

Paper for the

Social Work England Board

Sponsor

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Author

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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 the last Board meeting, held at the end of January, we reported on the performance of the organisation for quarter three. The performance report for quarter four will be prepared for and presented at the Board meeting in May. This report does not contain a dashboard update on performance. The focus for this meeting is on planning for the next business year, discussing the budget and business plan and ensuring we have set our stall out in the right way for 22/23, the last year of first three-year strategic planning cycle.

Since the last Board meeting, we have held an ARAC meeting and the first meeting of the new Policy Committee, the Chairs will be reporting the details to the Board at this meeting. While we are not reporting on performance at this meeting it is worth noting, as it has been of particular interest to the Board this year, that the key target we set this year to conclude at least 80% of our legacy investigations has been met by the end of February and we continue to accelerate the progression of the remaining caseload with a view to clearly exceeding the performance target by the end of the year. Alongside our progression targets we have a range of quality indicators drawn from internal quality assurance reviews. These show that accelerated progression has been achieved and maintained this year without any detriment to the quality of our decisions and outcomes.

2. Looking Back

Co-Production Training and Development

Building on the positive evaluation of the first year of National Advisory Forum (NAF) as reported to the Board in November there is a commitment to the further develop of the understanding of co-production across the organisation as an important step towards embedding it as part of the overall framework for the work of Social Work England. An internal training and development programme has been launched; the Executive Leadership Team were delighted to be part of the programme last month.

Policy

We have been involved with three streams of work being taken forward by Health Education England - the Centre for Advancing Practice and their work on advanced practice and credentials, the work on the broader Long Term Framework Programme for the NHS workforce, and the more specific work on the social care workforce. It is early days on the framework programme and it will be interesting to see how it develops with continued support from Minister in DHSC. We have continued to meet with policy colleagues at DHSC and DfE exploring the workforce implications and alignment challenges that may arise from policy initiative in both departments particularly the recently published white papers by DHSC on social care – People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform – and integration – Integration and Innovation: working together to improve health and social care; and the upcoming report from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Services. The policy

team produce an external policy summary each week for the organisation, going forward this summary will be worked into a quarterly review of policy which will be shared with the members of the Board.

3. Forward Look

Budget and draft business plan 22/23

On the agenda for our meeting is the budget and draft business plan for 22/23. For the budget the underlying assumption is that the DfE will provide an additional amount of grant in aid funding of c£5.9m in support of our efforts to reduce the number of outstanding legacy cases inherited from the previous regulator. This consists of £400k of funding previously approved in November 2021 and £5.5m relating to our current request for which we are awaiting final approval. The business plan outlines our key objectives for this third and final year of our first strategic plan. While some adjustments have been made to our approach to performance reporting and KPIs they are largely the same as this year so we can build trends and comparisons over time. There will be a more detailed review of performance reporting in the year ahead to align with the new strategic plan.

Corporate Strategy 23/26

Our current corporate strategy runs until March 2023. Work is gearing up now on the development and engagement work to produce a successor strategy. Whilst this may look like a comfortable period of time for this work, once a wide and deep stakeholder and staff engagement process is factored in alongside the important sign off processes it will be significant period of work – and so it should be as our strategic vision and direction needs clear articulation and broad agreement in the best interests of all those who are looking for the impact Social Work England can have.

Additional funding to expand hearings capacity

As noted in the budget 22/23 we are awaiting final approval for additional funding that will allow us to expand capacity at hearings to address the legacy case work. While not committing any additional expenditure at this stage we are now fully prepared to execute this plan should additional funding be secured. We have completed the promotion of new roles for adjudicators and legal advisers and have more than 100 interviews planned in March. We have also completed the procurement process for a new legal provider for investigations and advocacy services and the outcome will be published in March. We are also currently appointing up to 12 new employees to support the process and we have progressed the vast majority of outstanding legacy casework to the point where it can be progressed to a hearing rapidly once suitable capacity is secured.

Executive Director Recruitment

The recruitment of the Executive Director People and Business Support was launched on 16 February with a closing date of 21 March. A two-phase selection process has been put in

place which will include members of staff and members of the National Advisory Forum. It is anticipated that we will be in a position to announce the outcome by late April or early May.

Rules and Regulations

we have continued to advance our work to make necessary changes to our legislative framework. Our consultation on remote hearings has now closed and we are analysing the responses we have received. We will shortly be going out to consultation on amendments to aspects of our Rules, and we continue to work closely with the Department for Education to prepare for a consultation on amendments to aspects of the Social Worker Regulations 2018.

Education Quality Assurance

We continue to undertake, and schedule, reapproval activity and inspections. In order to ensure that we continue to have a strong cohort of inspectors to work with us, we have recently completed a recruitment exercise, and are now in the process of contacting applicants following interviews. Additionally, refresher training for inspectors will take place this month.

Fitness to Practise Improvement work

In order to continue to enhance and modernize our service we have consulted on a rule change to secure permanent provisions for remote hearings. A summary of responses and our planned next steps will be published this month. We have also concluded the pilot for introducing two-person panels and fully evaluated the quality of outcomes during the pilot and feedback from the parties involved. We are assured from this work that the use of two person panels is appropriate for shorter hearings, such as interim orders and reviews, and have now introduced the process permanently. The team have completed the 'proof of concept' for the end-to-end redesign of the online concern process. This is now being incorporated into the development schedule for this year. The regional engagement team has drafted the process, communications and contact lists required for the next phase of roll-out of Single Point of Contact network, which will be applied across the entire fitness to practise caseload to help reduce barriers to effective progression.

Hybrid Working update

At the last Board meeting I reported that we had moved the organisation to working from home following the move to plan B in England in response to the spread of the Omicron variant of the Covid 19 pandemic. The working from home guidance expired on 26 January and as a result we have returned to our Hybrid approach to our working environment as reported to the Board in November 2021. Our people have shown a high level of resilience and flexibility throughout and as can be seen from our quarterly performance reporting have continued to work effectively against our goals and objectives. We are adopting a flexible hybrid approach to the working environment going forward with a combination of remote and onsite working for everyone which will be based on organisational principles and the business needs of teams across the organisation. We will take the next two months to finalise the details and set a review for autumn.

4. Conclusion

Social Work Week now looms large as it kicks off on the 14 March. A detailed programme of events is outlined on our website and at the time of writing more than 3,500 people have registered to attend. It promises to be an excellent event and the team who have worked hard to bring it to life are to be commended. An initial review of the week will be shared with the Board at our meeting in May.

There is always a good deal of activity at this time of the year as we begin to plan for the year ahead and work on a new business plan and budget for the new year. This meeting is the opportunity to review the plans for the year ahead and be assured that we are building on the progress we have made this year in so many areas.

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

East London NHS Foundation Trust

The regular meeting of the Vulnerable Children and Young People's National Board

Chief Executive BASW

Department of International Trade Regulated Professions Advisory Forum

The regular meeting of the Chief Executives of Regulatory Bodies

Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Services

Health Education England Framework Review - Social Care Roundtable

Parliamentary Reception for the Social Work Awards

The regular Arm's Length Bodies of DfE meeting with the Permanent Secretary

Health Education England Centre for Advancing Practice

The Chief Executives of the other Social Work Regulators in the UK

Association of Chief Executives