

Social Work England
Annual Report and Accounts
2023 to 2024

2023
2024

Social
Work
England

Social Work England

**Annual report and accounts 2023-2024
For the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024**

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to paragraph 19, schedule 3 of the
Children and Social Work Act 2017**

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Contents

Overview from the chair and chief executive	4
Performance report	6
Performance overview	7
Performance analysis	24
Accountability report	62
Corporate governance report	63
Directors' report	63
Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities	66
Governance statement	67
Remuneration and staff report	79
Parliamentary accountability report	92
The Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Houses of Parliament	94
Financial statements	102
Statement of comprehensive net expenditure	103
Statement of financial position	104
Statement of cash flows	105
Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity	106
Notes to the financial statements	107

Overview from the chair and chief executive

Welcome to our annual report and accounts for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Here we reflect on the work we've undertaken over the first 12 months of our current 3-year strategic period, including the challenges we've faced, what we've learned and how we can continue to improve.

Every day, social workers support millions of people to improve their chances in life. They listen to, support and empower people, protecting people from harm when necessary. And they must ensure those that they work with are always treated with dignity and care, and that their wishes, feelings and needs are considered.

In undertaking this important and complex role, social workers must act with integrity and maintain high ethical and professional standards. Regulation means that the public can expect the social workers they engage with to meet clear professional standards, providing assurance and protection.

Our success requires us to build trust and confidence with the profession and create a clear understanding of the need for, and responsibilities of, a professional regulator. Building on our research findings into public perceptions of social work, we launched a campaign during Social Work Week to raise awareness of the positive impact social workers have on people's lives. It was wonderful to see the campaign receive such a positive reaction, both within the profession and among the public.

Reducing risk and preventing harm needs to be delivered in partnership across the sector. This report indicates that we've made good progress in developing our work with employers, social workers, educators and the public.

We're pleased to report that we're making good progress in improving our overall efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation. This was reflected in our latest performance report from the Professional Standards Authority, where we're pleased to have met 17 of the 18 standards of good regulation.

With our unique view of the whole profession, people continue to look to us to share learning, data and insight about social work. Alongside the publication of several pieces of research during the year, we also shared further data and insight that we hold about the social work profession and our regulation. Not only has this increased our openness and transparency, but it enables us to support leaders and policy makers to plan for change.

We've also been able to contribute to the development of national policy and statutory guidance. This included collaboration with the Department for Education on plans to reform children's social care as set out in their 'Stable homes built on love' strategy. We've also engaged with the Department of Health and Social Care's strategy 'People at the Heart of Care' for adult social care.

Every concern raised to us about a social worker is taken seriously and considered by our fitness to practise process. We've seen improvements in the outcomes for people at the various stages of our fitness to practise process. However, we know that overall it is taking us too long to resolve cases, something that was confirmed by the Professional Standards Authority review. We acknowledge that it's not acceptable to have such delays. We understand the distress this can cause to social workers and to people who have made a complaint. It remains a cause for concern for all of us and we continue to work on ways we can to address this.

Finally, we thank and recognise our staff, our board and all others who work for and with us, for their continuing hard work and commitment to public protection. Together, in line with the objectives we set in our latest business plan, we'll continue to address challenges, recognise success and strive for continued improvements to the way we regulate. We'll be guided by our values and culture, by our legislation and statutory responsibilities, and by our ongoing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Dr Andrew McCulloch
Interim Chair of the Board,
Social Work England

Colum Conway
Chief Executive
and Accounting Officer,
Social Work England

Performance report



Performance overview

The performance report explains who we are, our purpose, how we are organised and our performance against objectives. Overall, our performance for 2023 to 2024 was in line with what we set out to achieve in our business plan for the year. Page 26 to page 61 provide a detailed analysis.

Our purpose and activities

We are a specialist regulator focused on enabling positive change in social work.

We believe in the power of collaboration and share a common goal with those we regulate - to protect the public, enable positive change and ultimately improve people's lives.

Social Work England was established under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 ('the Act'). We are the single-profession regulator for social workers in England. Our powers and obligations are set out in part 2 of the Act and the Social Workers Regulations 2018 ('the Regulations'). The Regulations were amended in December 2022. The changes covered a wide range of areas, including changes to our data sharing powers.

We operate as a non-departmental public body and are classified as a central government organisation. We agreed our [framework document](#) with our sponsor the Department for Education, in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Care. The Department for Education has responsibility for child and family social workers. The Department of Health and Social Care has responsibility for adult social workers.

As stated in the Act, and like the other health and care regulators, our overarching objective is the protection of the public.

In pursuing our overarching objective we aim to do all of the following:

- protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public
- promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England
- promote and maintain professional standards for social workers in England

The Regulations detail the framework within which we regulate social workers. We're responsible for delivering key regulatory functions by:

- setting profession-specific education and training standards and approving training courses
- setting profession-specific standards for fitness to practise
- maintaining a register of all social workers in England
- running a fitness to practise system
- monitoring and reporting on continuing professional development
- approving post qualifying courses and specialisms

Professional Standards Authority

Our regulatory activities are overseen by the Professional Standards Authority (the Authority). They review and scrutinise our performance against their  standards of good regulation.

In March 2024, the Authority published its review of Social Work England for the period 1 January to 31 December 2023. We were pleased to have met 17 of the 18 standards, improving on the 16 we met in the previous period (1 December 2021 to 31 December 2022).

The review identified how we share valuable learning, insight and research. It also recognised that we continued to face challenges with timeliness in some parts of our fitness to practise process. It was for this reason that we did not achieve one of the standards. The review highlighted that we have taken several actions to improve in this area.

 Words in this report that are underlined and have a globe icon next to them show where more information can be accessed online.

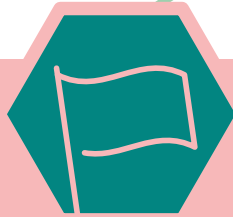
Our values

Our values shape and steer how we work. We're proud of our values and what they mean to us.



Fearless

Influence and drive change where needed.



Independent

Carry out our work without undue influence from anyone.



Ambitious

Have high aspirations for the social work profession, for regulation and for ourselves.



Integrity

Work with integrity in every aspect of our business.



Collaborative

Work with experts in the social work profession.



Transparent

Be honest and open about what we're doing and how we're doing it. Seek and act on feedback.

Our leadership team



Colum Conway
Chief Executive and
Accounting Officer



Sarah Blackmore
Executive Director
Professional Practice and
External Engagement



Philip Hallam
Executive Director
Regulation



Linda Dale
Executive Director
People and Business
Support

How we measure and report performance

Our executive leadership team tracks performance and milestones on a monthly and quarterly basis, including measuring against key performance indicators.

Our board reviews our performance on a quarterly basis. Our regular audit and risk assurance committee meetings support them in their responsibilities. They provide assurance in the areas of audit, risk management, governance and internal control.

Our quality assurance team conducts process reviews and internal audits. They ensure that we operate effectively and align with our statutory purpose to protect the public.

We have a formal quarterly strategic and performance review meeting with the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care. We have regular ongoing contact with the sponsor team at the Department for Education. Our accounts are consolidated within the Department for Education's annual report and accounts.

We engage with the Professional Standards Authority. They review and scrutinise our performance against their standards of good regulation. They also review our independent adjudicators' decisions on fitness to practise concerns.

Performance summary

Our [!\[\]\(0b5e7e25e8775f7e7e80906ada4f0021_img.jpg\) strategy](#) sets out our 3 year ambitions for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026. We developed it in partnership with staff and our [!\[\]\(740312fd467f47b04cab841ab3868d83_img.jpg\) National Advisory Forum](#), including people with lived and learned experience of social work. Our board endorses the strategy. It builds on the achievements, challenges and learning from our first 3 years.

The strategy focuses on the following 3 strategic themes where we aim to have an impact on the next stage of our journey.

- Prevention and impact
- Regulation and protection
- Delivery and improvement

For each strategic theme, we set one year business plan objectives. Our performance monitoring and reporting reviews our progress against these objectives.

Overall our performance for 2023 to 2024 was in line with what we set out to achieve in our business plan for the year. Page 26 to page 61 provides a more detailed analysis.



Prevention and impact

Business plan objective 1.1: develop an inclusive communications and engagement approach to improve understanding about social work and the value of our professional standards.

We have met this objective by engaging with many audiences through a variety of activities. This included:

- expanding the membership of our National Advisory Forum, recruiting more people with lived and learned experience of social work
- running our fourth Social Work Week held in March 2024, with over 6,500 people attending the 21 main sessions. The sector also embraced the week, delivering over 40 independent sessions
- delivering campaign activity to start a national conversation on the consequences that negative depictions of social workers in TV and film have on society. We delivered this activity under our #ChangeTheScript campaign
- engaging with a total of 10,891 external stakeholders across the social work sector.

We've established a baseline for raising confidence in our role, the professional standards and how valued social workers feel their work is. We'll continue to seek out opportunities to inform, educate and influence others on the varied role social work plays within society.



Business plan objective 2.1: implement our data and insight strategy

This year we began to develop and share more of the data and insight we hold about the social work profession and our regulation. This included:

- publishing regular data about our social work register, fitness to practise referrals and case outcomes and overseas applications
- publishing an initial analysis of social workers' diversity data in relation to our fitness to practise process. Doing so was a significant first step towards a comprehensive understanding of fairness in our processes, informing the future analysis and actions we need to take in response
- commissioning research about the social work profession and people's experiences and perceptions of the sector. The findings were consistent with previous intelligence that we've gathered. We are using this learning to inform the way we engage with the profession and the public.

We've met this objective which has increased our openness and transparency, enabling us to support leaders and policy makers to drive change. This transparency will also help to ensure that our processes are safe and fair. We'll continue to explore and share our data, insight and research findings, supporting wider learning across the sector.



Business plan objective 3.1: influence and advise on development of national policy and statutory guidance

We've advised on significant review and reform this year, particularly in children's social care. This has included:

- advising on the development of national policy in children's social care as a result of the Department for Education's Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy. We also provided a response to the Department of Health and Social Care's proposals to reform the workforce pathway for adult social care
- sharing our research findings at national roundtables, to support planning that addresses workforce challenges
- collaborating with the Department for Education on plans for an early career framework for children and families social workers.

Responding to and advising on proposed changes in the sector saw us meet this objective this year. We will continue to influence and advise on national policy.



Business plan objective 4.1: develop and implement the readiness for professional practice guidance

During the year, we established the Social Work Education and Training Advisory Forum for education stakeholders. Ongoing conversations with the sector and people with lived experience of social work have supported our development and drafting of readiness for professional practice guidance.

We've partially met this objective, as we are due to finalise and implement the guidance in 2024. This guidance will help to ensure that those entering the profession are prepared to meet the professional standards required of them for safe and effective practice.



Business plan objective 4.2: review our approach to course inspections, reapprovals and quality assurance

We continued to work with course providers to ensure that all social work students receive comprehensive, consistent education and training to prepare them for practice. This included:

- completing 74% of course reapproval decisions, achieving our target of 70% by 31 March 2024. We are on track to complete our current cycle of course reapproval inspections by December 2024
- completing annual monitoring with all 78 education and training providers in England
- surveying course providers to gauge their experience of our inspection process to help inform their future direction
- continuing to streamline our approach to systems and inspection processes.

While our progress against this objective is significant, we've postponed the review of our approach to course inspections until we complete the full cycle. Doing so will allow us to learn from our engagement with all course providers.

We've gained a huge amount of experience and intelligence since we began regulating. The recent Professional Standards Authority audit confirmed that our approach continues to require providers to take action to ensure they meet our standards. The Authority received positive feedback from stakeholders about our approach to inspections.

As part of our inspections we survey documentary evidence at depth with the course provider and their stakeholders. This approach has meant that all courses that we have reapproved or approved meet the current education and training standards.



Regulation and protection

Business plan objective 5.1: identify opportunities to improve the timeliness, fairness and quality of our registration and advice processes

Business plan objective 5.2: identify ways we can improve the timeliness of overseas applications

Business plan objective 5.3: review our approach to concerns about misuse of title of social worker

We have met these objectives by taking steps to ensure that our registration processes remain fair, responsive and efficient. This included:

- procuring new software to support handling of enquiries. With this support we increased our responsiveness and we continued to meet our targets for time taken to answer phone calls and emails
- continuing to meet our key performance indicators for the timeliness of both UK registration applications and applications to restore to the register
- publishing refreshed public guidance to support applicants with the registration process
- undertaking a number of activities to improve fairness, including reviewing our process for assessment of UK, overseas and restoration applications
- publishing  [guidance on misuse of title cases](#).

During 2024 to 2025, we'll look to implement the improvements we've identified and further develop our approach.



Business plan objective 6.1: identify opportunities to bring more investigative activity into earlier stages of the fitness to practise process

Business plan objective 6.2: optimise our approach to accepted disposals

Business plan objective 6.3: ensure our hearings process is efficient and delivers value for money

Business plan objective 6.4: demonstrate impact following changes to revised legislative framework

We met these objectives through quality assurance activities aimed at helping us to understand where we needed to develop or improve our work. We reviewed our approach to fitness to practise case resolution to improve service quality. This included:

- delivering a programme of learning and development activity. This programme supports ongoing work to bring more investigative activity into the early stages of the fitness to practise process
- dedicating significant focus to conclude almost all of the legacy caseload inherited from the Health and Care Professions Council
- reviewing how we use financial resources across the fitness to practise process. Doing so helped us to gain a better understanding of our challenges, and where efficiencies have and could be made.
- continuing to focus on timeliness of the triage and investigation stages
- reviewing the learning from the changes to our legal framework. Our analysis shows that the 5 key changes to the legal framework in 2022 have brought financial efficiencies while not compromising the quality of casework and decision making.



Business plan objective 7.1: develop our single point of contact network and explore local resolution pathways

We've partially met this objective, taking steps to develop our work with employers and the public to resolve more concerns locally. These steps included ensuring that our approach is proportionate, looking to resolve concerns as efficiently and effectively as possible, at the earliest appropriate stage.

We maintained a single point of contact within major employers, with the aim of supporting organisations to manage and respond to our requests for information. We also collaborated with employers and others to understand how local concern and complaint processes are working.

Due to capacity constraints, we've now planned further exploration work for 2024 to 2025. We'll evaluate the network and consider our approach to developing it further.



Delivery and improvement

Business plan objective 8.1: conduct user research to identify how to improve digital user experience

We met this objective by developing and implementing a new approach to how we involve users of our services in our work. This work allowed us to identify and bring together diverse participants to feedback on and shape our digital content. In February 2024, we delivered user research on how we can improve our raise a concern service.

We completed an accessibility audit on our website to ensure that we remain inclusive. We also updated and published our accessibility statement on our website, being transparent with users on where we still need to make improvements.



Business plan objective 9.1: implement our people strategy

We met this objective by launching our 3 year people strategy and continuing our work towards becoming a diverse and inclusive employer. This included:

- publishing our revised people policies, with the support of feedback groups
- putting in place targeted opportunities for leadership development
- improving our recruitment approach
- continuing to improve our overall rewards package
- receiving the results of our latest Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) which show our overall score improved to 70%, an increase of 4% on last year
- publishing our equality, diversity and inclusion action plan for 2023 to 2024. During the year we became a Disability Confident employer. We signed up to the Race at Work Charter and Mindful Business Charter. And we developed our positive action mentoring scheme.



Business plan objective 10.1: further develop and communicate our quality and assurance frameworks

Business plan objective 10.2: evaluate our economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and demonstrate value for money improvements across the organisation

Business plan objective 10.3: implement our corporate sustainability plan

To meet these objectives we've continued to improve the way we work.

We developed an assurance framework, which we have initially implemented across all of our regulatory departments. This process identified adequate controls already in place as well as areas for future improvement.

We evaluated how well we're using public funds. As a result, we know where we can be confident that we're providing value for money and where we need to gather more evidence.

We also implemented our sustainability plan. We've made good progress in reducing waste and increasing recycling.

Key performance indicators

In addition to our strategic and business plan objectives, we set key performance indicators to monitor our performance and progress during the year.

We achieved most of our key performance indicator targets in 2023 to 2024. High caseloads and resourcing challenges impacted on timeliness at the triage and investigations stage of fitness to practise. We have reviewed our processes and are investing in additional staff to improve timeliness in 2024 to 2025.

Our sickness absence has also been higher than average for the public sector. We supported people to return to work and by the end of March 2024, had no ongoing long-term absence cases.

For more detail on our performance, see page 26 to page 61.



