

Paper for the

Social Work England Board

Sponsor

Colum Conway, Chief Executive

Author

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Date

10 November 2021

Reviewed by

Executive Leadership Team

This paper is for

Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO9: We will establish robust infrastructure, systems and processes that promote trust and confidence.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite

Strategy - Hungry

1. Introduction

At our meeting this month we will be reporting on our half year review of performance through the Q2 performance pack for the end of September. This report contains a dashboard overview of trends in key areas (see Annex 2), more detail is contained within the Q2 performance report.

For the most part, performance is in line with expectations. We are nearing the end of our second renewals period and Directors will provide up to date figures on completed renewals and CPD uploads. As with our experience last year there is likely to be a significant period of activity in the last two weeks of this month.

Whilst performance indicates variation on case load numbers, in some parts of the Fitness to Practise service, there is confidence that the overall trajectory for case load numbers is on target for the year end. We are on target to achieve our objectives in communications and engagement, policy, governance, education, and training quality assurance, legal, IT, and people. In people we are carrying a higher number of fixed term contracts than we would like, however plans are in place to reduce that number by the year-end.

The management accounts indicate that we are having to manage expenditure carefully, reducing or delaying spend in some areas to ensure we can carry overspend in Fitness to Practise and remain with the year-end forecast of 2% budget variance. Our sponsor team at the Department for Education (DfE) have recently confirmed additional funding within this financial year of £2.315M to help address the legacy case load we inherited from the previous regulator. We will amend our caseload trajectories in Fitness to Practise and our budget forecasts accordingly and in line with what we believe we can achieve between now and the year end.

2. Looking Back

Board Strategy Planning

We had a successful strategic planning session with members of the board on the 5 and 6 October. The event also provided an opportunity to welcome two new non-executive board members, Dr Adi Cooper, OBE, and Dr Sue Ross and was well received as an opportunity for non-executive board members to meet with the broad leadership team at Social Work England to review our progress to date and agree priorities for the future. Discussions also took place on the board structures that would improve the level of engagement for the non-executives, provide opportunities to share their expertise and experience, and enhance their challenge function.

It was agreed to work on expanding the role of the Remuneration Committee, establish two further board committees on policy and regulatory performance/quality and establish a deputy chair role. The outcomes from the event are being fed into the current business and budget planning process for 2022/23. An outline business plan and budget will come to the January board meeting with sign off due at the March meeting.

Professional Standards Authority Performance Review

The Professional Standards Authority (PSA) published its first major report on our performance against the standards of good regulation on 20 September 2021. The report covered the period 02 December 2019 to 30 November 2020. The report indicated that we did not meet 3 of the 18 standards and highlighted other areas where some improvement could be noted in the next review. An action plan has been drawn up against all areas highlighted in the report – more detail is contained in a paper for the agenda item on the matter at this meeting. The performance review for 2020/21 is now underway.

Department for Education Ministerial Reception

In October our Chairperson and I were invited to attend a ministerial reception hosted by the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP and his ministerial team. It was a good opportunity for a brief introduction discussion with Will Quince MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families). We look forward to a more formal meeting with Minister Quince in due course. The event also provided the opportunity to meet with senior people at DfE and other senior leaders in the social work sector.

Community Care Live

This year we had the opportunity once again to attend Community Care Live a good forum for us to engage with social work practitioners. We presented on our journey as a regulator to date, and our Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion jointly facilitated a separate session on anti-racism in social work. We also had a stall across the two days of the exhibition and spoke to many social workers about a range of issues, from CPD to fitness to practise to registration renewal. Approximately 100 people attended both the keynote sessions.

3. Forward Look

Additional funding for fitness to practise legacy case load

The Executive Director, Fitness to Practise reported at the last board meeting on the potential for additional funding from the Department for Education to help address our legacy case load. As already indicated this funding has been recently confirmed by our Sponsor Team. The funding relates to this financial year and will support four areas of work:

- (i) a separate contract with our existing legal suppliers to progress an additional number of cases within the investigations service. The business case for the contract was approved by the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee.
- (ii) increase decision making capacity in the triage service.
- (iii) increase the capacity in the hearing service in anticipation of increased final hearing work.
- (iv) underpin the 'at risk' element of our grant in aid allocation for this year. Proposals for additional support for the hearings service for next year are currently under consideration.

Fitness to Practise Decision Review Group (DRG)

DRG continues to move forward with more thematic discussions impacting on social work practice and appearing in fitness to practise referrals. This is in addition to reviewing case decisions.

The group has looked at drink and drug driving related offences and our regulatory policy on this. It has also considered social media usage by social workers, and how to work more closely with employers and other regulators. The group continues to include helpful and considered contributions each month from our external representatives from other regulators, and from members of our National Advisory Forum (NAF). As noted in the report from the Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) the internal audit reported an adequate assurance outcome with some welcome recommendations which the group are taking forward.

