

Q: What is OpenLine?

A: OpenLine is NHS Highland's new in-house speak up and whistleblowing service, launching on Monday 1 December 2025. It provides confidential support and advice to all colleagues across the organisation, offering a safe space to discuss workplace concerns, seek guidance, or raise issues you may not feel comfortable discussing elsewhere. The service covers all employees across NHS Highland.

Q: Who answers the phone?

A: OpenLine is operated by a team of two trained confidential contact advisers who are dedicated to listening and providing support. They are experienced in handling sensitive conversations and will provide you with impartial, confidential advice.

Q: Is it the Guardian Service replacement?

A: Yes, OpenLine replaces the Guardian Service from 1 December 2025. We have worked with the Guardian Service for five years and recognise the excellent support they provided. OpenLine continues this vital service in-house, offering the same level of confidential support you have come to expect.

Q: What can I contact about?

A: You can contact OpenLine about any workplace concern or issue. This might include seeking advice discussing team dynamics, raising operational concerns, or speaking about anything you don't feel comfortable discussing with your line manager, People Services, or staff-side representative. Whatever the situation, OpenLine is here to listen and support you by providing a safe space to discuss any concern and assist you in raising this with an appropriate NHS Highland manager.

Q: What if I am already in a process?

A: If you are already engaged in a formal process, then OpenLine is not for use in this situation.

Q: What are the available times?

A: OpenLine is available Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. Outside these hours, you can leave a message and the team will respond when they return. There is also access to our Employee Assistance Programme – **Health Assured**.

Q: Guardian Service offered a 24/7 hour being continued?

A: While the Guardian Service offered 24/7 availability, analysis of usage patterns showed that demand outside standard extended hours was minimal. The Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm service pattern will effectively meet the needs of our colleagues while ensuring the team can provide high-quality, responsive support during core hours.

Q: Can I request to meet face to face?

A: Yes, face-to-face meetings can be arranged where appropriate. The OpenLine team will work with you to find a suitable time and location that respects your confidentiality and makes you feel comfortable.

Q: What happens out of hours?

A: Outside of the Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm service hours, you can leave a confidential message and the OpenLine team will respond when they return. For urgent concerns outside these hours, you may wish to contact your line manager, People Services, or access other support services such as your staff-side representative or occupational health services. Our Employee Assistance Programme, **Health Assured** is another option.

Q: Who else can I speak with?

A: In addition to OpenLine, you can speak with your line manager, People Services, your staff-side representative, or occupational health services. The choice is yours depending on the nature of your concern and who you feel most comfortable approaching. OpenLine is simply another option available to you. Our Employee Assistance Programme, **Health Assured** is another option and can be reached [here](#).

Q: What does confidential mean?

A: Confidential means that what you share with OpenLine will not be disclosed to others without your explicit consent, except in exceptional circumstances where there is a legal or safety obligation to share information (for example, if there is an immediate risk of harm to yourself or others). The team will always discuss with you before sharing any information.

Q: Where will my data be held and who will have access to it?

A: Any information you share with OpenLine will be held securely in line with NHS Highland's data protection policies and GDPR requirements. Only the OpenLine confidential contact advisers will have access to this information, unless you provide consent for it to be shared with others or there is a legal requirement to do so.

Q: Can confidential contacts attend team meetings?

A: Yes, OpenLine confidential contact advisers can attend team meetings if invited and if it is appropriate to do so. This might be to provide information about the service or to support broader team discussions about workplace culture. However, they will not discuss individual cases or breach confidentiality.

Q: How is the service promoted?

A: OpenLine is being promoted through various internal communication channels including the staff intranet, the Weekly Round Up newsletter, team briefings, and information from senior leadership. There is a dedicated OpenLine section on the intranet with information about the team, how to contact them, and helpful resources.

Q: When might the information be shared?

A: Information will only be shared in exceptional circumstances and typically with your consent. This includes situations where there is an immediate risk of harm to you or others, where there is a legal requirement to share information, or where you have given explicit permission for the OpenLine team to share information on your behalf. The team will always discuss with you before sharing any information wherever possible.

Q: Why was the contract with the Guardian Service terminated?

A: The decision to bring the service in-house was made following careful consideration and feedback from staff about what you wanted from a speak up service. This approach allows us to provide a more integrated, accessible service that is tailored to NHS Highland's specific needs and culture, while maintaining the same high standards of confidentiality and support.

Q: Can you truly say the service is independent now that it has been brought in-house and is no longer being operated by a third party?

A: Yes. While OpenLine is operated in-house, the service is designed with robust confidentiality safeguards to ensure independence. The confidential contact advisers operate separately from line management structures and People Services, and they report directly to senior leadership on service delivery only, not on individual cases. They are bound by strict confidentiality protocols and are committed to providing impartial support to all colleagues. The in-house model actually allows for greater integration with NHS Highland's policies and culture while maintaining the independence and confidentiality that are essential to an effective speak up service.