Education and training key performance indicator

Key performance indicator: completed course reapproval decisions (cumulative)

Target: 70% by March 2024

Timeframe: at 31 March

2023 to 2024: 74% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 32% (target missed)



Registration key performance indicators

Key performance indicator: time taken to approve UK registration applications

Target: less than or equal to 10 working days median

2023 to 2024: 3 working days median (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 5 working days median (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: time taken to approve restoration applications

Target: less than or equal to 20 working days median

2023 to 2024: 3 working days median (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 6 working days median (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: time taken to conclude misuse of title cases

Target: monitor

2023 to 2024: 55 working days median

2022 to 2023: 34 working days median

Key performance indicator: time taken to answer emails

Target: less than or equal to 5 working days

2023 to 2024: 2 working days (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 2 working days (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: time taken to answer phone calls

Target: less than or equal to 8 minutes

2023 to 2024: 6 minutes (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 8 minutes (target achieved)



Fitness to practise key performance indicators

Key performance indicator: age of triage caseload

Target: less than or equal to 14 weeks by March 2024

2023 to 2024: 23 weeks (target missed)

2022 to 2023: 16 weeks (target missed)

Key performance indicator: age of investigation caseload

Target: less than or equal to 54 weeks by March 2024

2023 to 2024: 62 weeks (target missed)

2022 to 2023: 60 weeks (target missed)

Key performance indicator: time taken to complete the case examination process

Target: less than or equal to 12 weeks

2023 to 2024: 10 weeks (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 8 weeks (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: time from receipt of referral to final fitness to practise outcome

Target: monitor

2023 to 2024: 110 weeks median

2022 to 2023: 109 weeks median

Key performance indicator: time taken to approve interim orders

Target: less than or equal to 20 working days

2023 to 2024: 18 working days (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 18 working days (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: fitness to practise internal quality score

Target: more than or equal to 90%

2023 to 2024: 91% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 94% (target achieved)



Information governance key performance indicators

Key performance indicator: time taken to complete Freedom of Information requests

Target: more than or equal to 90% within deadline

2023 to 2024: 100% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 98% (target achieved)

Key performance indicator: time taken to complete subject access requests

Target: more than or equal to 90% within deadline

2023 to 2024: 100% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 99% (target achieved)



Corporate complaints key performance indicator

Key performance indicator: corporate complaints response time

Target: more than or equal to 70% within 20 working days

2023 to 2024: 90% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 78% (target achieved)



Finance key performance indicator

Key performance indicator: forecast year-end variance to budget

Target: +/- 1.5%

2023 to 2024: 0.1% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 0.7% (target achieved)



IT key performance indicator

Key performance indicator: system availability excluding planned outages

Target: more than or equal to 99%

2023 to 2024: 99.9% (target achieved)

2022 to 2023: 99.8% (target achieved)



People key performance indicator

Key performance indicator: sickness absence over last 12 months

Target: less than or equal to 5.4 days per person

2023 to 2024: 8.9 days (target not met)

2022 to 2023: 6.0 days (target not met)

Summary of key risks

As we work to achieve our strategic and business objectives, managing our corporate risks effectively is paramount to our success. Our corporate risk register brings together our key risks regarding our ability to:

- achieve timeliness within our regulatory processes and stand behind the decisions we make
- respond to the external and policy landscape
- effectively manage our resource position
- defend ourselves from cyber incidents.

For further information on our corporate risks and mitigations, see the accountability report on page 62.

In 2023 to 2024, some of our corporate risks had a greater impact on our ability to achieve our objectives than others. This year, the number of cases awaiting a hearing became too great for us to manage within a reasonable timescale using our existing resources. We first anticipated this circumstance in July 2021 and added the emerging risk to our risk register.

In October 2023, our executive leadership team decided to manage this as an issue, as the risk had materialised. We're working determinedly to address the delays in hearing cases. We're identifying any further opportunities to improve the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of our process within our available resources and our legal framework.

Additionally, 2023 to 2024 saw cost of living pressures continue to stretch everyone. We were not immune to them. We had to adjust our spending plans due to higher building charges and to make a cost of living payment to our staff. We were successful in finishing the year with a +/-1.5% budget variance, however costs subsequently increased following a review and restatement of accruals balances relating to legal fees. Further information can be found in note 1.19.

During 2024 to 2025, we'll continue to focus on how we can drive further efficiency improvements across our organisation. We'll work with our sponsor, the Department for Education, to review our overall resourcing needs now and into the future, building the case for additional funding where necessary.

Performance analysis

Our year at a glance

April 2023

- Started publishing quarterly  registration and fitness to practise data
- Began refinement of the readiness for professional practice guidance in collaboration with the Education and Training Advisory Forum



May 2023

- Held first single point of contact network event for employers



June 2023

- Shared our people strategy with employees
- Published our  equality, diversity and inclusion action plan for 2023 to 2024
- Hosted the first of 5 national roundtables looking at the issues and challenges for practice education

July 2023/August 2023

- Installed new call centre software
- Consulted publicly on course approval standards for best interests assessor courses



September 2023

- Received the Silver Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) award from the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion for our progress on diversity and inclusion
- Published our first quarterly publication of  fitness to practise referral data
- Published our  initial analysis of diversity data in our fitness to practise process report

October 2023

- Started the annual monitoring process of social work education and training providers
- Attended Community Care Live with 1,000 people from the social work and social care community
- Hosted engagement sessions about our readiness for professional practice guidance



November 2023

- Contacted 678 employers to raise awareness of our overseas application guidance
- Engaged in extensive consultation on readiness for professional practice with social work academics, people with lived experience and social workers

December 2023

-  Over 100,000 social workers renewed their registration

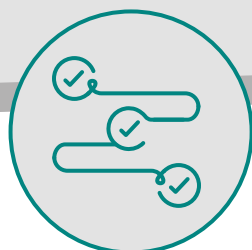


January 2024

- Launched a second round of our positive action mentoring scheme for our people

February 2024

- Hosted 20 user research sessions to improve our online raise a concern process
- Completed annual monitoring of social work courses for the 2023 academic year



March 2024

- Hosted Social Work Week
- Launched a national campaign #ChangeTheScript
- Launched a new annual survey of social workers and published research into public perceptions of social work, the social work workforce, and practice education

Performance against objectives (analysis)

We've been working to the ambitions set out in our 2023 to 2026 strategy. We have reviewed performance against our business plan priorities for 2023 to 2024.

Strategic theme: prevention and impact

A vital part of why we exist is to maintain professional standards in social work. People should have trust in their social worker and confidence that they have the skills and expertise to meet their needs.

Our work aims to incrementally grow:

- confidence in the way we regulate
- the proportion of social workers who understand how the professional standards apply to their work
- confidence in social work as a profession and how it is positively viewed by society



Objective 1.1: develop an inclusive communications and engagement approach to improve understanding of social work and professional standards

Engaging with the profession and people with lived experience

Our engagement team engaged with a total of 10,891 external individual stakeholders this year.

During the year we have increased our engagement with employers on overseas recruitment. We emailed 678 employer contacts to raise awareness of guidance. We also offered support to all employers and agencies recruiting candidates who qualified outside of the UK.

The number of requests from higher education institutions for in-person support from our engagement team increased this year. As a result, we've been able to deliver two-way feedback relating to our fitness to practise and registration processes.

We also delivered 14 national CPD and registration renewal sessions and 14 peer reflection sessions. We received fewer requests for bespoke CPD and registration renewal sessions than in 2022 to 2023. This decline suggests there is a better understanding of registration renewal and CPD requirements.

To shape our regulation, we continue to engage with people with lived experience, including children and young people. We listen to their experience of social work and their understanding of professional regulation.

Co-production

Co-production is one of our guiding principles. We work on the principle that people should feel heard and that we have listened to their experiences.

Our  [National Advisory Forum](#) is central to this approach. It acts as our critical friend and brings real-life advice, support and challenge to drive positive change in social work.

During the year, we welcomed 10 new members to the forum. Through targeted recruitment we brought in social work students and those with expertise from the private, voluntary and independent sectors of the profession.

Annual social worker survey

In March 2024, we launched a new  [annual survey for social workers](#) to gather their thoughts on:

- the effectiveness of our regulation
- the professional standards
- how society values social work

The results will support us to understand and track perceptions of social work, and confidence in us and the profession. The findings will inform our communication and engagement approach.

Social Work Week

Now in its fourth year, over 6,500 people attended the main sessions at Social Work Week. We co-produced 21 sessions with people working across the sector and those with lived and learned experience.

These sessions are available on our  [YouTube channel](#), providing further opportunities for those interested in social work to build their understanding of the profession.

We are committed to evaluating the impact of this event on the profession and other attendees to inform our future approach.

Informing and educating: #ChangeTheScript campaign

In early 2024, we launched a public campaign calling on the entertainment and media industry to more accurately reflect social work in TV and film. We drew on our research and used ringfenced funding granted by the Department for Education.

The campaign aimed to inform and educate the public on the reality and the role of social work. It also sought to raise awareness among scriptwriters and filmmakers of the consequences that negative depictions of social workers have on society.

We co-produced the campaign with a working group who brought a diverse range of experiences from both social work and non-social work backgrounds.

#ChangeTheScript included a  [short film](#), featuring impactful real stories of social workers from the perspective of the people they support.





Launched on 18 March, early evaluation of the campaign through to the end of March shows:

- coverage in over 35 national, regional and broadcast outlets and in leading social work sector publications which helped to inform and educate the public on social work
- 1,800 views of the film on YouTube and our website, and almost 100,000 opportunities to see content across social media channels
- endorsement and amplification by key sector stakeholders including government departments, employers and social workers through their own communication channels
- an early shift in perception of the profession among those engaging with the campaign, with the number of people who strongly agreed that the profession deserves more recognition than it currently receives increased by 67% after viewing the film

Looking ahead

In our 3 year strategy we have committed to placing greater emphasis on targeted communication and engagement to enable positive change in social work. We aim to continue our work to inform, educate and influence others on the varied role social work plays within society. We'll use learning from the campaign and Social Work Week to work towards this goal.

Longer term, we hope these activities will increase confidence both within and outside of the profession for the benefit of the people social workers serve.

Data and insight

We have an important and informed viewpoint on the profession, drawn from our data and insight, our research, our engagement and our experience.

We use data and insight to inform our activities and how we regulate. Sharing data and insight about the social work profession and our regulation helps us to support leaders and policy makers to drive change. It also means that our processes are safe and fair.



Objective 2.1: implement our data and insight strategy

In 2023, we began to publish a range of data and insight we hold about the social work profession and our regulation.

Online data and insight hub

In September, we started to publish regular data and insight on a new online  [data and insight hub](#). This includes:

- monthly data on our social work register and fitness to practise cases
- quarterly overseas application data
- fitness to practise process: an initial analysis of diversity data
- quarterly fitness to practise referral data

There have been over 2,500 views of our data and insight hub pages since they launched at the end of September. These pages have also formed the basis of a number of engagement activities.

Exploring our diversity data

Our report titled  [Fitness to practise process: an initial analysis of diversity data](#) was published in September 2023. We found that the following groups of social workers were overrepresented in referrals received by us, and cases referred to hearing:

- social workers aged 40 and over
- male social workers
- social workers from a Black, African, Caribbean or Black British background.

Our analysis also showed that these groups have higher progression rates from triage to investigation, as well as from case examination to hearings.

This report represented a significant first step for us towards a comprehensive understanding of fairness in our processes. It also helped us to identify the actions we must take in response. We are conducting further analysis to better understand causality for these overrepresentations. We have established a data oversight group to ensure our analysis is robust.

Benchmarks and insight

We are committed to continuously learning more about social work and why it has a vital role in society. As such, we gather data and intelligence about the social work profession and people's experiences to inform our activities.

[Public perceptions of the social work profession](#)

In 2023 we commissioned YouGov to investigate how people in England feel about the social work profession. We wanted to know whether they understand and have confidence in what social workers do. We also wanted to find out how they feel about the regulation of social work by Social Work England.

It was reassuring to see that members of the public, healthcare professionals, and social workers themselves, think social workers play an essential role in society. Those in training and in practice said that they came into social work because they wanted to make a difference in people's lives and be fulfilled by a meaningful career. Despite this, only 1 in 10 social workers think they are well respected in society, whereas 44% of members of the public reported that social workers were respected. As part of our commitment to support the social work profession, we'll be doing more to understand why these different perceptions of social work exist.

The social work workforce

We complemented our perceptions research by commissioning YouGov to help us better understand the social work workforce. This insight will inform where future interventions might be helpful to address workforce challenges.

Practice education in England: a national scoping review

We commissioned research in 2023 to better understand:

- practice education
- the models of practice across education providers and employers
- the perceptions of social workers undertaking this role

Our research found that there are effective local networks in place that support the delivery of practice education. The findings have deepened our understanding of the perceptions of practice educators, course providers and placement providers.

Building on our existing insights and experience, this research is helping to shape our approach to the regulation of practice education. As always, we will work with the sector to ensure that any potential future regulation is proportionate, risk based and in the public interest.

Looking ahead

In 2024 to 2025, we'll build on this activity by sharing more of our research findings, thematic reviews and analysis of data. Doing so will increase our openness and transparency and support wider learning.

We'll continue to use significant moments to start national conversations on the role of the social work profession within society. These opportunities may include new reports, publications, news, data and events. We'll monitor any trends, themes and emerging regulatory risks, aligned with our purpose to protect the public.

National policy

We want every social worker to be able to practise, develop and progress in an environment that supports safety and effectiveness. We explore and challenge what professional regulation and the framework of our legislation can achieve towards this goal. But there are limits to what our regulation alone can do for public protection and professional confidence.

Effective public protection and regulation increasingly means prevention. It means identifying and reducing threats and risks to public protection at a more systemic level, as well as focusing on individual social workers.



Objective 3.1: influence and advise on the development of national policy and statutory guidance

There has been significant sector review and reform, both in adults and children's social care, through the Department for Education's Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy and the Department of Health and Social Care's People at the Heart of Care strategy. We engaged with the 2 departments as well as stakeholders throughout these processes, providing [!\[\]\(4729e517bc6a7cd81c8025b9646574fb_img.jpg\) organisational responses to consultations](#). Our work included 5 Department for Education consultations relating to reform. It also involved the Department for Health and Social Care's call for evidence on the [!\[\]\(90a2fb2f2c617b26262139ae4159c0a0_img.jpg\) Care workforce pathway for adult social care](#). We advised on policy developments, such as the early career framework and we explored the potential implications for our future regulation, drawing on our data, insight and research.

This area is evolving and could potentially result in changes to our regulation. We're monitoring the work closely and continue to consider the implications for our own strategic priorities in professional practice.

Workforce pressures are a significant risk for the profession. High numbers of vacancies continue to exacerbate high pressure working environments, making recruitment and retention a challenge. Intense workloads and burnout are leading social workers to leave front line roles. Despite these challenges, our data shows that social workers are not necessarily leaving social work altogether. Over a 3 year period our register has grown from 99,702 social workers in November 2020, to 103,324 in November 2023.

Building on our research findings, alongside sector leaders we've continued to take forward planning to address these workforce challenges. We worked with the sector to explore critical issues such as retention, recruitment and the impact and implications of recruiting social workers who qualified overseas.

Looking ahead

We'll continue to use our experience and expertise to help inform national policy agendas. We'll also continue to work with the sector on the pressing workforce challenges, to understand what could better support the profession.

Education and training

A key strand of prevention and impact is ensuring those who graduate from social work qualifying courses are ready to register and practise as social workers. We regulate social work education and training through approving and inspecting qualifying courses on a 5-year cycle. We are on track to conclude our first round of inspections by the end of 2024, which will mean:

- we will have inspected all social work courses
- all course providers will have evidenced that they meet our education and training standards
- students who successfully complete a course can meet our professional standards

On completion of our first inspection cycle, we will have a clear picture of the different routes into social work, and how courses are being delivered.



Objective 4.1 develop and implement the readiness for professional practice guidance

During 2023 to 2024, we established the  [Social Work Education and Training Advisory Forum](#). The forum provides opportunities for stakeholders to discuss and help shape strategic priorities and to act as our critical friend. Through this engagement, we are refining and strengthening our approach to the knowledge, skills and behaviour statements included in our readiness for professional practice guidance.

We've also held ongoing conversations and engagement events with education providers, practice educators, students, people with lived experience of social work and the wider sector. These discussions have supported the development of the guidance. We'll finalise the guidance in 2024 and work with the forum to share it with the sector.

Best interests assessors (BIAs) and approved mental health professionals (AMHPs)

In 2023, we consulted on new education and training approval standards for BIA courses, following our consultation on AMHP courses in 2022. We have drafted guidance to support these standards.

We'll publish both sets of standards and guidance in 2024 and implement them the following year. This will begin a cycle of reapproval for all AMHP and BIA courses, as part of our plans to develop to a closer relationship with people working in these specialist and advanced roles.



Objective 4.2 review approach to course inspections, reapprovals and quality assurance

We continue to make progress on our inspection cycle. In 2023 to 2024, we have:

- met our target for reapproval decisions, inspecting 106 courses
- continuously engaged with higher education institutions and training providers to explain our role, our expectations, and our approach
- completed annual monitoring with all 78 education and training providers in England
- responded to over 350 enquiries from higher education institutions, local authorities, students and members of the public
- surveyed course providers to gauge their experience of our inspection process to help inform future directions

We have also continued to streamline our systems and processes. We have done all of the following:

- completed end-to-end mapping of the education quality assurance process, developing an internal continuous improvement plan
- started to plan for BIA and AMHP course inspections
- started to explore digital improvements to ensure our education quality assurance process is as efficient and effective as possible

Looking ahead

During 2024 to 2025, we'll inspect and make reapproval decisions for the remaining courses. We'll use this intelligence to provide a fuller analysis of the education and training landscape for social work. We'll also analyse emerging trends from our inspection experience. This learning will inform our review of our education and training standards. We'll look at how we can ensure our approach to inspections, reapprovals and quality assurance is effective and sustainable.