Framework Document

Work on the Framework Document between Social Work England and the Department for Education will soon reach a conclusion and it is expected that the document will be ready for sign off by the Board at the January meeting and it will be laid in the House libraries shortly thereafter. As this is will be the first framework document for us with a three-year review period both ourselves and DfE are giving it the attention and detail it deserves.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our reconfigured EDI Steering Group has continued to meet and look at the action plan for our organisation that underpins our statement of intent. Each team is represented on the group by a nominated team champion, responsible for taking the work forward in their area. We held successful "clumsy conversation" sessions across the organisation, encouraging engagement with difficult topics safely. Externally, we have continued our close engagement with the Principal Social Worker networks as we have taken forward our anti-racism work with them. 2,000 social workers responded to the survey coordinated by the What Works Centre, with more than 500 social workers signing up to take part in focus groups that will form the next stage of this process.

National Advisory Forum

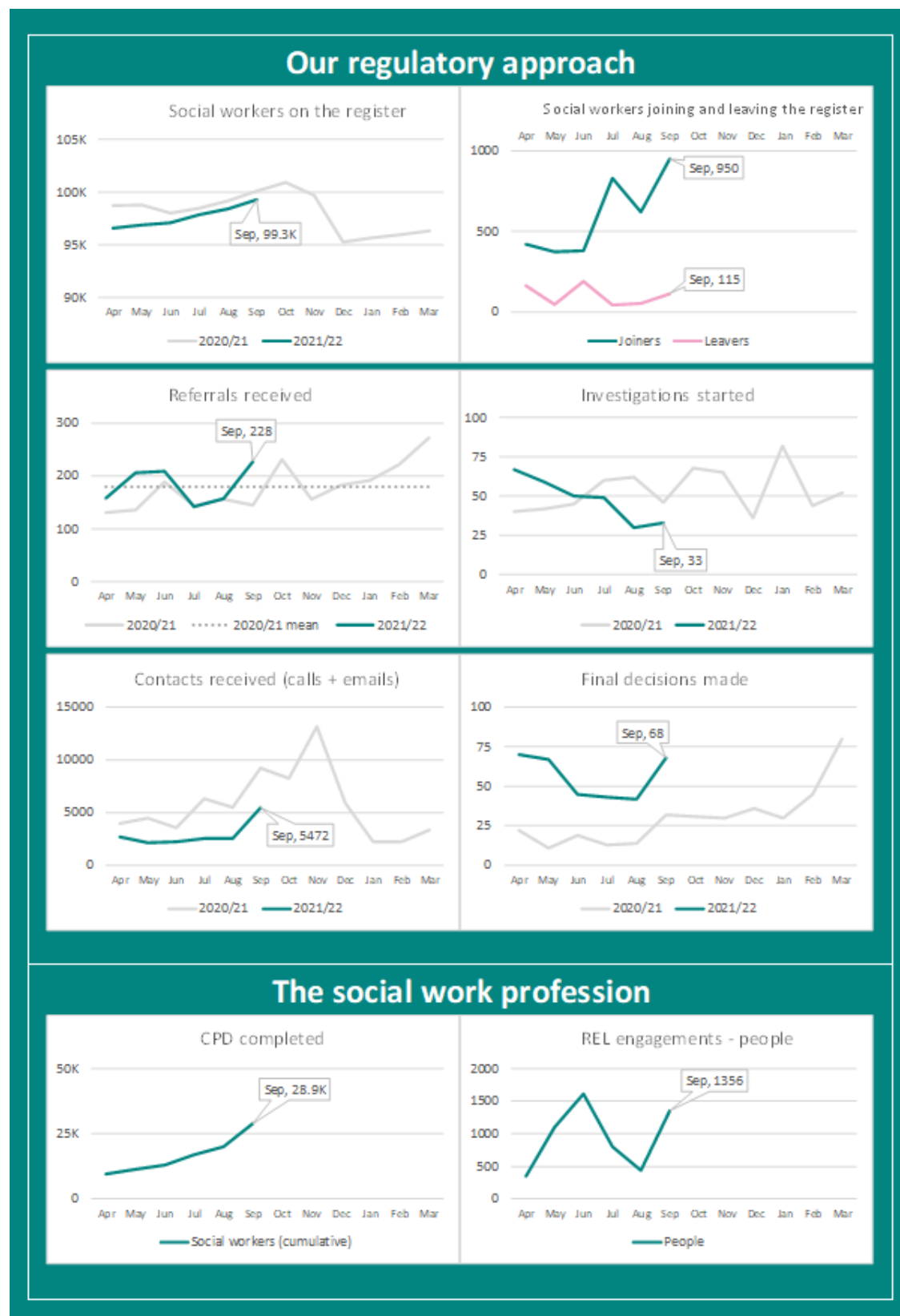
The forum includes registered and practicing social workers, people with lived experience of social work, education and training providers and social work students. The role of the group is to act as a critical friend to Social Work England by bringing a wealth of lived and learned experience to the regulator, as well as acting as the main driver of co-production across the organisation and a means of embedding that in our ways of working. The Forum completed a review at the end of their first year in operation the outcome of which will be presented at this meeting. I had the pleasure of meeting members of the forum recently and affirmed our commitment to co-production and their vital role in bringing this to life for Social Work England. The Forum is currently recruiting for new members.

