

Business plan 2023 to 2024

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Foreword

Our [strategy for 2023 to 2026](#) sets out our goals for the next 3 years. This business plan for 2023 to 2024 outlines what we aim to achieve in the first year of our strategy. It covers our 3 key strategic areas: prevention and impact, regulation and protection, and delivery and improvement.

In all our work, we'll be guided by [our values](#), and our ongoing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Where appropriate, we will co-produce our work with people who have lived and learned experience of social work.

By the end of June, we will have concluded our project to progress the outstanding legacy fitness to practise caseload we inherited from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This means we can focus on managing our own caseload, driven by our own targets and measures of success.

Our position as the regulator means we can offer a unique breadth and depth of insight into social work, spanning the whole profession. Working with government departments, we'll influence policy impacting all social work roles and specialisms, and take forward important discussions on workforce issues. This includes the transformation of children's social care through the government's '[Stable Homes, Built on Love](#)' strategy.

Our experience over the last 3 years has also shown us the importance of preventing problems before they happen. Moving forward, we want to be a proactive regulator wherever possible. We'll work towards this by encouraging an increased commitment to professionalism and high standards across the sector.

Primarily, we'll do this through continuing professional development (CPD). CPD is an integral part of being a registered and regulated professional. When social workers do reflective CPD, they contribute to a culture of professionalism and accountability in the sector. We want social workers to understand the value of the professional standards, and feel confident applying them in practice.

Last year, we published [our new approach to education and training](#). In the year ahead, we'll set out how we plan to deliver on these ambitions. This includes finalising our readiness for professional practice guidance and taking forward our approach to practice educators. Our newly established education and training advisory group will play an essential role, shaping our progress in this space.

Finally, our people remain at the heart of what we do. The key to this business plan, and to our broader 3-year strategy, is a strong, values-based culture. Our people will drive this work with their consistent passion and dedication.

Colum Conway

Chief Executive, Social Work England

Our vision for 2023 to 2026

Our strategy on a page

Our purpose:

To regulate social workers in England so that people receive the best possible support whenever they might need it in life.

Our strategic themes:

Prevention and impact



Building trust and confidence within a safer practice environment.

Regulation and protection



Being transparent, efficient, responsive and fair in how we regulate.

Delivery and improvement



Putting our people at the heart of the positive change we want to drive.

Our guiding principles:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded in all that we do - driving positive change, valuing diversity and representing society
- We will listen to, engage with and co-produce alongside those who are directly impacted by our work
- We will learn through data and use insight to understand our impact and inform our plans

Our values:

- Fearless
- Independent
- Transparent
- Ambitious
- Collaborative
- Integrity

Strategic context

Our strategy for 2023 to 2026 is based around three strategic themes:

- **Prevention and impact:** building trust and confidence within a safer practice environment.
- **Regulation and protection:** being transparent, efficient, responsive and fair in how we regulate.
- **Delivery and improvement:** putting our people at the heart of the positive change we want to drive.

Across these themes, we have identified 10 strategic objectives that we aim to achieve over the next three years.

Our business plan for 2023 to 2024 sets out the work we will do this year to ensure we are on track to achieve our strategic objectives.

Monitoring our progress

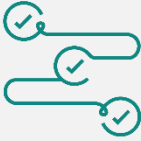
As we move into the period covered by our second strategy, our focus is on how we can build on the foundations we established in our first three years. Our objectives for 2023-24 reflect this.

Many of our objectives are developmental. They aim to provide insight into how we can deliver further improvements in the second and third years of our strategy. In some areas, we aim to establish baselines that we can use to monitor progress in the longer-term.

Alongside the objectives in this business plan, we will continue to monitor our core regulatory and organisational functions. The core activities within these functions are not all explicitly referenced in our objectives for 2023-24, but they remain important elements of our work. We will continue to monitor them through the key performance indicators described at the end of this plan.

Maintaining efficiency and effectiveness in these functions will be the foundation of our work to deliver further improvements over the next three years. We will harness the increasing range of data and insight we hold to develop our evidence base and demonstrate our progress towards realising the benefits of being a specialist social work regulator.