We'll also consider the role of annotations to the register, to provide the public with information about the capabilities of social workers with specialist roles. We will begin with AMHPs, BIAs and practice educators.

Strategic theme: regulation and protection

Protecting the public starts with our professional standards, which apply to every social worker. Our regulation embeds the principles of professionalism to support safe and effective practice.

More information about this strategic theme is in our  [strategy](#).

Registration and advice

We require social workers to renew their registration and demonstrate that they meet our professional standards on an annual basis. This way they show that they are capable of safe and effective practice, ensuring public protection and increasing public confidence. As part of this process, we set annual continuing professional development (CPD) requirements that social workers must meet to maintain their registration. As such, we encourage a culture of learning and development that is ongoing, sustained and embedded in practice.

This year, we improved our  [search the register](#) functionality. It is now easier for the public to search for a social worker and identify whether they hold registration and whether they have any conditions on their registration.



Objective 5.1: identify opportunities to improve the timeliness, fairness and quality of our registration and advice processes

Timeliness

In 2023 to 2024 we procured and installed new software for our contact centre to handle enquiries. This upgrade has supported our responsiveness and ensured accurate reporting of calls and email activity.

We met our targets for time taken to answer phone calls and emails. During the year, we received 35,291 calls, slightly fewer than the 36,672 calls received last year. However, we received 41,004 emails compared to 25,691 last year. The new contact centre software has allowed for better data recording of emails we receive. We believe this change is key to the increase in email volumes we have recorded.

We also met our target timescales for assessing applications to join and restore to the register. See page 20.

Fairness and quality

Over 100,000 registered social workers in England engaged with us during the registration renewal period. Identifying opportunities to improve the fairness and quality of our registration and advice processes is central to our operations.

During 2023 to 2024, we further improved fairness in our registration functions by:

- reviewing processes for our assessment of UK, overseas and restoration applications
- using learning to keep processes efficient, proportionate and rigorous on public protection

We have created new guidance on misuse of the title social worker and overhauled our public guidance for:

- UK and overseas applicants
- applicants who wish to return to the register
- safe and effective practice

Using our learning and feedback from the sector, our updated guidance clearly explains our expectations of applicants and social workers. Doing so has increased the fairness in understanding and navigating our processes for users. For misuse of title cases, it will ensure that investigations are proportionate to the period of misusing the title.

Registration renewal: 1 September to 30 November 2023

Following a review of last year's registration renewal cycle, we didn't make any significant changes to the registration renewal processes, systems or CPD requirements this year.

We supported 101,052 (98%) social workers to renew during the registration renewal period through a wide range of targeted and multi-channel communication activities, including:

- emails tailored to communicate specific outstanding actions
- text messages to improve cost efficiency and responsiveness
- improvements to and promotion of guidance for applicants

The compliance rate and lower volume of enquiries this year indicate that social workers are increasingly familiar with the registration renewal requirements.

We became more transparent in publicly reporting registration renewal data, publishing regular and consistent updates on our website. We published information about the  [registration renewal outcomes](#) on our website on 6 February 2024.

As with previous years, we randomly selected 2.5% of social workers for a CPD review. A team of 9 independent CPD assessors completed this review between January and March 2024. They accepted 2,406 (97.7%) social workers' CPD. They gave 57 (2.3%) advice on how to improve their recording of CPD. The assessors noted that the quality of CPD recording had improved this year. Social workers showed better understanding when describing the impact of their learning on their practice.

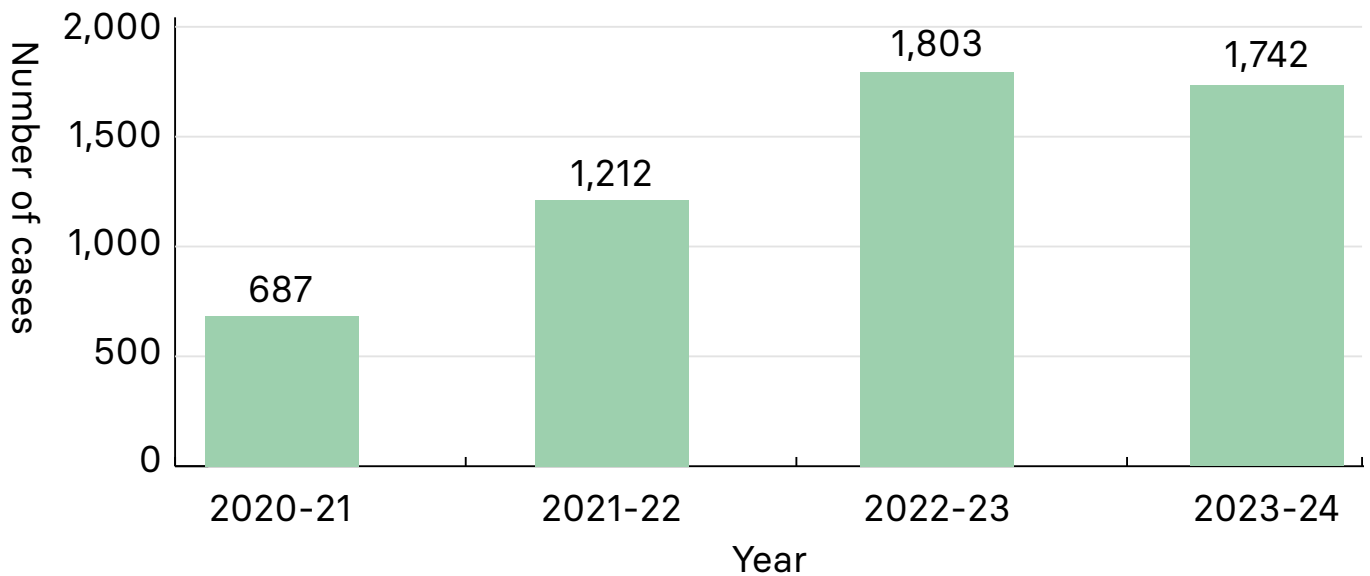
CPD is a key element of our growing relationship with social workers. We'll continue to strengthen this relationship by promoting further adoption of learning, development and reflection as a routine and valued part of professional life. We'll explore whether we need to make any changes to our guidance, engagement and digital delivery to support this ambition.

Objective 5.2: identify ways we can improve the timeliness of overseas applications

In 2023 to 2024 we received 1,742 applications to join the register from people who qualified overseas. This number represents a 3% decrease on the volume received in 2022 to 2023. This includes multiple applications from people whose previous application was not completed, therefore the number of successful unique applicants is lower.

Overseas registration application: cases opened

Annual totals (financial years) of applications received from those who qualified outside of the UK.



There is correlation between the significant increase in application volumes since 2020 to 2021 and processing times associated with overseas applications. Processing times increased from a median of 29 working days in 2022 to 2023 to a median of 57 working days in 2023 to 2024.

In response to these challenges we have:

- updated our  [guidance for overseas applicants](#), in collaboration with social work representative bodies and international recruitment agencies
- held discussions with  [International English Language Testing System \(IELTS\)](#) to understand the availability of their tests and gain some assurance that applicants will not be affected by delays once they sign up for a test
- produced examples of updating skills and knowledge forms to help applicants provide the right information
- implemented a checklist for applicants, making additional contact to check they have provided all required information to support their application
- met with international regulators, recruitment agencies and UK local authorities to understand their processes and plans so that we can better support each other

Activities are ongoing to help us understand and manage the high volume of overseas applications within the resources that are available.

Objective 5.3: review our approach to concerns about misuse of the protected title of social worker

Social worker is a protected title. It is illegal for a person to use the title unless they have completed the required education and training and are registered with us. Dealing with title misuse is an important part of our duty of public protection.

The volume of misuse of title cases continued to increase in 2023 to 2024. This increase related to concerns raised by the public querying why someone was not on our public register. It also included cases where people practised while not holding registration, often after failing to renew their registration.

Along with resource challenges in the registration service, this increase in volume led to longer closure times. This year it took an average of 55 days to conclude a case, compared to 34 days last year.

To address this concern, we published [!\[\]\(339a16584d5da0f0a3ca4e9ec17bf6a1_img.jpg\) guidance on misuse of title cases](#). We also introduced changes to the assessment of restoration applications. People are now able to return to practise appropriately and efficiently.

These improvements have started to reduce the time it takes us to resolve cases.

Looking ahead

In 2023 to 2024, we reviewed our registration and advice processes to identify opportunities to improve timeliness, fairness and equality. This work included specific focus and new guidance on overseas applications and misuse of title cases. During 2024 to 2025, we'll implement the changes we've identified and further develop our approach.

Fitness to practise

It is our responsibility to investigate concerns raised to us about social workers. We take this action to protect the public, maintain public confidence in social workers, and uphold professional standards. It's vital that we investigate such concerns in a fair and transparent way. Specialist teams operate each activity in our fitness to practise process:

- Our triage service considers the concerns we receive. They make an initial decision on whether or not we should investigate further.
- The investigations team then gathers evidence on referred concerns to help determine whether there may be fitness to practise issues.
- Case examiners make decisions following the conclusions of investigations. They close cases using the outcomes available to them or refer cases to a hearing.
- Our hearings service ensures that public hearings deal fairly with referred cases.
- Our case review team works with social workers who have restrictions on their practice. They ensure that these social workers can demonstrate how they're working to meet the requirements of their restrictions. We might apply these restrictions as interim orders during the course of our investigation, or decision makers may apply them once they have reached a final decision.
- Our quality assurance activities help us make appropriate and reasonable decisions and highlight where we need to develop or improve. Where appropriate, we involve those with lived experience of social work, often through our National Advisory Forum. At times we engage other stakeholders too. Our work is also subject to scrutiny by the Professional Standards Authority and the courts.

In line with our objectives, this year we focused on reviewing and analysing our approach to fitness to practise, to identify areas for improvement.

We also focused on the impact of changes made to our legislative framework in December 2022.

Fitness to practise data

During the year, we started to publish  [monthly data relating to our social work register and fitness to practise cases](#). Our yearly summary below shows the volume of activity and the proportion of cases that progressed to each stage of the fitness to practise process.

On 31 March 2024, there were 2,128 open fitness to practise cases.

The numbers below are based on decisions that we made on cases at each stage of fitness to practise during the year, including those that we opened in previous years.

We made 1,655 assessment decisions across the pre-triage and triage stages of our fitness to practise process. Of these decisions:

- 71% (1,179) were to close cases with no further action
- 29% (476) were to progress cases to the case examination stage

Case examiners made 422 decisions, of which:

- 50% (210) were to take no further action
- 29% (122) were to refer to a hearing
- 21% (90) were to close cases by means of  [accepted disposal](#)

Where we found there was a realistic prospect of impairment at the case examination stage, we applied the following accepted disposal outcomes:

- 53% (48) warning orders
- 20% (18) conditions of practice orders
- 11% (10) removal orders
- 11% (10) suspension orders
- 3% (3) no further action
- 1% (1) advice

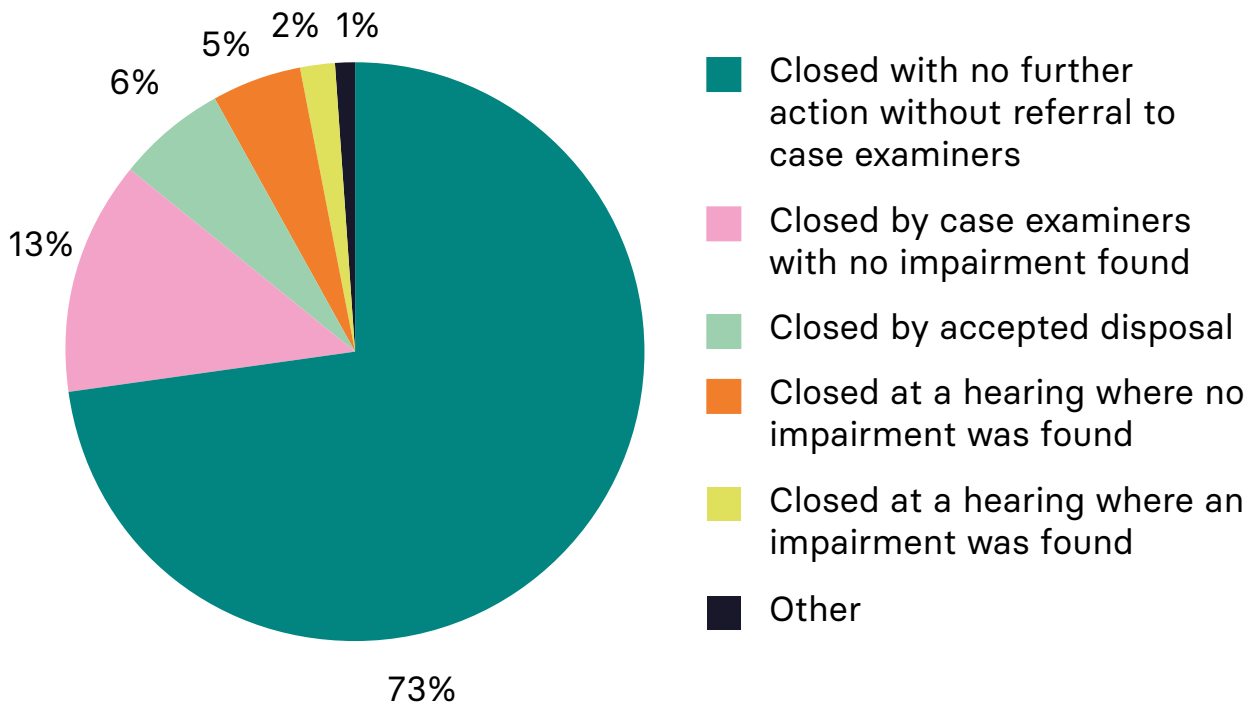
We decided 125 cases at hearings, finding:

- 67% (84) of cases where the social worker's fitness to practise was impaired
- 33% (41) of cases where no impairment was found

Where we found that the social worker's fitness to practise was impaired at the hearings stage, we applied the following sanctions:

- 44% (37) suspension orders
- 32% (27) removal orders
- 13% (11) warning orders
- 8% (7) conditions of practice orders
- 2% (2) no further action

Fitness to practise case outcomes



During the year, 1,613 cases reached a final outcome, of which:

- 73% (1,179) were closed with no further action, without referral to case examiners
- 13% (210) were closed by case examiners with no impairment found
- 6% (90) were closed by accepted disposal
- 5% (84) were closed at a hearing where impairment was found
- 3% (41) were closed at a hearing with no impairment found
- 1% (9) cases were closed for other reasons. For example, voluntary removal from the register or removal from the register on another fitness to practise case.

Reflecting on fitness to practise referrals

Our fitness to practise function has expanded its understanding of the number and nature of the concerns we receive. We've continued to refine how we manage these concerns at all stages of the process.

This year we received 1,617 referrals (1,769 in 2022 to 2023), of which 1,172 have a known source. Of these:

- 337 (339 in 2022 to 2023) were from employers of social workers
- 641 (861 in 2022 to 2023) were from members of the public
- 194 (261 in 2022 to 2023) were from other sources

Members of the public made 55% of referrals, down from 59% in 2022 to 2023. These referrals were primarily from people who use the services of social workers.

At the triage stage, we referred 79% of the concerns we received from employers into our investigation process (88% in 2022 to 2023). 93% of referrals from the public were not appropriate for us to investigate as the regulator (85% in 2022 to 2023). For example, we cannot:

- influence court proceedings
- investigate concerns about social care services or employers of social workers

On our website we are clear about the  [types of concern we can consider](#).



Objective 6.1: identify opportunities to bring more investigative activity into the earlier stage of the fitness to practise process

Timeliness continued to be the focus in our triage and investigation stages. Case progression is dependent on a number of variables. As such, we expected the median age of caseloads for these stages to fluctuate over the year.

At the investigation stage, gathering evidence from employers, social workers and other parties is more challenging than we originally anticipated. Many of our cases require us to seek primary evidence to understand:

- the context of the social worker's involvement
- whether and how the issues raised by the third party relate to the social worker's professional judgements

Often this process can take time because:

- records are not available or forthcoming
- staff involved have left their roles
- service users are unwilling to engage with us

We're working hard to build relationships with employers through our single point of contact network but this work takes time to embed.

This year, we implemented new approaches to support our teams to progress their older and more complex cases. And we strengthened our approach to identifying and managing risk. We delivered learning and development activity to help teams be more targeted at the early stages and to better the quality of our investigations. We also improved our induction pathway for new investigators to support them more in their first few months.

Objective 6.2: optimise our approach to accepted disposals by reviewing the case examination stage

We met our target for the time we take to complete the case examination process. Throughout the year we used learning from the accepted disposal process to inform the rest of the fitness to practise process. Our quality audits of the process and decisions have been positive. Together with representative bodies we also co-produced guidance for social workers who are considering accepted disposal.

We continued to review cases where offers of accepted disposals were not accepted, to share learning with the case examiners. We will keep on holding thematic reviews with the case examiners to support further improvements. We will closely monitor timeliness as we optimise the accepted disposal decisions process.

Objective 6.3: ensure our hearings process is efficient and delivers value for money

With the support of additional funding from the Department for Education, we dedicated significant focus to conclude almost all the legacy caseload inherited from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). We completed our project to conclude the legacy caseload at the end of June 2023.

