action to manage the risks in the service, and that it had not handled the concern in line with the National Whistleblowing Standards.

My investigation found problems with access to the whistleblowing process, support for the person who raised the concern, communication, and governance around potential harm to patients.

This case highlights a systemic risk around NHS Highland's vascular service. NHS Highland could not safely sustain the specialist service without support from other NHS Boards, but the national arrangements did not secure that support quickly enough.

I have shared the report with the Scottish Government and NHS leaders in Scotland to highlight these risks and the need for a national approach to the development of effective mutual aid arrangements that ensure timely and equitable access to care across the NHS.

[Read case 202408925](#)

Speak Up Week: “Five Years of the Whistleblowing Standards - What’s Changed? What’s Next?”

Speak Up Week 2026 starts next week from Monday 28 September to Friday 2 October.

While NHS boards have made progress in creating environments where people feel able to speak up, my recent reports show there is still more to do. Speak Up Week is an opportunity for NHS leaders and staff to raise awareness of the value of speaking up and to support positive change.

To mark the start of the week, I will publish my reflections on five years of the Whistleblowing Standards, highlighting progress, good practice and areas where further improvement is needed. I will also share an interview with a whistleblower reflecting on what has changed and what still needs to happen.

On Thursday 1 October, join me and Elaine Cameron, Head of INWO, for a live webinar exploring the report's findings, followed by a Q&A session.

[Sign up to the webinar](#)

How your organisation can get involved:

- Make a visible contribution to the week
- Use our [resource pack](#), including logos, Teams backgrounds, posters, draft email for NHS leaders and more
- Take part in our social media challenge
- Promote the INWO activities within your organisation

Further details, event registration and resources can be found on our website: [Speak Up Week | INWO](#).

Together we can build a better speak up culture across the NHS.

Public service complaints

In addition to our public interest report, we made 588 decisions on complaints and published 8 investigations, 6 of which were upheld.

Early intervention and timely investigation

A recurring theme in several cases this month has been the importance of early intervention and timely investigation when patients present with symptoms that could indicate serious illness.

In a case this month in Lothian NHS Board, a key opportunity to support diagnosis was missed when a GP practice failed to consider a CA125 blood test alongside a pelvic ultrasound scan. This meant the patient was not fully investigated for possible ovarian cancer in line with relevant guidance. Early recognition, appropriate testing, and

adherence to clinical guidelines play a vital role in supporting timely diagnosis and avoiding potential deterioration in health for patients.

[Read case 202408721](#)

[Read our latest findings](#)

Preliminary investigation

Outside of our full investigations, over the past month we supported a disabled tenant to secure more suitable housing options with their local authority and helped a business customer secure agreement from their water provider to honour their original contract following an internal pricing error.

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer

Scottish Speak Up Network

The Scottish Speak Up Network is delighted to welcome Carolynn Lawrie, NHS Highland, as co-chair, joining Hannah Monaghan and Caroline McDowall.

The network is open to Confidential Contacts within NHS Boards and provides the opportunity to get peer support and learn from each other. It is a safe space, where people can ask questions and benefit from the experience of colleagues

Part of the network sessions are focussed on learning from external speakers and increasing awareness of the work undertaken by other groups.

If you are a confidential contact and wish to join, please email the co-chairs at

SpeakUp@nhs.scot.

Scottish Welfare Fund

Last month, we responded to 64 enquiries and made 48 review decisions, 11 on community care grants and 37 on crisis grants.

Of these, 45% of community care grants were upheld and 14% of crisis grants were upheld.

In one case, we instructed the council to award a further £175 for food, gas and electricity costs after an applicant had lost their money on a bus.

The council initially awarded £175 but we deemed this was insufficient to meet A's needs, who was a wheelchair user and had disability related expenses.

Engagement

This month, three local authorities were contacted at Level 1 of our [Support and Intervention Policy](#) to discuss timescale issues identified in casework. Three local authorities were contacted at Level 3: two due to recurring concerns about timescales and one regarding issues with evidence gathering.

[Read our latest findings](#)

Training

Complaints Investigation Skills

Our trainer-led course will equip participants with the knowledge to conduct robust investigations, ask the right questions, assess evidence, and make informed decisions.

Book your spot now:

- [Monday 30 November](#)
- [Tuesday 1 December](#)

Good Complaints Handling

Our Good Complaints Handling online training self-guided course is aimed at staff handling complaints at stage 1 of the [Model Complaints Handling Procedure \(MCHP\)](#) but would be useful for anyone involved in complaints handling looking to develop their knowledge.

The course takes around 45 minutes to complete and costs £50 per person.

[Book now](#)

Child Friendly Complaints

Our Child Friendly Complaints online training is tailored for complaints handlers and frontline staff. The course shows how organisations can put children and young people's rights at the heart of the complaints process.

The course takes around 45 minutes to complete and costs £50 per person.

[Book now](#)