4. Conclusion

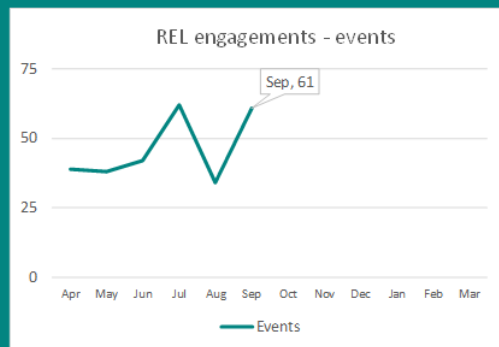
It is a very busy time of the year for Social Work England, we are continuing to work with all our staff on a flexible approach to smarter working within in this new hybrid working environment. I would like to take the opportunity to commend our staff and partners for their commitment to delivering the objectives, values and culture that underpin the overall performance of the organisation.

5. Annexes

Annex 1: Dashboard Overview



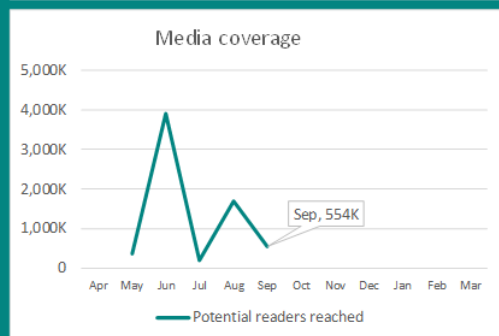
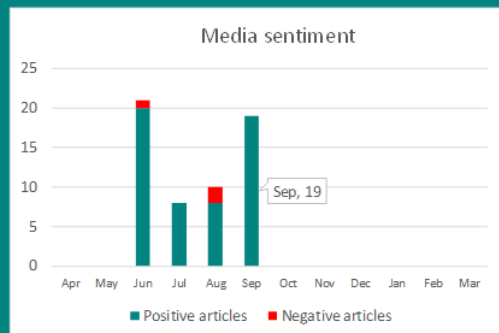
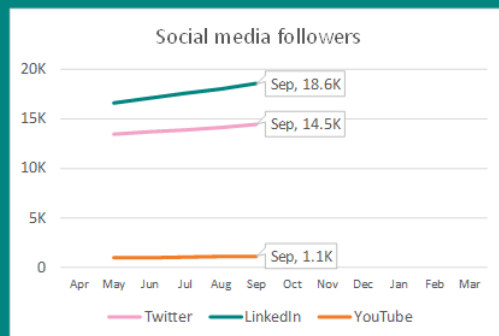
The social work profession



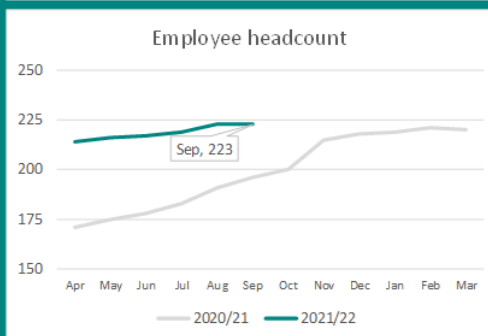
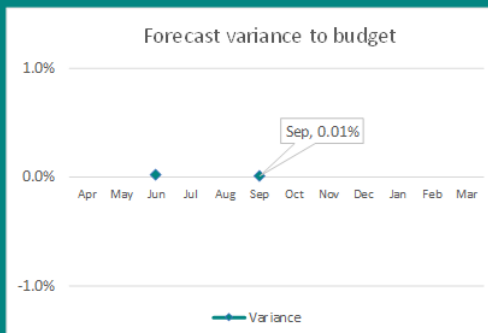
Education and training



The people we work with and for



Our organisation



Annex 2: Chief Executive's meetings with external organisations since the last meeting

Representatives from KPMG

Chief Executive of Skills for Care

Chief Executive of BASW

New Chair and Chief Executive of the Nursing and Midwifery Council

The regular meeting with the Chief Executives of DfE ALBs with the Permanent Secretary

The National Director of Social Care Ofsted

Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council

Attended the Ministerial Reception hosted by the Secretary of State for Education

Attended the Health Education England Deliberative Event

Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

The regular meeting of the Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Professional Regulators

Secretary of the Association of Chief Executives