We worked to identify the position of all cases awaiting hearing, to be able to make decisions on their progression within our available financial resources. Our level of resources did not allow us to reduce the number of cases awaiting hearing. During the year, we informed many social workers that they would have to wait longer than they expected for a final fitness to practise outcome. We notified social workers of the status of their case and kept complainants and witnesses updated. We continue to prioritise cases awaiting hearing based on the risks we have identified and the age of the case.

This year we reviewed our hearings processes, and these have been subject to a positive internal audit. We launched a pilot of 2-person panels for some final hearings, which will continue across 2024 to 2025. This approach could bring about financial savings that we can then reinvest into progressing more final hearings. Through the pilot we'll understand which cases are best suited to 2-person panels without affecting the quality of decision making.

We also analysed the reasons for adjournments and postponements as well as refining our approach to data collection. Our adjournment and postponement rate in 2023 to 2024 was 20%, compared to 24% in 2022 to 2023.

Objective 6.4: demonstrate impact following the changes to our revised legislative framework, focusing on interim order timeliness, quality of voluntary removal decisions, and efficiency and outcomes of case examiner decision review process

Changes to our regulations, rules and guidance came into effect in December 2022. The changes we made included the following:

- a change in the frequency of interim order reviews, from every 3 months to every 6 months
- the ability for us (at our discretion) to remove social workers who are subject to a fitness to practise process from the register, if the social worker asks for this to happen
- the ability for case examiners to remove social workers from the register with the social worker's agreement
- giving us the power to refer cases directly for consideration of an interim order, rather than going through case examiners or adjudicators
- the ability for us to review and seek a new case examiner decision. This approach applies when we have reason to believe that new information has become available or that the decision may be materially flawed.

We reviewed whether these changes achieved the benefits we expected in efficiency and effectiveness. We're satisfied that we could see positive outcomes across them all, without any reduction in the quality of the decisions we make.

Interim order process and timeliness

This year we made 52 applications for an interim order under the new process described above. Making applications directly allows us to identify and manage potential risks more effectively. We continued to meet our timeliness target for approving interim orders.

Voluntary removal

We have considered 44 applications for voluntary removal from social workers who are in the various stages of the fitness to practise process and 15 applications for voluntary removal have been granted.

We held internal and external stakeholder workshops to review and streamline our voluntary removal processes. With voluntary removal being new to our legal framework, we've reviewed all decisions we made about it during 2023 to 2024. These reviews have assured us that our voluntary removal decisions are of good quality.

Case examiner decisions

Our legal team reviewed 13 case examiner decisions using their new powers. Of these:

- 7 were closed by the legal team
- 2 were referred back to the case examiners for a fresh decision
- 4 are being considered

Impact on quality

We continued to meet our target for our fitness to practise internal quality score. See page 21.

Our decision review group regularly reviews a sample of fitness to practise decisions and have looked at thematic reviews. It has shared its learning with the case examination decision makers and panel members to refresh and improve our processes.

Looking ahead

In 2024 to 2025, we'll implement our learning and continue to monitor our performance. We'll focus on encouraging better engagement with social workers at an early stage.

We'll also explore further opportunities to improve quality, fairness and value for money. This includes our ongoing work on analysis of diversity in fitness to practise, and implementation of our quality framework for case examiners.



Objective 7.1: develop our single point of contact network and explore local resolution pathways

Over the past few years, we've developed a network of single points of contact with employers of social workers.

We also started work with employers and others to understand how local complaint and concern processes are working. Due to capacity constraints, we've planned further exploration work for 2024 to 2025. We'll continue to make sure that we provide a route to engage with local employers about current fitness to practise cases. At the same time, we'll help others deal with complaints as close as possible to where the issue arose.

Looking ahead

In 2024 to 2025, we'll nurture and develop the network, building on the learning from our evaluation. We'll increase collaboration to better understand the national, regional and system issues affecting the profession.

Strategic theme: delivery and improvement

In 2023 to 2024 we focused on continuing to improve the approaches and systems that underpin our work.

Key to these developments are:

- our digital services
- attracting and retaining skilled, committed and valued people
- effective leadership, governance and oversight

Our  [strategy](#) explores this theme in more detail.

Digital user experience

Our digital platforms are our main point of contact with the public and the profession. For many, our digital services will be the only point of interaction they have with us. Their experience will significantly impact on the trust and confidence they have in us as a public body. Our digital approach must therefore be inclusive, informative and intuitive for our users, while always keeping data secure.



Objective 8.1: carry out user research to identify how to improve digital user experience

User research

Our first step in shaping our future digital strategy was developing and implementing a new way of involving users of our services in our work. We're now able to identify and bring together a group of diverse participants, to feedback on and shape our digital content. Doing so will help us to provide more user-friendly, inclusive digital services.

In February 2024, we delivered user research on how we can improve our raise a concern service. To stay true to our co-production values, we engaged with 20 people with lived experience on this.

Over 20 sessions we tested 2 different versions of our raise a concern online process. We developed scenarios with our professional advisers and matched them to participants to reflect their lived experience where possible. Our testing focused on:

- accessibility
- clarity of information
- how participants felt when using the services

We'll use our learning to optimise the raise a concern service. We'll also feedback to participants about how their inputs helped shape the service.

Digital improvements

We improved the annual registration renewal journey for social workers. And we made further improvements to our case management system to help our people work efficiently. We also created a new  [equality, diversity and inclusion section on our website](#).

Accessibility

We've completed an accessibility audit to ensure our website remains inclusive. We've updated and published our  [accessibility statement on our website](#), to be transparent with users on where improvements are required. Work to educate our people on the importance of inclusive communication is on track. We'll continue this internal work to ensure our people understand that accessibility is everyone's business.

Looking ahead

In 2024 to 2025, supported by our user research, we'll deliver further accessibility improvements. We'll continue to improve our case management systems and improve our data architecture. We'll also consider how artificial intelligence might offer opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. We'll give careful consideration to any potential implications for privacy and fairness.

Be a diverse and inclusive employer

It's only through the hard work, commitment, skills and knowledge of our people that we can deliver our strategy. Everyone in the organisation has an important role to play in carrying out our plans and contributing to:

- protecting the public
- enabling positive change in social work
- improving people's lives



Objective 9.1: implement our people strategy

In June, we began implementing our people strategy for 2023 to 2026. Our priority areas are:

- attraction, retention and workforce planning
- cultivating our strong and inclusive culture
- health and wellbeing
- leadership and talent development

We've made improvements to our recruitment process throughout 2023 to 2024, including:

- enhancing the  [careers page](#) on our website
- changing our interview approach so candidates can showcase their skills and experience
- developing and increasing the data we hold
- researching and benchmarking internally and externally to identify and share best practice

We plan to review the impact of these improvements during 2024 to 2025 and explore further how we can attract a wider range of talent.

Looking ahead

We've made steady progress over the first year of our people strategy. We'll continue to build on these achievements in 2024 to 2025. In particular, we'll focus on our culture and ways of working. We'll also develop a behaviours framework to support and underpin these efforts.

Continually develop and improve how we work

We continue to develop our governance and quality assurance frameworks. We're focused on how they can drive continual improvement in the quality and timeliness of our decision-making and promote public confidence. We seek to contribute positively to societal and environmental challenges. By developing and improving how we work, we ensure we're a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.



Objective 10.1: further develop and communicate quality and assurance frameworks

Assurance frameworks helps us to understand:

- how well our systems of internal control are working
- whether we're effective in assessing and managing risks

We developed and implemented our assurance framework this year, starting with our regulatory departments. Through this process we identified that we have adequate controls and assurances across all regulatory functions. We reported areas of strength and improvement to the audit and risk assurance committee. The learning has informed our priorities for quality assurance and continual improvement in 2024 to 2025.

We continue to be robust and considered in how we manage the information we hold, including personal data, and how we respond to requests for it. This year we responded to 228 data subject rights requests, and 226 freedom of information requests. As in previous years, our data protection officer has provided regular updates to the audit and risk assurance committee. They have also shared with the committee an annual report on our data processing activities.

Looking ahead

In 2024 to 2025, we'll continue our phased roll out of the assurance framework. We'll start to publish key information to explain our quality assurance arrangements. And we'll lay out how they have driven improvements in the quality and fairness of decision making and the timeliness of our regulatory process.

Objective 10.2: evaluate our economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and demonstrate value for money improvements

In 2023 to 2024 we evaluated how well we're using public funds. Doing so helped us to understand where we can be confident that we're providing value for money and where we need to gather more evidence. Our work in this area will inform the independent review of our organisation that will begin in 2024 to 2025.

Alongside this activity, in 2024 to 2025 we'll work with our sponsor, the Department for Education, to review our resourcing needs for the future.

Objective 10.3: implement our corporate sustainability plan

We started implementing our sustainability plan in 2023. Since then, we've made good progress in reducing waste and increasing recycling.

For further detail, see our sustainability report on page 53.

Looking ahead

We'll continue to drive forward our ambition to be an effective, efficient organisation that delivers excellent value for money. We'll also maintain our focus on contributing to positive wider social and environmental outcomes.

Sustainability reporting

Sustainability and the environment

We've reported on climate-related financial disclosures consistent with HM Treasury's TCFD (Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures) aligned disclosure application guidance. This interprets and adapts the framework for the UK public sector.

Social Work England has complied with the TCFD recommendations and recommended disclosures around:

- Governance – all recommended disclosures
- Metrics and Targets - recommended disclosures (b)

This is in line with the central government's TCFD-aligned disclosure implementation timetable. We plan to make risk management and metrics and targets disclosures (a) and (c) in future reporting periods, in line with the central government implementation timetable.

We aim to be a sustainable organisation that contributes positively to challenges facing society and the environment. We're committed to sustainable development as a guiding principle within our work. This means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

We're located in Sheffield. Our neighbourhood benefits from Sheffield City Council's ground-breaking  [Grey to Green](#) environmental and economic development strategy. We're a tenant of North Bank, leasing 17,785 square feet, or 30% of the building. This multi-occupancy office building has a BREEAM7 (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) very good rating. Its Energy Performance Certificate was upgraded from grade E to C in 2021.

Our  [sustainability plan for 2023 to 2026](#) combines both of the following:

- our corporate social responsibilities
- our environmental, social and governance commitments.

The plan aligns with the greening government commitments and focuses on near-term areas that we can most influence and build upon in future years. These include action by our people within local communities, procurement, decarbonisation and waste minimisation.

Governance

The executive director for people and business support sponsors our sustainability plan. The executive leadership team is responsible for all of the following:

- assessing climate-related risks and opportunities as part of developing strategy, business planning and risk appetite
- approving the sustainability plan and annual action plan, based on the assessment of climate-related risks and how we need to respond and adapt to these
- monitoring delivery and ensuring risks are mitigated
- ensuring opportunities are maximised

The board provides strategic oversight of the sustainability plan with support and advice from the audit and risk assurance committee (ARAC). ARAC is responsible for both of the following:

- reporting to the board on the development and implementation of our sustainability plan
- providing oversight of our approach to managing sustainability risks

Reporting

We report our progress bi-annually to ARAC and the board.

Our report on sustainability performance for 2023 to 2024 follows statutory requirements and is in accordance with HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual, subject to the information we can fully disclose.

Mitigating climate change – working towards Net Zero by 2050

Greenhouse gas emissions

We've calculated carbon emissions for our energy related activities and business travel using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol's corporate standard. All our energy emissions fall under scope 3 of the UK greenhouse gas emissions reporting.

- Scope 1 direct emissions is not applicable as we don't own energy sources or hire or lease car fleets.
- Scope 2 emissions are indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy. Our lease agreement doesn't give us operational control over our energy, gas and water suppliers and therefore scope 2 is not applicable to our organisation.
- Scope 3 emissions are all indirect emissions not included in scope 2, that occur as a consequence of our activity but aren't owned or controlled by us.

Consumption

Following the lifting of the COVID-19 guidance to work from home in early 2022, hybrid working became our norm. This post COVID-19 lockdown shift provides context to the year to year changes reported below.

We started to report our electricity usage from 2021 to 2022 and are not yet able to report on gas. We've kept electricity usage and CO₂ emissions broadly stable since 2021 to 2022.

The cost of electricity was significantly higher in 2022 to 2023 as the landlord issued invoices based on estimated usage. The landlord subsequently carried out a reconciliation in June 2023 and we were issued with a credit which was allocated against 2023 to 2024 spend.

Category	Unit	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023	2021 to 2022	% movement since 2021 to 2022
Electricity	Kilowatt hours	116,234	143,319	135,180	-14.0%
Gas	Kilowatt hours	not available*	not available*	not available*	n/a
CO ₂	Tonnes	27.3	29.9	26.1	4.6%
Expenditure	£	£50,889	£104,086	£26,534	91.8%

To be as transparent as possible with available data, we've calculated our electricity consumption from invoices from our landlord.

*Data unavailable on specific usage by Social Work England since the proportion of our gas consumption is charged to us as part of our service charge.

All our utilities are recharged quarterly by our landlord. To increase energy efficiency, we use LED lights that switch on and off according to room occupancy.

To highlight energy use within our organisation, we developed our 'Turn Teal' internal campaign to make Social Work England a more sustainable organisation. This campaign supports the actions laid out in our sustainability plan. For example advocating for the practice of powering down screens and devices, both in office settings and at home. This has encouraged individuals to reduce the amount of energy used by monitors and docking stations, ultimately reducing carbon emissions in office and household environments.

Business travel

We're committed to hybrid working and the work-life balance it brings for people. This supports our efforts towards net zero by 2050. Travel is minimised by using video conferencing for hearings, board meetings and other stakeholder meetings where appropriate. We also promote through our travel and expenses policy, the use of public transport as the more environmentally friendly and economically viable option.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the lifting of restrictions and resumption of business travel, emissions have stabilised in the past year, and we have achieved a slight reduction in CO₂e for travel.

Means of transport	2023 to 2024 £	2023 to 2024 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)	2022 to 2023 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)	2021 to 2022 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)	2020 to 2021 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)
Car	4,900	2.92	3.55	2.15	1.46
Taxi, rail and bus	46,682	6.46	6.49	0.21	0.15
Air	2,292	2.60	2.47	0.11	0.22
Total	53,874	11.98	12.22	2.47	1.83

Breakdown of air travel	2023 to 2024 distance travelled (miles)	2023 to 2024 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)	2022 to 2023 distance travelled (miles)	2022 to 2023 (Tonnes of CO ₂ e)
Domestic short haul (economy)	5,257	2.31	3,050	-
International short haul (economy)	974	0.29	3,198	-
Total	6,231	2.60	6,248	2.47

Waste management

We changed our waste contract this year and our supplier now collects mixed recycling as well as general waste. We have promoted recycling practices in a variety of ways including our 'Turn Teal' campaign.

From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, we produced 0.66 tonnes of mixed recycling and 0.89 tonnes of general waste. This is a significant reduction from 2.04 tonnes of general waste during 2022 to 2023.

Less than 1% of our waste goes to landfill and 99% is sorted for re-use and recycling. Any waste that cannot be re-used or recycled is incinerated to generate energy. The total cost of waste management during the year 2023 to 2024 was £1,242.

Single-use plastics

We're committed to reducing consumer single-use plastics in line with the government's 25 year environment plan, and use plastic-free packaging wherever possible. Our hydro taps encourage staff to use reusable water bottles and glasses. We provide reusable crockery and facilities to store and reheat food to encourage homemade lunches.

Paper use

We seek to reduce the use of paper by taking a digital-first approach. Where we use paper, we limit its consumption by requiring double-sided printing. In the financial year 2023 to 2024 we procured 15 reams of A4 paper, which amounts to 7,500 pieces. This is a reduction of 79% compared to 2022 to 2023.

Reducing our water use

Our water is part of our utilities service charge. We calculate usage on a pro-rated square footage basis. The building owner informed us that there is no water meter installed. We manage our water use to our best abilities by having hydro taps and dishwasher facilities installed.

Sustainable procurement

Our commercial plan sets out how we deliver value for money, minimise our environmental impact and consider sustainability and social value through effective procurement and contract management. We comply with all applicable legislative requirements and always strive to improve our knowledge in this area.

Where practical, we use the Crown Commercial Service framework contracts in order to establish suppliers' compliance with environmental standards.

When undertaking new procurement we ensure that business cases include an analysis of Modern Slavery risks. We apply best practice to identify high risk areas as described in the Government Commercial Function's Modern Slavery guidance and use the Home Office's Modern Slavery Prioritisation Tool.

Nature recovery and biodiversity

We do not have any natural capital or landholdings. Our sustainability plan includes the provision of biodiversity training for our people.

Reducing environmental impacts from ICT and digital

Our 'Turn Teal' campaign has advocated for the practice of powering down screens and devices, both in office settings and at home.

This has contributed to a reduction in energy used by monitors and docking stations, ultimately reducing carbon emissions.

During 2023 to 2024, we sent no equipment to landfill. We continued to enable reuse through our buy back scheme for depreciated laptops. We recycled other IT equipment through a company that is United Kingdom Accreditation Service accredited to international standards.

Communities and partnerships

We belong to a network of health and care regulators which share best practice in sustainability.

We also participate in the Department for Education's roundtable on sustainability. This brings together the department with its arms-length bodies to share good practice and foster collaboration.