Our plan on a page for 2023 to 2024

Social Work England Our business plan for 2023 to 2024			
Our values	Prevention and impact	We'll work to prevent harm • improve understanding about social work and the value of professional standards • implement our data and insight strategy • advise on regulatory risk impacting the workforce to inform policy and guidance • implement readiness for professional practice guidance • review approach to inspections, reapprovals and quality assurance	Our guiding principles
			
	Regulation and protection	We'll balance protection and proportionality • identify ways to improve timeliness, fairness and quality of registration and advice process (including overseas applications) • learn more about misuse of title concerns • identify opportunities for improvements to investigations and hearings preparations • optimise approach to accepted disposals • ensure efficiency and value for money of hearings • explore local resolution pathways	
			
	Delivery and improvement	We'll keep evolving the ways we work • identify how we can improve our digital user experience • implement our people strategy • develop our quality and assurance frameworks • demonstrate value for money improvements • implement corporate sustainability plan	
			

Prevention and impact

We believe that it is better (where possible) to seek to prevent harm. This approach to public protection will be an increasing focus in how we regulate and the new work we will do to get ahead of the curve. Success will be underpinned by building trust and confidence with the profession and creating a clear understanding of the need for and responsibilities of professional regulation; a more powerful and insight driven approach to data and change; and to look at the social work practice environment to identify risk factors.

Strategic objective 1: Build trust and confidence in the social work profession, and in regulation, by strengthening our relationship with the sector

Objective for 2023-24	Success criteria
1.1: Develop an inclusive communications and engagement approach to improve understanding about social work and the value of our professional standards	Research completed to establish a baseline measure of public confidence in our work and public confidence in the profession (quarter 2) Started to collect information through an annual survey (quarter 4) to show how our work is incrementally contributing towards: • An increase in the proportion of social workers who have confidence in the way we regulate (2024-25) • An increase in the proportion of social workers who value our professional standards (2024-25) We will refine our expectations in these areas once we have established the baseline measures

Strategic objective 2: Share the data and insight we hold about the social work profession and our regulation. This will help us to support leaders and policy makers to drive change, and ensure our processes are safe and fair

Objective for 2023-24	Success criteria
2.1: Co-produce and implement our data and insight strategy. This will ensure that our approach to gathering, analysing and sharing data and insight is proactive, responsive and deepens our evidence on regulatory risk	Scope, milestones and governance agreed, with a vision for how we will collate, analyse and share our data and insight, including first year delivery plan (quarter 1) Initial analysis of fitness to practise referrals and outcomes is published, with identified actions and next steps (quarter 2) Published data about the register and considered our future approach to publishing data about our activity and research on a regular basis (from quarter 2)

Strategic objective 3: Collaborate with other sector leaders to develop a clear and shared understanding of risks to the public and agree how to manage those risks

Objectives for 2023-24	Success criteria
3.1: Influence and advise on the development of national policy and statutory guidance, ensuring there is consideration of the many diverse areas of social work practice and the makeup of the profession	Designed an approach to track changes in levels of stakeholder engagement and trust in our work (quarter 1) Conducted an internal evaluation of how our research on workforce and leadership of the national workforce roundtable is contributing towards longer term solutions to social work recruitment and retention issues (quarter 4)

	Developed and shared proposals on how to implement an early careers framework and other aspects of the children's social care reforms which relate to our remit as a regulator (quarter 4)
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Strategic objective 4: Ensure all social work students receive comprehensive and consistent education and training, in a supportive and inclusive learning environment to prepare them for practice

Objectives for 2023-24	Success criteria
4.1: Complete and implement the readiness for professional practice guidance to provide improved clarity to course providers to develop programmes that equip students to meet the professional standards	Education and Training Advisory Forum established to consult on guidance and implementation (quarter 1) Readiness for professional practice guidance published (quarter 3)
4.2: Review the overall approach to course inspections, reapprovals and quality assurance to consider how it can be sustainable, with a new risk-based and thematic approach	Published learning from current education quality assurance inspections to share insight with the sector on the position of social work education and training (quarter 2) Reviewed education quality assurance process, system and resources to improve efficiency and effectiveness and deliver regulatory assurance against the schedule of inspections (quarter 4) A workable model and a revised set of standards have been developed for consultation (quarter 4)

Regulation and protection

We will ensure that all of our regulatory activity continues to strike the right balance between protection and proportionality. We will ensure that our work is fair, transparent, as efficient as possible and in the public interest. We will identify and implement new approaches to local areas handling concerns raised, where safe and appropriate. We will continue to encourage and promote effective regulation, including continuing professional development (CPD), to demonstrate to the public that social workers meet our professional standards.

