

<https://www.hsj.co.uk/brighton-and-sussex-university-hospitals-nhs-trust/trust-holds-up-whistleblower-investigation/7022369.article>

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Trust holds up whistleblower investigation

- National Freedom to Speak Up Guardian confirms delays in launching a review of concerns at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals
- The trust claimed it wants the review to wait until it has completed more improvement work
- In the latest staff survey, 30 per cent of staff said they had experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues

An investigation by the National Freedom to Speak Up Guardian's Office has been delayed because an NHS trust said it would not fit into its improvement timetable - and then refused a request to speed things up, HSJ has learned.

A number of former and existing staff at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust raised concerns about the trust's speaking up processes, procedures and culture in the trust with the National Guardian's Office in December.

Last month they were told in a letter that, after a conversation between national guardian Henrietta Hughes and trust chief executive Marriane Griffiths, the review would be delayed for "a few months" to allow time for improvement work at the trust to take effect and to enable "a more accurate picture" of whether improvements were happening.

In a second letter, Dr Hughes stressed: "We want to work with the trust and the referrers - we are not looking to catch anyone out or to collude with any party."

In recent years, BSUH has had a problem with staff reporting concerns around bullying and harassment. The 2017 staff survey showed only around 47 per cent of staff would recommend it as a place to work and 30 per cent said they had experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues. Both scores were slightly better than the previous year but below national averages for acute trusts. (HW comment - I suspect they probably mean that both scores are worse than national averages for acute trusts; I've not checked the latest figures, but assume that the national average for bullying/harassment/abuse is still around 25%.)

Ms Griffiths, who is also chief executive of the Western Sussex Hospitals Foundation Trust, took over as chief executive at BSUH in April 2017. The trust had been put in special measures in August 2016 after being rated inadequate: Western Sussex is rated outstanding.

In a statement to HSJ, Dr Hughes said: "We can confirm that a referral for a case review at BSUH has been accepted. Case reviews carried out by the National Guardian's Office are not inspections and the NGO does not have powers to compel an organisation to collaborate in the process. Therefore, as with all case reviews, I have spoken to the chief executive of BSUH. She has welcomed this case review, but indicated that our originally proposed timings do not fit in with the trust's current programme of improvement.

"We have subsequently sought to expedite the timeframe, but the trust has indicated that it is unable to accommodate this request. Currently, therefore, we are looking to carry out the case review later in the year."

A trust spokesman said: "We absolutely welcome the opportunity for an independent review by the National Guardian's Office as part of our continued organisational improvement.

"BSUH is in a period of substantial change. For the review to be the most meaningful, we have suggested that it is deferred until later in the year when our current improvement programme will be more established. This will give our staff the best opportunity to contribute fully to the review.

"The national guardian has accepted this, and we are looking forward to working productively with them at the appropriate time."