As part of our sustainability plan, we've developed a volunteering policy in line with our values and status as a public body. This is linked to our sustainability objectives and local charities. Employer supported volunteering gives employees the chance to build connections with their local communities, give back to society and develop new skills, whilst contributing to the achievement of our sustainability priorities. The scheme will entitle all employees to one day per year of paid volunteering leave from 1 April 2024.

Adapting to climate change

We have no natural capital or landholdings. As a tenant of a multi-occupancy building, we do not have direct control of decisions about energy supply or measures to protect the building and its surroundings from the impact of climate change. The main climate risk we've identified that may affect our operations is the increased risk of local flooding to our offices in North Bank, Sheffield. Our business continuity arrangements address this risk and enable us to quickly move to a model of home-based working. In 2023 to 2024, we also arranged training for senior leaders on the Environmental Principles Duty to help us consider the environmental impact of any future changes to our regulations and rules.

Financial commentary

The following commentary summarises our net expenditure and financial position as at 31 March 2024. Further detail can be found in the financial statements and the notes to the financial statements. Prior year comparatives have been restated following a review of accruals balances at 31 March 2024 which have also impacted balances in prior periods. This has increased prior year liabilities with further details in note 1.19. As an arm's-length body our financial statements are classified to the central government sector and will therefore be consolidated into the Department for Education's 2023 to 2024 annual accounts.

Statement of comprehensive net expenditure

During the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, income in the form of registration fees from social workers of £10.09m (£10.14m 2022 to 2023) was received. Further detail can be found in note 2 of the financial statements.

We also received £13.22m (£15.49m 2022 to 2023) from the Department for Education in the form of grant-in-aid; to be used in furtherance of our objectives.

Revenue expenditure for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was £22.61m (£25.29m 2022 to 2023), a reduction of £2.67m. Expenditure incurred is inclusive of staff and other staff related costs, IT infrastructure, legal and professional fees, and depreciation. Further detail can be found below and in notes 3 and 4 of the financial statements.

Total expenditure

£22.61m

(£25.29m restated 2022 to 2023)



Staff and staff related costs:
£11.16m (£10.97m 2022 to 2023)
Consists of wages and salaries £10.76m and other staff related costs including board fees and travel and subsistence of £0.40m.

Other operating expenditure:
£9.71m (£12.63m 2022 to 2023 restated)
Consists of professional fees of £7.10m, depreciation of £2.04m and other operating costs of £0.57m.

Infrastructure costs:
£1.74m (£1.69m 2022 to 2023)
Consists of IT infrastructure of £1.34m and building related costs of £0.40m.

Statement of financial position

Non-current assets obtained during the year cost a total of £2.19m (£2.66m 2022 to 2023).

Further development of our registration and case management system incurred costs of £2.18m (£2.22m 2022 to 2023). Other non-current assets cost £0.01m (£0.44m 2022 to 2023).

As at 31 March 2024, the cash and cash equivalent balance was £3.05m (£6.25m 2022 to 2023).

Going concern

The board has reviewed and approved the annual budget for the year ending 31 March 2025. Funding for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 has been confirmed in writing by the Department for Education.

Social Work England will continue to receive registrant fee income, which will offset a significant proportion of our operating expenditure. The remaining forecasted balance is to be financed by the Department by way of grant-in-aid. The Department for Education's estimates and forward plans include provision for Social Work England's continuation and ongoing funding. Based on this information, the board considers that it is appropriate to prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

Colum Conway

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
22 July 2024

Accountability report



Corporate governance report

This part of the report explains our governance structure and how it supports us to achieve our objectives.

It includes information about our non-executive directors. It confirms the chief executive's responsibilities as Accounting Officer and how they are assured. It outlines our governance framework, including the work of the board and its committees. And it assesses the risks to the organisation.

The corporate governance report has 3 sections.

1. Directors' report
2. Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities
3. Governance statement

The report on personal information breaches is on page 73.

Directors' report

How Social Work England is organised

Our chair, board and chief executive have decision-making authority at board level as per the  [governance framework](#). Our executive leadership team and staff support them in discharging their duties.

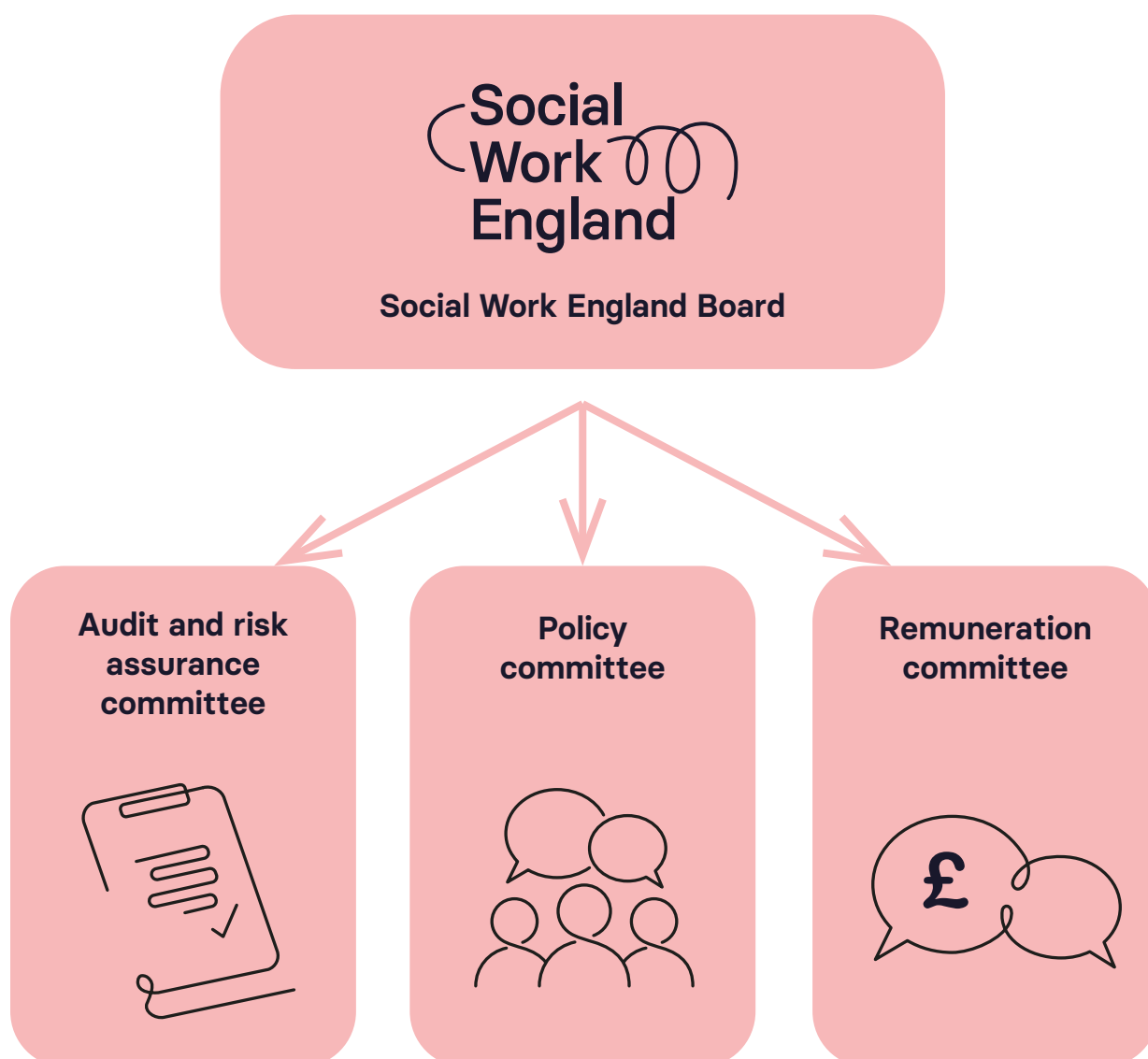
Board and committee structure as of 31 March 2024

Our board ensures effective arrangements are in place to provide assurance on risk management, governance and internal control. It has sub committees on each of the following:

- Audit and risk assurance
- Policy
- Remuneration

The committees support the board with its leadership, direction and a steer on our overall strategy. The board works to a governance framework agreed with the Department for Education, our sponsor department, in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Care and in accordance with  [Managing Public Money](#) published by HM Treasury.

This diagram shows our corporate governance structure for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.



Board composition

On 31 March 2024, the membership of the board comprised:

- the interim chair, Dr Andrew McCulloch
- 5 non-executive directors including a senior independent director, Ann Harris OBE CPFA
- the chief executive, Colum Conway.



Dr Andrew
McCulloch



Colum Conway



Dr Adi Cooper



Jonathan Gorvin



Ann Harris OBE
CPFA



Simon Lewis



Dr Sue Ross

Dr Andrew McCulloch took up the role of interim chair of the board on 1 March 2023.

The Secretary of State for Education appointed the interim chair by exception to cover the period of recruitment that is still underway. He will serve until 28 November 2024, standing down when a substantive chair is in place.

In October 2023, the board agreed to appoint a senior independent director, Ann Harris, from within the existing membership. This was to assist with continuity and strengthen support for the incoming chair and non-executive directors during this transitional period. The board's terms of reference have been updated to include the responsibilities attached to this role.

Register of interests

We maintain a  [register of interests](#) that details our board members' company directorships and other significant interests.

All executive directors have also declared their outside interests for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. They did so for the purposes of ensuring full disclosure regarding related party transactions.

See page 102 in the financial statements.

Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities

Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Secretary of State for Education has directed Social Work England to prepare for each financial year a statement of accounts in the form and on the basis set out in the accounts direction. The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of Social Work England and of its income and expenditure, statement of financial position and cash flows for the financial year.

In preparing the accounts, the Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the government financial reporting manual and in particular to do all of the following:

- observe the accounts direction issued by the Secretary of State for Education, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis
- make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis
- state whether applicable accounting standards as set out in the government financial reporting manual have been followed and disclose and explain any material departures
- prepare the accounts on a going concern basis
- confirm that the annual report and accounts as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable and take personal responsibility for the annual report and accounts and the judgements required for determining that it is fair, balanced and understandable.

The Permanent Secretary, as Principal Accounting Officer of the Department for Education, has designated the chief executive as Accounting Officer of Social Work England. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding Social Work England's assets, are set out in Managing Public Money, published by HM Treasury.

As the Accounting Officer, I have taken all the steps that I ought to have taken to make myself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that Social Work England's auditors are aware of that information. So far as I am aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the auditors are unaware.

As the Accounting Officer, I confirm that the annual report and accounts as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable and that I take personal responsibility for the annual report and accounts and the judgments required for determining that it is fair, balanced and understandable.

Governance statement

The purpose of the governance statement

This governance statement describes the corporate governance, risk management and assurance frameworks we used in the 2023 to 2024 financial year. It identifies our compliance with our responsibilities for risk management and internal control systems. These responsibilities are set out in Corporate Governance for Central Departments Code of Good of Good Practice and the Treasury's handbook Managing Public Money. They also follow the audit and risk assurance committee handbook and UK government's  [The Orange Book: management of risk – principles and concepts](#).

Our board

Our board oversees the full range of our regulatory responsibilities, including all of the following:

- setting professional standards and standards for education and training for social workers;
- establishing and running a fitness to practise system; and
- holding a register of social workers in England.

The board holds the chief executive and executive leadership team to account and provides our strategic steer. They oversee our performance, use of resources, and ensure a sound system of internal control and risk management.

The board is provided with quarterly performance reports and data that track our performance against business objectives. Publishing quarterly means the board sees trends and performance within the year and against previous years. This year the board has been satisfied that it has been able to compare this year's performance with last year.

The Secretary of State appoints the chair and non-executive members under paragraph 2, schedule 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. These appointments are subject to the  [Public Appointments Order in Council 2019](#). As such they must comply with the  [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#). Each board member brings a distinct set of skills and expertise. Their areas of expertise include health and social care, social work, regulation, policy, finance, risk management, digital technology, law and business planning.

Our governance arrangements

The board met regularly and kept the effectiveness of our system of risk management and internal control under review. The board and its committees received regular reports on performance, risk management and assurance. This diagram shows the governance arrangements in place for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Audit and risk assurance committee

Membership: 3 non-executive directors

Ann Harris (chair)

Jonathan Gorvin

Sue Ross

Attendees: chief executive, executive director, people and business support and internal and external audit teams, boardroom apprentice

Met: 4 times

The audit and risk assurance committee provides assurance to the board in the areas of audit, risk management, governance and internal control. It acts only in an advisory capacity and has no executive or decision-making powers.

Remuneration committee

Membership: 3 non-executive directors

Mark Lam (chair until 10 January 2024)

Adi Cooper

Sue Ross (chair from 2 February 2024)

Simon Lewis (from 1 March 2024)

Attendees: chief executive and chair of the board as requested

Met: 3 times

The remuneration committee provides assurance to the board in the areas of remuneration, performance, people and culture. It acts only in an advisory capacity and has no executive or decision making powers.

Policy committee

Membership: 2 non-executive directors, 2 executive directors and 2 National Advisory Forum members

Jonathan Gorvin (chair)

Adi Cooper – non executive director

Phil Hallam – executive director

Sarah Blackmore – executive director

Rachael Clawson – National Advisory Forum member

Isaac Samuels – National Advisory Forum member

Attendees: chief executive and chair of the board as requested, boardroom apprentice

Met: 4 times

The policy committee provides assurance to the board with regard to the process and content of our policy programme. It acts only in an advisory capacity and has no executive or decision-making powers.

Reports to	
Social Work England board	
Membership: 6 non-executive board members and chief executive, boardroom apprentice Andrew McCulloch - chair Sue Ross Jonathan Gorvin Mark Lam (until 10 January 2024) Ann Harris – Senior independent director Adi Cooper Simon Lewis (appointed 1 March 2024) Boardroom apprentice Met: 5 times for regular board meetings; and an additional awayday.	The board provides leadership, direction and a steer on our overall strategy. It ensures effective arrangements are in place to provide assurance on risk management, governance and internal control.

Performance of the board and its committees

We hold our board meetings in public using videoconferencing. 9 members of the public and 6 of our employees observed a board meeting during 2023 to 2024.

In accordance with high standards of corporate governance good practice, the board conducted an annual self-appraisal of its performance through an internal board effectiveness review.

In addition, RedQuadrant were commissioned to carry out an external effectiveness review of the Social Work England board. This was to provide an independent assessment of board effectiveness and to offer advice and recommendations for continuous improvement. The review was carried out through a combination of one-to-one interviews, board and committee observations, document reviews and self-assessment questionnaire analysis. The findings were presented to the board in March 2024.

Key strengths were that the board had provided continuity despite the departure of the permanent Chair in 2023. Many processes, including the audit and risk assurance committee, were working well. There were positive relationships between the board and senior executives, and opportunities for board and National Advisory Forum members to provide reciprocal support and learning.

Opportunities for further development were identified in some areas including:

- clarifying the specific and strategic roles of the board
- improving resilience during times of succession and change
- ensuring a variety of skills across the membership
- enhancing the role of the policy committee.

The recommendations will be progressed during 2024 to 2025.

The board also reviewed its terms of reference, committee terms of reference, board related policies, and approved all of the following:

- code of conduct policy
- board declarations of interest and conflict resolution policy
- gifts and hospitality policy

The board received bespoke training on information governance which fulfilled its training requirements in relation to data protection for the year.

In January 2024, our board welcomed a new apprentice into its boardroom for 12 months. This is part of a national boardroom apprenticeship scheme sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The scheme aims to enable more people to play a part on public boards.

Audit and risk assurance committee

This year, the committee continued to implement the improvement actions which it identified in 2022 to 2023, and was recognised to be a high-performing committee in the external board review. As good practice this year, the committee chair produced a year-end report. The key areas of focus for the audit and risk assurance committee during 2023 to 2024 were all of the following:

- oversight and assurance of digital development
- finance and commercial activity
- internal and external audits
- scrutiny of the annual report and accounts
- internal quality assurance, feedback, and complaints
- overview of the assurance framework
- corporate risk review and deep dives
- data protection and information governance
- evaluating and improving our governance

Remuneration committee

The committee reviewed its effectiveness in 2023. It evaluated the impact of extending its remit in 2022 to 2023 to include matters relating to people and culture. Overall, the committee was found to be performing well and the focus on people and culture had enabled it to provide assurance and advice to the board on these matters. The committee has taken a key role in advising on all of the following:

- remuneration and pay remit
- delivery of our people strategy
- culture and employee engagement
- broader workforce issues

Policy committee

Over the course of 2023 to 2024, the committee reviewed and advised on all of the following:

- the implications of an early career framework, designed to support professionals starting their careers in children and families social work, for our regulation
- research on public perceptions of social work, the social work workforce and practice education.
- plans for how we approach and deliver research in the future
- our plans and ambitions for initial education and training for social work, including practice education
- the development and implementation of course approval standards for approved mental health professional and best interests assessor courses, and associated guidance
- how we may reflect on our requirements for demonstrating that social workers meet the professional standards relating to continuing professional development

The committee held an away day at the University of Nottingham, providing an opportunity for strategic in-depth discussions.

Board member attendance in 2023 to 2024

Attendance at board and committee meetings over the year is recorded as the following.