Strategic objective 5: Ensure that our registration processes are fair, responsive and efficient

Objectives for 2023-24	Success criteria
5.1: Identify opportunities to improve the timeliness, fairness and quality of our registration and advice processes by reviewing our learning and data from the last three years	Review completed, and actions for improvements in 2024-25 identified (quarter 4)
5.2: Work with internal colleagues and overseas organisations to identify ways we can improve the timeliness of overseas applications	Timeliness targets established for the 3 countries from where we receive the most overseas applications (quarter 3)
5.3: Review our approach to concerns about misuse of the protected title 'social worker', to enhance our understanding of the nature of these concerns and improve timeliness to conclude a case	Completed amendments to public guidance and the process where the need is identified (quarter 1) Established baseline for time taken to conclude a misuse of title case (quarter 2) Analysis of type of misuse of title concerns completed (quarter 4)

Strategic objective 6: Review our fitness to practise case resolution approach, to improve service quality and fairness, and ensure value for money

Objectives for 2023-24	Success criteria
6.1: Identify opportunities to bring more investigative activity into the earlier stage of the fitness to practise process, and streamline the preparation of cases for a hearing	Review of processes completed and actions identified (quarter 4)
6.2: Optimise our approach to accepted disposals. We will review the case examination stage of the fitness to practise process, focusing on engagement with accepted disposals, guidance and outcomes	Review completed and actions identified (quarter 4) Established a baseline for number of accepted disposals offered (quarter 2) Evaluated the quality of accepted disposal decision making (quarter 3)
6.3: Ensure our hearings process is efficient and delivers value for money, and we have a clear understanding of reasons for adjournments	Review of process completed and actions identified (quarter 4) Analysis of reasons for adjournments completed and actions identified to optimise the adjournment rate (quarter 4)
6.4: Demonstrate impact following the changes to our revised legislative framework. We will focus on interim order timeliness, quality of voluntary removal decisions, and efficiency and outcomes of case examiner decision review process	Review of framework completed and actions identified (quarter 4) Analysis completed of impact on time taken to approve interim orders (quarter 4) Evaluated quality of voluntary removal decisions (quarter 4) Analysis completed of the outcomes of reviews of case examiner decisions (quarter 4)

Strategic objective 7: Develop our work with employers and the public to resolve more concerns locally (where it is safe and appropriate to do so)

Objective for 2023-24	Success criteria
7.1: Develop our single point of contact network and explore local resolution pathways for appropriate concerns	Single points of contact in place across all local authority adult and children services and CAFCASS, plus scoping of contacts in NHS trusts (quarter 4) Internal evaluation completed on single point of contact networks and how local intelligence gathered through these networks has strengthened preventative responses to emerging regulatory issues (quarter 4) Options paper completed on local resolution pathways (quarter 4)

Delivery and improvement

To deliver our ambitions we will further evolve how we work. We are taking the next steps on our journey, from being a new organisation creating systems and processes for the first time, to consolidating our people and functions and moving into maturity. We will focus on continuous improvement of the approaches and systems which underpin our work. Key to this are our digital services through which so much of our engagement with the public and the profession takes place. Also, the governance and oversight which ensure we are accountable for what we do. A new people strategy will enhance our role as a diverse and inclusive employer and embrace putting people at the heart of change.