Name and role	2023 to 2024 meetings attended according to board and committee membership			
	Social Work England board	Audit and risk assurance committee	Policy committee	Remuneration committee
Dr Andrew McCulloch Interim chair	5/5			
Colum Conway Chief Executive Officer	5/5	3/4		3/3
Dr Adi Cooper Non-executive director	5/5		3/4	3/3
Jonathan Gorvin Non-executive director	5/5	3/4	4/4	
Ann Harris Non-executive director	4/5	4/4		
Mark Lam Non-executive director	3/3			3/3
Dr Sue Ross Non-executive director	4/5	4/4		3/3
Simon Lewis Non-executive director	1/1			

Board members also attended 5 private strategy meetings. They participated in 1 strategic planning session.

Management control activities

Our framework agreement sets out our delegated authorities, which the Department for Education reviews annually. The chief executive has delegated responsibility from the board for leading the organisation on a day-to-day basis. He is the executive decision maker at board level. The chief executive determines which duties are discharged by members of the executive leadership team, through line management arrangements. The executive leadership team works with the board to discharge duties as a collective.

The executive leadership team meet weekly to provide strategic and operational oversight of progress and performance. They also hold monthly business performance review meetings, which heads of function join on a quarterly basis. The executive leadership team reviews risks monthly, agreeing to escalate to the board when appropriate.

This year, we started to implement our assurance framework across our regulatory departments. A map of the assurances and management controls in each service was developed. Assurances were tested through sampling of evidence.

Whistleblowing policy

Our policy encourages our people to speak up if they have a concern that they reasonably believe is of public interest. It may be about the conduct of others or the way in which we run ourselves. Our partners also have a raising concerns and whistleblowing policy included in the partner handbook. No concerns that qualified for investigation under the Public Interest Disclosure Act were recorded this year.

We also have an anti-fraud, anti-bribery and anti-corruption policy and a gifts and hospitality policy. We review and update these policies annually, with approval by the audit and risk assurance committee and board, respectively. Everyone working with and for us has mandatory anti-fraud, anti-bribery and anti-corruption training.

We completed our investigation into one potential issue that we identified in 2023, relating to the appropriate application of our travel and expenses policy. We did not find any instances of fraud, however a small number of travel and subsistence payments were found to have been ineligible under our policy and these have been disclosed as losses [see page 92]. We reviewed and strengthened our policies and procedures in relation to travel and expenses. An internal audit in summer 2023 confirmed that controls were suitably designed and operating effectively.

Report on personal information breaches

As a non-departmental public body, we are required to report personal data related incidents in our annual report. This reporting is in accordance with the standard disclosure format issued by the Cabinet Office. We also regularly report to the board and the audit and risk assurance committee.

We had 92 personal data related incidents this financial year. 3 of these incidents met the threshold of risk that required us to report them to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). No further action was taken by the ICO.

Risk management

Context

Our risk management approach aligns with our purpose of protecting the public and raising standards across social work in England. It also aligns with the principles set out in the UK government's Orange Book.

Our approach involves all of the following:

- identifying and managing risks at strategic, corporate and operational levels
- using our risk appetite to determine our risk response
- integrating assurance and internal control review
- creating an organisation-wide culture that builds increasing risk maturity

As part of our strategic decision-making process, executive directors individually own and manage each risk. The executive leadership team highlights risks for the audit and risk assurance committee to discuss and challenge. Shared learning is also applied from Department for Education arm's length body risk lead meetings.

Risk appetite statement

Our board members and executive leadership team decide the level of risk we are willing to accept as we pursue our objectives. They review this risk appetite annually or in the event of strategy change. We balance the cost of mitigating the risk with the impact of the risk being realised.

Our risk appetite is reflective of all of the following:

- our role as a regulator
- our 2023 to 2026 corporate strategy
- the controls and assurances we have in place
- our resources
- external factors

Our risk appetite for 2024 to 2025 will reflect the parameters above. The new risk appetite statement will come into effect in May 2024.

Corporate risk register

Our risk register outlines our risk environment. It helps us to keep in place the mitigations and controls to manage risks effectively. Our risk appetite enables sound, consistent judgement and decision making.

While we categorise our risks, we recognise the interplay between different risks. There is potential for risk mitigations in one area to increase risk in another area.

Our risk categories

Financial governance		Reputation and credibility	
Strategic approach		Cyber security	
Processes		People and culture	
Regulatory functions		Governance and compliance	
Innovation and change		Equality, diversity and inclusion	

Corporate risks

Outlined below are the most pertinent risks to our regulatory role for the period ending 31 March 2024. We have taken action to mitigate these risks and expect to see the impact of our actions in the future.

Risk title	Risk description	Trend since April 2023	What we have done to mitigate this risk in the 2023 to 2024 business year
Education provision	There is a risk that our work in policy and standards does not lead to improvement in social work education	n/a (newly worded risk)	- Set up a review group to quality assure our course approval decisions - Established our Education and Training Advisory Forum
External environment	There is a risk that we fail to be ready to respond to strategic, political or workforce changes		- Developed a closer working relationship with relevant organisations - Created a communications and engagement strategic approach aligned to our 2023 to 2026 strategy
Registration demand	There is a risk that we are unable to meet registration demand and process renewals and applications to join the Register within reasonable timescales with existing resources		- Reviewed our learning and data from the last 3 years to identify opportunities to improve the timeliness, fairness and quality of our registration and advice processes - Ensured recruitment is on track to cover all vacant posts.
Timeliness and quality within triage and investigations	There is a risk that we cannot achieve quality and timeliness within triage and investigations		- Implemented learning from reviews of accepted disposal and discontinuance - Developed a plan to implement front-loaded investigations
Our people capacity and capability	There is a risk that we do not have the capacity and resources, skills set, talent development and sustainable people strategy that we need to effectively deliver our business and strategic objectives		- Targeted leadership development opportunities - Benchmarked against Mindful Business Charter, Race Equality Charter and Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation and identified areas for improvement - Developed our management development programme

Risk title	Risk description	Trend since April 2023	What we have done to mitigate this risk in the 2023 to 2024 business year
Cultural shift	There is a risk that as we continue to evolve and develop as an organisation, we inadvertently lose aspects of our culture that we consider to be positive and important		- Started quarterly all staff in-person days - Reviewed and refreshed our hybrid working principles - Developed the management development programme
Cyber security	There is a risk of a cyber, ransomware or socially engineered attack which reaches beyond our business continuity programme and prevents us from operating		Undertook an internal audit on cyber-security and began to implement the improvements identified
Misjudged decision	There is a risk that we seriously misjudge a decision we make in exercising our regulatory responsibilities	N/A (new risk)	- Reviewed our decision-making policies to reduce likelihood of unconscious bias - Evaluated the quality of voluntary removal decisions - Implemented learning from reviews of our decisions by others
Managing our budget	There is a risk that we are unable to plan and manage our annual budget effectively	N/A (new risk)	- Monthly budget forecasting and management review - Implemented actions where necessary to ensure expenditure did not exceed annual budget
Financial resources	There is a risk that we are unable to secure the financial resources that we need to achieve efficient and timely delivery of all our regulatory functions (notably hearings).	N/A (new risk)	- Regularly discussed our resourcing position with our board, and sponsor the Department for Education - Completed an evaluation of our economy, efficiency and effectiveness - Planned work during 2024 to 2025 to realise further efficiency savings, which can be re-focused towards improving fitness to practise case progression

Effectiveness of the internal control framework

As Accounting Officer, I review the effectiveness of our system of internal control. My review is informed by the work of the internal auditors, by feedback from the directors and heads of functions who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework and by comments made by the National Audit Office in their audit completion report. We are subject to review by the National Audit Office, including statutory audit and value for money reports. We are also reviewed by the Department for Education.

Internal audit

Out of the 5 audits conducted this financial year, 3 received substantial assurance or good progress, 1 received reasonable assurance and 1 partial assurance. Internal audit reports to the board and audit and risk assurance committee were as follows.

Internal audit	Level of assurance
Fitness to Practise hearings process Travel and expenses	Substantial
Follow up audit	Good progress
Risk management	Reasonable
Cyber Risk Assessment/Management	Partial

RSM UK conducted our internal audit in 2023 to 2024. Based on their reviews during the year, their end of year report stated that we have an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. Further enhancements have been identified to ensure that the framework remains adequate and effective.

During 2023 to 2024, management actions were agreed to address all of the findings reported by the internal audit service except for one, from the Cyber Risk Assessment review, which it was agreed with audit and risk assurance committee and board, that we would tolerate.

The Cyber Risk Assessment review recommended one high priority management action, in relation to the exemption of Social Work England’s Bring Your Own Device policies and procedures for board members. This action was addressed prior to the end of March 2024.

Conclusion

As Accounting Officer, I am responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of Social Work England's system of internal controls as set out in the governance statement. Social Work England has not suffered from any significant internal control failures during 2023 to 2024. The systems for risk management and internal control have been in place during 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts.

My review of the effectiveness of the system of internal controls was informed by all of the following:

- assurance from executive directors that they have acted in accordance with their delegations and the operation of our governance framework
- independent assurance from our internal auditors in their annual audit report
- scrutiny and advice provided by the audit and risk assurance committee
- discussion of the annual report and accounts with the audit and risk assurance committee and board in June 2024.

Based on my review of the evidence I am assured that we have a sound system of governance, risk management and internal controls to support the delivery of our strategy.

Remuneration and staff report

Remuneration report – subject to audit

The remuneration and staff report sets out our remuneration policy for all staff and board members. It also details actual costs.

Remuneration policy

Our employees are public servants. HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and Secretary of State approve our pay levels.

As a non-departmental public body, we must adhere to the pay guidance the Cabinet Office sets each year and submit a pay remit business case for approval by the Secretary of State for Education. In 2023 our approved pay award included a salary increase of 4.5%, with an additional 0.5% available to those on lower pay bands. A one-off, non-consolidated cost of living payment of £1,500 was made in July to all eligible employees below executive leadership level. We also awarded a one off £600 non-consolidated pay award in recognition of people's contributions to our achievements overall. The 2023 pay award for our executive leadership team was 6.5% in line with published guidance and to address pay anomalies.

Executive leadership team remuneration (including salary) and pension entitlements

Executive leadership team	Salary £000	Non-consolidated performance award £000	Benefits in kind £000	Pension benefit £000	2023 to 2024 total £000	2022 to 2023 total £000
Colum Conway	155 - 160	0 - 5	0	11	170 - 175	165 - 170
Sarah Blackmore	95 - 100	0 - 5	0	7	105 - 110	100 - 105
Philip Hallam	95 - 100	0 - 5	0	6	105 - 110	100 - 105
Linda Dale	95 - 100	0 - 5	0	7	105 - 110	55 - 60
Full year equivalent (FYE)						90 - 95

Separate disclosures relating to pension entitlements are not applicable. Social Work England operates an unfunded multi-employer defined contribution pension scheme provided by the National Employment Savings Trust. There are therefore no value or lump sum increases.

Executive leadership team performance awards are determined by the chief executive taking account of advice from the remuneration committee. Performance awards for the chief executive are based upon the recommendation of the chair of the board and are subject to remuneration committee approval to the board.

Board members' remuneration

Name	Position	Appointment term	2023 to 2024 fees £000	2022 to 2023 fees £000
Dr Andrew McCulloch	Interim chair	10 August 2018 to 28 November 2024	60 - 65	30 - 35
Dr Adi Cooper	Non-executive director	4 October 2021 to 3 October 2024	5 - 10	5 - 10
Jonathan Gorvin	Non-executive director	10 August 2021 to 9 August 2024	5 - 10	5 - 10
Ann Harris	Non-executive director	19 July 2019 to 18 July 2025	10 - 15	10 - 15
Mark Lam	Non-executive director	11 January 2019 to 10 January 2024	5 - 10	5 - 10
Dr Sue Ross	Non-executive director	4 October 2021 to 3 October 2024	5 - 10	5 - 10
Simon Lewis	Non-executive director	1 March 2024 to 28 February 2027	0 - 5	0
Full year equivalent (FYE)			5 - 10	

Members of the board are not entitled to any pension or other financial benefits. The remuneration disclosed consists of board fees only.

Total non-executive board expenses for the year were £1,102 (2022 to 2023 £1,323).

Fair pay disclosure (subject to audit)

Reporting bodies are required to disclose the relationship between the remuneration of the organisation's highest paid director and the median remuneration of its workforce as well as the relationship with the pay at the 25th and 75th percentile.

In 2023 to 2024, nil employees (2022 to 2023: nil) received remuneration in excess of the highest paid director. Total remuneration ranged from £24,688 to £162,500 (2022 to 2023, £23,512 to £157,500 restated to reflect the mid-point of the banded remuneration). Total remuneration includes salary, non-consolidated performance related pay and benefits-in-kind. It does not include severance payments, employer pension contributions and the cash equivalent transfer value of pensions.

The banded remuneration of the highest paid director during the year ending 31 March 2024 was £160,000-£165,000, an increase of 3.2% since last year (2022 to 2023: £155,000-£160,000).

This was 4.75 times the median employee remuneration (2022 to 2023: 4.81). The median pay ratio is consistent with our pay, reward and progression policies.

Pay ratios have remained consistent with last year. There was a reduction in the median and 75th percentile pay ratios. The increase in the 25th percentile pay ratio to 5.53 is reflective of an increase in the remuneration of the highest paid directors in line with Senior Civil Service pay guidance (2022 to 2023: 5.47 times).

The total average remuneration per employee in the year ended 31 March 2024 was £41,652, an increase of 3.19% from last year (2022 to 2023: £40,364). The movement in the total average remuneration is as a result of a cost-of-living payment made in July 2023 and an annual pay increase effective from September 2023.

The tables below show the pay and benefits for each percentile along with the accompanying pay ratios.

2023 to 2024	25th percentile	Median (50th percentile)	75th percentile
Pay ratio	5.53:1	4.75:1	3.37:1
Annual salary	£28,767	£33,605	£47,682
Non-consolidated performance award	£600	£600	£600
Total pay	£29,367	£34,205	£48,282

2022 to 2023	25th percentile	Median (50th percentile)	75th percentile
Pay ratio	5.47:1	4.81:1	3.40:1
Annual salary	£28,167	£32,064	£45,629
Non-consolidated performance award	£650	£650	£650
Total pay	£28,817	£32,714	£46,279

Pension scheme

The National Employment Savings Trust provides our pension scheme. It is an unfunded multi-employer defined contribution scheme. Employees are auto enrolled in the pension scheme and can opt out if they choose.

The number of employees who were members of the pension scheme reduced by 12 in 2023 to 2024. This is reflective of the overall reduction in headcount across 2023 to 2024. We continue to operate a salary exchange pension scheme. Our minimum contribution is set at 4% employee and 6% employer contribution. There are options to increase contributions to 6% employee contribution and 8% employer contribution from 1 April 2024. This is a 1% increase in both employee and employer contribution compared with 2023 to 2024.

Employers' pension contributions for the period ending 31 March 2024 were £576,000 (2022 to 2023: £514,353 employers' pension contributions).

No one retired early on grounds of ill health.

Salary

Salary includes gross salary, overtime and allowances. This report is based on accrued payments made by Social Work England and therefore recorded in these accounts.

Benefits in kind

Benefits in kind is the monetary value of benefits in kind. It covers any benefits provided by Social Work England and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as taxable.

Non-consolidated performance awards

For 2023 to 2024 our budgeted non-consolidated performance award was 2% of the total salary bill. The non-consolidated performance award figures include awards paid or agreed in the 12 months up to the 31 March 2024.

Reporting of exit, compensation, special, severance and non-contractual packages

There were no exit compensation, special, severance or non-contractual packages in the year ending 31 March 2024. This was the same for the year ending 31 March 2023.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) article 21 staff disclosure

No staff members asked for their entitlements not to be disclosed in the year ending 31 March 2024. This was also the case for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Staff report

Part A: subject to audit

Analysis of staff costs

Category	Permanently Employed Staff £000	Others £000	2023 to 2024 total £000	2022 to 2023 re-presented total £000
Wages & Salaries	9,568	42	9,610	9,183
Social Security Costs	1,034	0	1,034	955
Pension Costs	576	0	576	517
Total	11,178	42	11,220	10,654
Less:				
Capitalised Staff Costs	(460)	0	(460)	(113)
Total	10,718	42	10,760	10,541

Staff costs for 2022 to 2023 have been re-presented to include those recognised as capital expenditure.

Others refers to staff engaged on our objectives via short term contract, for example agency or temporary workers. We pay a flat fee for agency staff, which includes social security and holiday pay. Others includes the salary and on-costs of inward secondments.

Staff costs also include an element of capital expenditure relating to employees who work solely on the development of our internally generated software. This note has been presented to include capitalised staff costs for both 2023 to 2024, and 2022 to 2023 which was not previously disclosed.

Staff composition

On 31 March 2024 Social Work England’s average full-time equivalent number of employees was 224.7 (compared with 243.4 on 31 March 2023).

Staff composition analysis	2023 to 2024 total	2022 to 2023 total
Social Work England permanent	219.7 (98%)	209.7 (86%)
Social Work England fixed term	5 (2%)	28.7 (12%)
Other	0 (0%)	3 (1%)
Secondment	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Total	224.7 (100%)	243.4 (100%)

During the first quarter of 2023 to 2024, we received additional funding from the Department of Education to progress the closure of fitness to practise legacy cases. This work was supported by a number of fixed term positions, which ended on 30 June 2023 following conclusion of the legacy cases project.

Part B: Unaudited

The following sections are not subject to audit.

Staff by level and gender

Levels	Permanent contract – males	Other contract – males	Permanent contract – females	Other contract – females	Permanent contract – non-binary	Other contract – non-binary	Total
Chief executive	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	1.0
Executive leadership team	1.0	0	2.0	0	0	0	3.0
Assistant directors	0	0	4.0	0	0	0	4.0
Heads of functions	9.0	0	6.0	0	0	0	15.0
Other levels	59.6	2	137.1	3	0	0	201.7
Total	70.6	2	149.1	3	0	0	224.7

Other includes fixed term appointments, secondees and agency or temporary workers.

Average full time equivalent headcount

Contract type	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Permanent employees	221.6	208
Others	8.4	26.6
Total	230.0	234.6

This table represents the average across the year. Others includes fixed term appointments, secondees and agency or temporary workers.

There was a 14.2% turnover of staff during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 (15% during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023)

Our people

Our staff policies and practices

Early in this financial year, the fixed term contracts in place to support completion of legacy fitness to practise cases came to an end. This significantly reduced the number of fixed term contracts in our establishment. This process was carefully planned and communicated, to ensure that those people whose contracts were due to end were offered application and interview support to secure alternative roles.

In June, we published our [!\[\]\(c3d993ca47bfe2a953c700506ce31fa0_img.jpg\) equality, diversity and inclusion action plan](#) for 2023 to 2024. During the year we have become a Disability Confident employer. We've continued our work to benchmark against the charters we've signed up to, including the Race at Work and Mindful Business Charter, and have identified strengths and opportunities for improvement. We also received the results of our latest Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) submission. Our overall score improved to 70%, an increase of 4% compared to last year. Our submission was benchmarked against all other entries, and we were delighted to receive a silver award this year. This is an improvement from bronze last year.

We continue to champion and develop our range of staff networks, including our new Disability and Neurodiversity Network. We reviewed and relaunched our hybrid working principles, engaging extensively across the organisation. Our aim is to balance our ability to meet business objectives with looking after the wellbeing of our people.

Following the pilot last year, we've evaluated and launched our positive action mentoring scheme. The scheme is aimed at people who are traditionally marginalised or underrepresented, particularly in terms of disability, ethnicity and LGBTQIA+ identity. However, anyone across the organisation was welcome to apply.

We completed our review of our people policies, in collaboration with working groups. Implementation is being supported via our new management development programme and guidance, to enable our managers to feel confident in applying our policies consistently.

We have refreshed our managers forum and have promoted the managers buddy scheme within the forum. Our senior managers have completed 360° feedback and received facilitation sessions and access to bespoke development. From this process, we are identifying areas of strength within our leadership cohort and key development areas that will form the basis of a targeted leadership programme next year.

Our people engagement survey took place in May 2023. Our overall engagement score, which measures how positive people feel about working here, was 70%. This compares with 76% the previous year, although a direct comparison cannot be made due to changes in some indicators and questions. Our responses were similar to those of other public and voluntary sector organisations, and we saw improvement in areas that we targeted following the 2022 survey.

Sickness absence

We benchmark with the public sector average provided by the Office for National Statistics by measuring sickness absence over a 12-month period. In early 2024, we identified an issue with our sickness absence reporting. This meant that our absence per employee was higher than we had understood it to be, and was above the public sector average. Once identified, the reporting issue was quickly resolved.

In 2023 to 2024 we lost the equivalent of 8.9 days per employee over the 12-month rolling period.

We have continued to support our people during the year when they have experienced episodes of ill-health. Those who experienced long term sickness absence were supported through our occupational health service to help them return to work. Other support was also provided, including adjustments in working patterns, phased return to work, assistance through our wellbeing tools (e.g. workplace passports) as well as access to our employee assistance programme and health hub.

At the end of 2023 to 2024, we had no long term absence cases.

Diversity statistics (unaudited)

Gender data

Gender identity for whole workforce	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Female	69%	69%
Male	31%	31%
Non-binary	0%	0%

Gender split for executive leadership team	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Female	67%	67%
Male	33%	33%
Non-binary	0%	0%

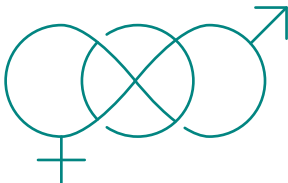
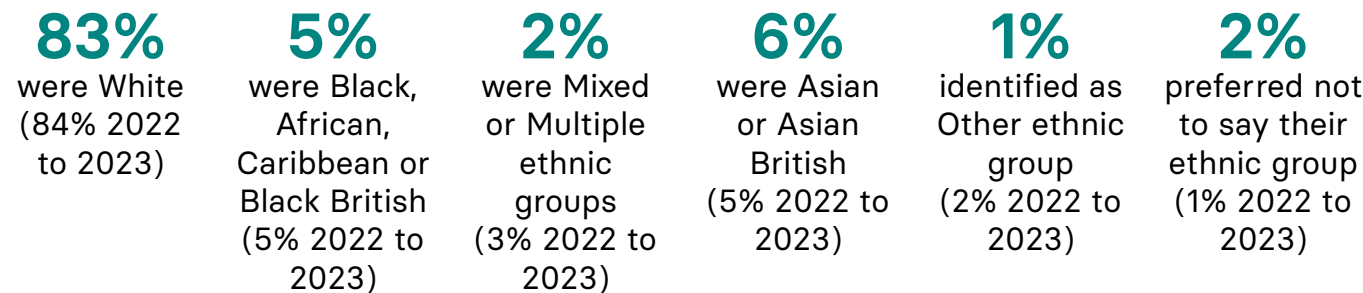
Gender split for heads of functions	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Female	40%	55%
Male	60%	45%
Non-binary	0%	0%

Diversity data

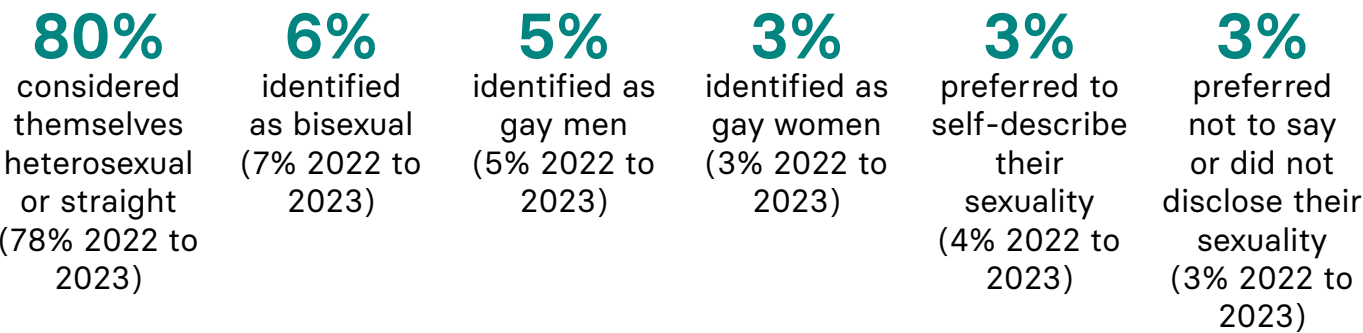
We encourage staff to upload their diversity data into our human resources system Enable, though it is not mandatory.



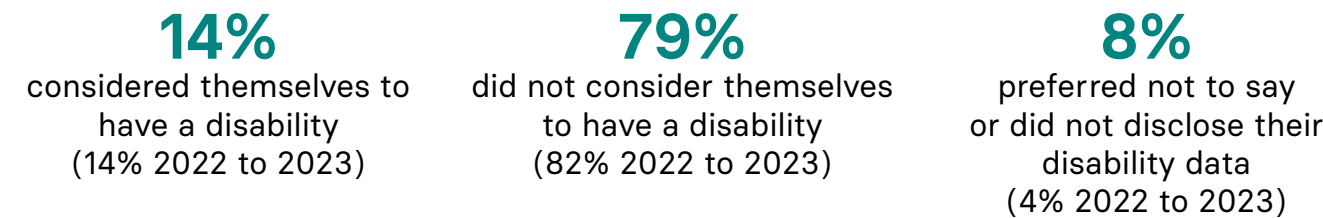
Of the 73% of employees who shared their data, for ethnicity:



Of the 73% of employees who shared their data, for sexual orientation:



Of the 73% of employees who shared their data, for disability:



Consultancy spend

No expenditure on consultancy was incurred during the year ending 31 March 2024.

Review of tax arrangements of public sector appointees

Off-payroll engagements of board members and senior officials with significant financial responsibility

Engagements by category	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Number of off-payroll engagements of board members and/or senior officials with significant financial responsibility	0	0
Number of individuals deemed board members or senior officials with significant financial responsibility, including both off-payroll and on-payroll engagements	11	13

We consider that all board members and executive directors have significant financial responsibility and reimburse them through payroll.

There were no off-payroll engagements of board members or senior officials with significant financial responsibility during the year ended 31 March 2024.

There were no other off-payroll engagements during the year.

Parliamentary accountability report

Parliamentary accountability disclosures: audited

A1 Losses statement

Losses statement	2023 to 2024	2022 to 2023
Number of fruitless payment cases	176	323
Number of special payments	1	0
Number of losses	22	0
Value		
Fruitless payments	£53,399	£121,962
Special payments	£8,000	£0
Losses	£1,692	£0

A fruitless payment is one the recipient is legally entitled to even though we receive nothing of use in return. During 2023 to 2024 they included payments we made to partners in relation to cancelled fitness to practise hearings. The value of fruitless payments reduced this year due to a reduction in the number of fitness to practise hearings and a corresponding reduction in postponements.

The losses during 2023 to 2024 relate to travel and subsistence costs which were ineligible under our travel and expenses policy.

A2 Special payments

There was one special payment during the 12-month period ending 31 March 2024. (Period ending 31 March 2023: nil).

A3 Fees and charges

Income of £10.09m was received in the form of registration fees (£10.14m 2022 to 2023).

More analysis can be found in note 2 of the financial statements on page 115.

Total expenditure for 2023 to 2024 was £22.61m (£25.29m 2022 to 2023 restated); net expenditure for the year was £12.53m (£15.15m 2022 to 2023 restated). More analysis can be found in notes 3 and 4 of the financial statements on page 116 and page 117.

A4 Remote contingent liabilities

Social Work England is involved in ongoing legal cases. No further statement has been made so as not to compromise the outcome of proceedings.

A5 Government functional standards

The Government functional standards are used to guide our activity and promote continuous improvement, as relevant and proportionate to our size and arrangements.

A6 Regularity of expenditure

The Accounting Officer is responsible for ensuring the regularity of expenditure. To discharge this responsibility the following activities are in place:

- Formal delegation of budget
- Detailed monitoring of expenditure
- Monthly management reporting against budget

To the date of this statement, there have been no instances of material irregularity, impropriety or non-compliance discovered during the financial year.

Colum Conway

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
22 July 2024

The Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Houses of Parliament

Opinion on financial statements

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of Social Work England for the year ended 31 March 2024 under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The financial statements comprise Social Work England's:

- Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024;
- Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, Statement of Cash Flows and Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity for the year then ended; and
- the related notes including the significant accounting policies.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in the preparation of the financial statements is applicable law and UK adopted International Accounting Standards.

In my opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of Social Work England's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and its net operating expenditure for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Secretary of State directions issued thereunder.

Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects, the income and expenditure recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Basis for opinions

I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs UK), applicable law and Practice Note 10 *Audit of Financial Statements and Regularity of Public Sector Bodies in the United Kingdom (2022)*. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements* section of my certificate.

Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Financial Reporting Council's *Revised Ethical Standard 2019*. I am independent of Social Work England in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to my audit of the financial statements in the UK. My staff and I have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that Social Work England's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on Social Work England's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Accounting Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this certificate.

The going concern basis of accounting for Social Work England is adopted in consideration of the requirements set out in HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual, which requires entities to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements where it is anticipated that the services which they provide will continue into the future.

Other Information

The other information comprises information included in the Annual Report, but does not include the financial statements and my auditor's certificate and report thereon. The Accounting Officer is responsible for the other information.

My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my certificate, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

My responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or my knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion the part of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Children and Social Work Act 2017

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the parts of the Accountability Report subject to audit have been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017; and
- the information given in the Accountability and Performance Reports for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements and is in accordance with the applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of Social Work England and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Accountability and Performance Reports

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept by Social Work England or returns adequate for my audit have not been received from branches not visited by my staff; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the financial statements and the parts of the Accountability Report subject to audit are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of remuneration specified by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual have not been made or parts of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited is not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with HM Treasury's guidance.

Responsibilities of the Accounting Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities, the Accounting Officer is responsible for:

- maintaining proper accounting records;
- providing the C&AG with access to all information of which management is aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
- providing the C&AG with additional information and explanations needed for his audit;
- providing the C&AG with unrestricted access to persons within Social Work England from whom the auditor determines it necessary to obtain audit evidence;
- ensuring such internal controls are in place as deemed necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements to be free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error;
- preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017;
- preparing the annual report, which includes the Remuneration and Staff Report, in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017; and
- assessing Social Work England's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Accounting Officer anticipates that the services provided by Social Work England will not continue to be provided in the future.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a certificate that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Extent to which the audit was considered capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations including fraud

I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud. The extent to which my procedures are capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud is detailed below.

Identifying and assessing potential risks related to non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud, I:

- considered the nature of the sector, control environment and operational performance including the design of Social Work England's accounting policies.
- inquired of management, internal audit and those charged with governance, including obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation relating to Social Work England's policies and procedures on:
 - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations.
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud; and
 - the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations including Social Work England's controls relating to Social Work England's compliance with Managing Public Money and the Children and Social Work Act 2017;
- inquired of management, internal audit and those charged with governance whether:
 - they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations;
 - they had knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
- discussed with the engagement team regarding how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud.

As a result of these procedures, I considered the opportunities and incentives that may exist within Social Work England for fraud and identified the greatest potential for fraud in the following areas: revenue recognition, posting of unusual journals, complex transactions, and bias in management estimates. In common with all audits under ISAs (UK), I am required to perform specific procedures to respond to the risk of management override.

I obtained an understanding of Social Work England's framework of authority and other legal and regulatory frameworks in which Social Work England operates. I focused on those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on material amounts and disclosures in the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the Social Work England. The key laws and regulations I considered in this context included Children and Social Work Act 2017, Managing Public Money, and relevant employment law.

Audit response to identified risk

To respond to the identified risks resulting from the above procedures:

- I reviewed the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with provisions of relevant laws and regulations described above as having direct effect on the financial statements;
- I enquired of management and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- I reviewed minutes of meetings of those charged with governance and the Board and internal audit reports;
- I addressed the risk of fraud through management override of controls by testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements on estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business;
- testing postings to the general ledger that fell outside the standard transaction process flow; and
- I addressed the risk of fraud in revenue recognition by considering deferred income calculations; testing the appropriateness of revenue journal entries meeting our risk criteria; and using analytical procedures to identify any unusual transactions or movements. I also considered income cut-off to ensure that transactions had been recorded in the correct financial year.

I communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential risks of fraud to all engagement team members and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at:  www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of my certificate.

Other auditor's responsibilities

I am required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control I identify during my audit.

Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.

Gareth Davies

Date 23 July 2024

Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
London
SW1W 9SP

Financial statements



Statement of comprehensive net expenditure

For the 12 month period ending 31 March 2024

Statement of comprehensive net expenditure	Note	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 restated* £000
Income	2	(10,088)	(10,135)
Staff costs	3	10,760	10,541
Other expenditure	4	11,854	14,746*
Net operating expenditure		12,526	15,152*
Net expenditure for the year		12,526	15,152

There are no discontinued operations.

There are no other recognised gains or losses.

The notes on page 107 to page 127 form part of these accounts.

Statement of financial position

Statement of financial position as at 31 March 2024

Statement of financial position	Note	31 March 2024 £000	31 March 2023 restated £000	1 April 2022 restated* £000
Non-current assets				
PPE	9	1,418	1,880	784
Intangibles	10	8,606	7,986	6,159
Total non-current assets		10,024	9,866	6,943
Current assets				
Receivables	5	695	630	609
Cash and cash equivalents	6	3,050	6,251	6,042
Total current assets		3,745	6,881	6,651
Total assets		13,769	16,747	13,594
Current liabilities				
Payables	7	(6,602)	(10,246)*	(8,217)*
Provision		(42)	0	0
Total current liabilities		(6,644)	(10,246)	(8,217)
Total assets less current liabilities		7,125	6,501	5,377
Non-current liabilities				
Payables	7	(764)	(833)	(186)
Provision	8	(136)	(136)	0
Total non-current liabilities		(900)	(969)	(186)
Assets less liabilities		6,225	5,532*	5,191*
Taxpayers' equity:				
General fund		6,225	5,532	5,191
Total taxpayers' equity		6,225	5,532	5,191

The notes on page 107 to page 127 form part of these accounts.