Strategic objective 8: Further develop our digital channels and services, to ensure they are inclusive and focused on user experience

Objective for 2023-24	Success criteria
8.1: Carry out user research to identify how we can improve our digital user experience	Identified priorities for a digital strategy to ensure our channels and services are inclusive, informative and intuitive for our users (quarter 3) Action taken to address priority improvements from our accessibility audit (quarter 4)

Strategic objective 9: Be a diverse and inclusive employer, which supports and motivates its people so they can deliver for the people we serve

Objective for 2023-24	Success criteria
9.1: Implement our people strategy	Improved recruitment approach to attract a wider range of candidates (quarter 4) and increased diversity (2024-25) Designed and implemented priority training programmes for registration and fitness to practise (quarter 3) Benchmarking completed against Mindful Business Charter, Race Equality Charter and Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation, and areas for development have been identified (quarter 2) Identified an appropriate external benchmark for our people and development function (quarter 2)

	Targeted leadership development opportunities in place (quarter 3), and participants feel their knowledge, confidence and leadership behaviours have improved (quarter 1, 2024-25)
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Strategic objective 10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money

Objectives for 2023-24	Success criteria
10.1: Further develop and communicate our quality and assurance frameworks to increase public confidence in our processes and decision making, and promote a culture of continuous improvement	Scope and implementation plan agreed for publishing information about our quality assurance process and fairness of our decision making (quarter 2) Assurance framework agreed and launched (quarter 1)
10.2: Evaluate our economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and demonstrate value for money improvements across the organisation	Evaluation completed and efficiency improvements identified (quarter 3) Benefits realisation plan produced and implemented (quarter 4)
10.3: Implement our corporate sustainability plan	Using 2022-23 data as our baseline, set out 3-year targets for improving our delivery in achieving the Greening Government Commitments (quarter 4) Supported by our new waste management contract, general waste is reduced by 10% and proportion of waste recycled is increased (quarter 4)

Key performance indicators

Registration

Key performance indicator	Target
Time taken to approve UK registration applications	less than or equal to 10 working days (median)
Time taken to approve restoration applications	less than or equal to 20 working days (median)
Time taken to answer emails	less than or equal to 5 working days (median)
Time taken to answer phone calls	less than or equal to 8 minutes (median)
Time taken to conclude misuse of title cases	monitor

Education quality assurance

Key performance indicator	Target
Percentage of course reapproval decisions made	at least 70%

Fitness to practise

Key performance indicator	Target
Age of triage caseload	less than or equal to 14 weeks (median)
Age of investigation caseload	less than or equal to 54 weeks (median)
Time taken to complete case examination process	less than or equal to 12 weeks (median)
Time taken from receipt of referral to final outcome	monitor (median weeks)
Time taken to approve interim orders	20 working days (median)
Fitness to practise cases internal quality score	at least 90% meet internal standards

Organisational

Key performance indicator	Target
Time taken to complete freedom of information requests	at least 90% within statutory deadline
Time taken to complete subject access requests	at least 90% within statutory deadline
Corporate complaints response time	at least 70% within 20 days
Retention rate	at least 80%
Sickness absence days lost	less than or equal to 5.4 days per person
Forecast year-end variance to budget	+/- 1.5%
System availability excluding planned outages	at least 99%

Resources

The total revenue resource allocation for 2023-24 is £21.6 million. This is an increase of £3 million compared to our core budget for 2022-23, excluding the additional funding received from the Department for Education in that year to complete legacy fitness to practice cases transferred from the previous regulator. This project is nearing completion and will conclude in the first quarter of 2023-24.

The additional £3 million comprises an additional £2 million of grant in aid and an increase of £1 million in fee income, reflecting continuing growth of the register. With this additional investment, we will allocate resources to progress the number of outstanding fitness to practise cases that are currently awaiting a hearing as quickly as possible, including conclusion of the cases transferred to us at our inception. We will also invest in some additional roles required to deliver the outcomes in this business plan, in particular to build resilience within the fitness to practice function to support progress towards meeting our targets for 2023-24.

For 2023-24, our capital expenditure allocation is £2.2 million, the majority of which will support further development of our case management system to improve operational efficiency. Our overall 2023-24 revenue budget comprises of £10.8 million salary costs and £12.7 million of non-pay costs, including depreciation and amortisation charges of £2 million.

The majority of our revenue budget, 63%, supports our strategic theme of regulate and protect, 14% supports prevention and impact, and 23% supports delivery and improvement.

Revenue budget for 2023 to 2024 by strategic theme