Colum Conway

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, Social Work England, 22 July 2024

Statement of cash flows

For the 12 month period ending 31 March 2024

Statement of cash flows	Note	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 restated* £000
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net operating cost	Statement of comprehensive net expenditure	(12,526)	(15,152)*
Adjustments for non-cash transactions	4	2,077	834
(Increase)/decrease in receivables	5	(65)	(21)
Increase/(decrease) in non-lease payables	7	(3,637)	2,052*
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(14,151)	(12,287)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	9	(11)	(440)
Purchase of intangibles	10	(2,182)	(2,217)
Increase/(decrease) in capital payables	7	(22)	(113)*
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(2,215)	(2,770)
Cash flows from financing activities			
Exchequer supply from sponsor department	Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity	13,219	15,493
Payments of lease liabilities	11	(54)	(227)
Net cash inflow from financing activities		13,165	15,266
Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents (net of overdrafts)		(3,201)	209
Cash and cash equivalents (net of overdrafts) at beginning of the year		6,251	6,042
Cash and cash equivalents (net of overdrafts) at end of the year		3,050	6,251

The notes on page 107 to page 127 form part of these accounts.

Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity

For the 12 month period ending 31 March 2024

Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity	Note	General Fund restated* £000
Balance at 31 March 2022		5,191
Grant-in-aid from sponsor department		15,493
Comprehensive expenditure for the year	Statement of comprehensive net expenditure	(15,152)*
Balance at 31 March 2023		5,532*
Grant-in-aid from sponsor department		13,219
Comprehensive expenditure for the year	Statement of comprehensive net expenditure	(12,526)
Balance at 31 March 2024		6,225

The notes on page 107 to page 127 form part of these accounts.

Notes to the financial statements

1. Accounting policies

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the government financial reporting manual (FReM) 2023 to 2024 issued by HM Treasury, as set out in a statutory accounts direction issued pursuant to paragraph 18(3), schedule 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The accounting policies contained in the financial reporting manual apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector context. Where the financial reporting manual permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be most appropriate to the circumstances of Social Work England for the purpose of giving a true and fair view has been selected. The policies adopted by Social Work England are described below.

They have been applied consistently in dealing with items considered material in relation to the financial statements.

1.1 Reporting period

The figures in the financial statements are prepared for the 12 month period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

1.2 Accounting convention

These financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

1.3 Going concern

Each year Social Work England receives registrant fee income which offsets a significant proportion of our operating expenditure. The remaining forecasted balance, programme and capital, is financed by the Department for Education (DfE) by way of grant-in-aid.

These accounts have been prepared on a going concern basis, in accordance with the definition set out in Table 2 of paragraph 8.2.1 of the FReM as "the anticipated continuation of the provision of a service in the future, as evidenced by the inclusion of financial provision for that service in published documents".

The going concern assessment period is 12 months from the date the financial statements are authorised for issue. We do not expect any change to either our funding arrangements or the value of registrant fee income for the next financial year as well as the 12 month period from the approval date of these annual accounts.

We offer no other discretionary services and have no ring-fenced areas of expenditure. We have robust budgetary control processes and are currently unaware of any information or legislation that would have a material impact on our going concern assessment.

1.4 Income and funding

Grant-in-aid

Social Work England records all draw down of grant-in-aid as financing, as we regard draw down of grant-in-aid as contributions from our controlling party giving rise to a financial interest. Social Work England records draw down of grant-in-aid as financing in the Statement of Cash Flows and draw down of grant-in-aid to the General Reserve.

Fee Income

Fee income is collected under statute by Social Work England. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has approved Social Work England to retain this fee income to offset against their expenditure. Fee income comprises of registration and renewal fees, restoration fees and scrutiny fees. The annual registration period runs from 1 December to 30 November.

Social Work England has adopted IFRS 15 "Revenue from Contracts with Customers" with fees accounted for as described below.

Registration and renewal fees

Registration and renewal fees are collected in advance and are calculated based upon the length of time remaining before the end of the current fee year. For registration fees relating to new applicants, the fee must be paid in full once an application has been deemed successful. Renewal fees can be paid in full in advance of the new fee year or can be paid in 6-monthly instalments twice a year via Direct Debit. All fees are non-refundable.

Under IFRS 15, performance obligations can be satisfied, and therefore revenue can be recognised, either at a point in time or over time. As Social Work England fulfils its performance obligation by maintaining a social worker's registration over the annual registration period, registration and renewal fees are therefore recognised over the same period. The balance at the end of the financial year is shown in the statement of financial position as deferred income and released to the statement of comprehensive net expenditure proportionately over the period that the fee relates to.

Deferred registration fee income that is recognised within the statement of financial position relates to the following financial year only and is recognised as a current liability.

Restoration fees

Restoration fees are applicable where a social worker has previously been registered with Social Work England but has left the register for a period and wishes to restore to the Social Work England register. Restoration fees are paid when an application to restore is submitted.

Restoration fees are non-refundable and represent the time and resources involved in assessing a restoration application. Restoration fees are recognised immediately within the statement of comprehensive net expenditure.

Scrutiny fees

Scrutiny fees are applicable to those whose social work qualification was gained outside of the UK. The scrutiny fee is paid when an application to join Social Work England's register is submitted and the fee is non-refundable. It represents the time and resources involved in assessing this type of application and therefore is recognised immediately within the statement of comprehensive net expenditure.

1.5 Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

The preparation of these financial statements requires Social Work England to make judgements, estimates and assumptions that affect the application of policies and reported amounts of assets and liabilities, income and expenditure. These assumptions are based on historic and other factors that are believed to be reasonable, the results of which form the basis for making judgements. These judgements, estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an on-going basis. The main items included in these financial statements are:

- Accruals and prepayments: judgement as to when revenue earned or expenses incurred impact the financial statements, irrespective of the transfer of physical payment, and the associated impact on the assets and liabilities within the statement of financial position.
- Intangible asset recognition involves two critical judgements by management. The first judgement is over the projected feasibility of the intangible asset once it has been completed. Intangible assets are only recognised when management are satisfied that the organisation has or can secure the technical and operational skill set to complete the development of the intangible asset. The second critical judgement is the identification of costs that are required to be included in the assets carrying value. Costs are only included if they are direct costs wholly incurred in developing and bring into use the future intangible asset.

- Intangible asset amortisation requires management to consider whether the intangible asset is in its final condition capable of operating as management intended. Once management is satisfied as to the condition of the asset it will be amortised over its useful economic life. In the opinion of management, version 1 of our internally generated software is complete and we have begun amortising during the 2022 to 2023 financial year.
- An estimated amount is provided for accrued but untaken staff holiday.
- Provisions for dilapidations recognition involves two key judgements by management. The first is the likelihood that a requirement to pay dilapidation costs would arise. The second judgement is the identification of the potential cost of dilapidations.

1.6 Segmental reporting

In accordance with IFRS 8: Operating Segments (IFRS 8), Social Work England has considered the need to analyse its income and expenditure relating to operating segments. Social Work England has assessed that all lines of operation fall within the same geographical location and regulatory environment as envisaged by IFRS 8.

Since segmental information for total assets and liabilities is not reported to the chief operating decision-maker and in compliance with the financial reporting manual, it has not been produced in these accounts.

1.7 Pensions

Social Work England has adopted IAS 19 Employee Benefits to account for its pension scheme. All eligible employees are auto enrolled into Social Work England's defined contribution pension scheme (NEST). Social Work England's contribution varies dependent on the level of employee contribution up to a maximum of 7% of gross salary as at 31 March 2024. This is an increase of 1% compared to 2022 to 2023 and the contribution is recorded as expenditure in the statement of comprehensive net expenditure.

1.8 Provisions

Social Work England recognises provisions in accordance with IAS 37 Provisions, contingent liabilities and contingent assets.

Provisions are recognised when there is a present legal or constructive obligation as a result of past events, and it is more likely than not that an outflow of resources will be required to settle the obligation and the amount can be reliably estimated.

Provisions are reviewed annually and adjusted to reflect the current best estimate. If it is no longer probable that an outflow of resources will be required to settle the obligation, the provision shall be reversed.

1.9 Property, plant and equipment

The minimum level of capitalisation for expenditure on property, plant and equipment is £2,000. In the case of IT equipment and furniture, all items recorded as capital expenditure are capitalised, and those of a similar type which fall below the capitalisation threshold are grouped together and recorded as bulk assets. Bulk assets are those with an individual purchase value of £500 or lower. The location of bulk assets is not tracked where it is not economical to do so.

The asset value on capitalisation is measured as all direct cost, including installation, attributable to bringing them into working condition. Where assets have short useful lives or low values the asset value is held at cost as a proxy for fair current value.

Gains and losses on disposal of an item of property, plant and equipment are determined by comparing the proceeds from disposal with the carrying amount of property, plant and equipment, and are recognised within other administrative expenses in the statement of comprehensive net expenditure.

The carrying value of property, plant and equipment is assessed annually and any impairment is charged to the statement of comprehensive net expenditure.

1.10 Depreciation

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the value of property, plant and equipment by equal instalments over their estimated useful lives.

Asset lives are in the following ranges:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| 1. Computer equipment | 3 years |
| 2. Fixtures and fittings | 10 years |
| 3. Leasehold improvements | 10 years |

1.11 Intangible assets

Development costs that meet IAS 38 intangible asset recognition criteria where the assets are intended to be used internally or otherwise, are capitalised as an intangible asset. Capitalisation will only occur when management are satisfied that each of the following criteria have been met:

- There are probable economic benefits arising from the project.
- There is an intention to complete the project.
- Resources are available to complete the project.
- Social Work England is able to use the item.
- The project is technically feasible
- Expenditure on the project can be identified

Costs are only included if they are direct costs wholly incurred in developing and bring into use the future intangible asset.

Assets under development and other intangible assets are tested annually for impairment with an assessment undertaken as to whether the asset will be, or continues to be, technologically and economically viable.

Assets under construction are not depreciated whilst assets judged as in use are amortised on a straight line basis over 5 years. Assets under construction are not depreciated.

1.12 Leases

IFRS 16 Leases was implemented from 1 April 2022 introducing a single lessee accounting model, removing the previous IAS 17 distinction between operating and finance leases. IFRS 16 requires a lessee to recognise right of use assets and financing liabilities for all leases, apart from a number of exemptions including low value assets.

Social Work England has chosen to apply the low value exemption for leases relating to office printers.

Social Work England recognises a right of use asset and lease liability at the commencement date of a contract. The right of use asset is initially measured at cost, which comprises the amount of the lease liability adjusted for direct costs, prepayments or incentives, and costs related to restoration at the end of a lease.

Right of use assets are subsequently measured at either fair value or current value in existing use in line with property, plant and equipment assets. The cost measurement model in IFRS16 is used as an appropriate proxy for current value.

Right of use assets are depreciated using the straight-line method from the commencement date to the earlier of the end of the useful life of the right of use asset or the end of the lease term. The estimated useful lives of the right of use assets are determined on the same basis of those of property, plant and equipment assets. Social Work England applies IAS 36 Impairment of Assets to determine whether the right of use asset is impaired and to account for any impairment loss identified.

The lease liability is initially measured at the present value of the lease payments that are not paid at the commencement date, discounted using the interest rate implicit in the lease, or if that cannot be readily determined, the rate provided by HM Treasury.

The lease payment is measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method. It is re-measured when there is a change in future

lease payments arising from a change in the rate, or a modification to the lease terms, or a reassessment of whether it will exercise a purchase, extension or termination option.

1.13 Financial instruments, assets and liabilities

In accordance with IFRS 9 (Financial Instruments), Social Work England recognises financial assets and liabilities when it becomes party to the contracts that give rise to them. Social Work England does not hold any complex financial instruments i.e. long-term loans or equity investments.

1.14 Receivables

Trade and other receivables are recognised at carrying value and under IFRS9 these are subsequently carried at amortised cost using the effective interest rate method, less provision for impairment.

1.15 Cash and cash equivalents

Cash is the current balance at the bank and Social Work England does not have any cash equivalents. Social Work England is permitted by its sponsor department, the department for education, to maintain a cash balance sufficient to cover its working capital requirements.

1.16 Payables

Trade and other payables are recognised at carrying value. At 31 March 2024, the value of payables predominately consists of fee income received in advance and recognised as deferred income.

1.17 Financial risks

Liquidity risk

Parliament votes annually on the financing of Social Work England's net revenue resource requirements, as well as its capital expenditure. With no borrowings, Social Work England does not consider itself exposed to any significant liquidity risks.

Interest rate risk

Social Work England's financial liabilities carry either nil or fixed rates of interest. Social Work England does not consider itself exposed to any significant interest rate risk.

Foreign currency risk

All material assets and liabilities are denominated in sterling. Social Work England does not consider itself exposed to any significant currency risk.

1.18 IFRSs in issue but not yet effective

To comply with the requirements of IAS 8 Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors, Social Work England must disclose where it has not applied a new IFRS that has been issued but is not yet effective.

IFRS 17 Insurance Contracts was effective for accounting periods on or after 1 January 2023. The exact date for adoption in the Public Sector is subject to confirmation. This will have no impact on Social Work England's Financial Statements as Social Work England does not issue insurance finance or insurance contracts.

1.19 Prior period restatement

Prior year comparatives have been restated following a review of accruals balances for legal fees at 31 March 2024 impacting balances in prior periods. The restatement has impacted the financial statements as follows:

Statement of Financial position (extract)	1 April 2022	Increase/ (decrease)	1 April 2022 restated
Payables	6,048	2,169	8,217
Assets less liabilities	7,360	(2,169)	5,191

Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity (extract)	1 April 2022	Increase/ (decrease)	1 April 2022 restated
Opening taxpayers' equity	7,360	(2,169)	5,191

Statement of comprehensive net expenditure (extract)	31 March 2023	Increase/ (decrease)	31 March 2023 restated
Other expenditure	13,402	1,344	14,746
Net expenditure for the year	13,808	1,344	15,152

Statement of financial position (extract)	31 March 2023	Increase/ (decrease)	31 March 2023 restated
Payables	6,733	3,513	10,246
Assets less liabilities	9,045	(3,513)	5,532

Cash flow statement (extract)	31 March 2023	Increase/ (decrease)	31 March 2023 restated
Net operating cost	13,808	1,344	15,152
Increase/(decrease) in non-lease payables	595	1,344	1,939

Statement of changes in taxpayers' equity (extract)	31 March 2023	Increase/ (decrease)	31 March 2023 restated
Comprehensive expenditure for the year	13,808	1,344	15,152
Closing taxpayers' equity	9,045	(3,513)	5,532

2. Fee income

Fee income	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 £000
Registration fees	9,217	9,053
Scrutiny fees	676	768
Restoration fees	195	314
Total	10,088	10,135

Registration fees include £3.12m of deferred income from 2022 to 2023.

Further information regarding fee income can be found in section 1.4 of the notes to the financial statements.

Fee income comprises:

Registration and renewal fees

Initial registration fees relate to social workers who make a new application to join the Social Work England Register. The fee is paid in full once an application is deemed successful and is calculated based on the length of time remaining before the end of the current fee year. Full year registration fees are £90 covering a period of 12 months from 1 December to 30 November.

Renewal fees are due annually and will be paid by social workers who wish to remain on the Social Work England register. The renewal fee for the 2022 to 2023 fee year is £90.

Restoration fees

Restoration fees are applicable where a social worker has been previously registered with Social Work England (or prior to December 2019, with the HCPC) but has since left the register for a period of time and wishes to restore their registration. A restoration fee is paid when an application to restore is submitted and is a non-refundable amount of £135 which represents the time and resources it takes to assess a restoration application.

Scrutiny fees

Scrutiny fees are applicable to those whose social work qualification was gained outside of the UK. The scrutiny fee is paid when an application to join Social Work England's register is submitted and the fee is a non-refundable amount of £495 which represents the time and resources it takes to assess this type of application.

3. Staff costs

For the financial year ending 31 March 2024

Staff Costs	Permanently Employed Staff £000	Others £000	Total £000
Wages and salaries	9,173	42	9,215
Social security costs	991	0	991
Pension costs	554	0	554
Total	10,718	42	10,760

Staff costs represent the cost recognised in the statement of comprehensive net expenditure and exclude staff costs which form part of intangible assets. 'Others' relates to the cost of secondments during the year.

For the financial year ending 31 March 2023

Staff Costs	Permanently Employed Staff £000	Others £000	Total £000
Wages and salaries	8,901	180	9,081
Social security costs	946	0	946

Staff Costs	Permanently Employed Staff £000	Others £000	Total £000
Pension costs	514	0	514
Total	10,361	180	10,541

4. Operating expenditure

Operating expenditure	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 restated* £000
Staff related costs	156	197
Legal and other professional fees	7,105	11,433*
Premises costs	308	291
IT and Telecommunications costs	1,337	1,232
Travel and subsistence	129	96
Research and development	119	36
Advertising and marketing	93	0
Cash items relating to leases	17	55
Lease interest	31	13
Board fees	110	134
Utilities	51	101
External audit fees	56	56
Internal audit fees	34	9
Bank charges	115	86
Other expenditure	116	173
Total	9,777	13,912*

Prior year legal and professional fees have been restated following a review of accruals balances at 31 March 2024, which impacted balances in prior periods. The decrease in legal and other professional fees relates to reduced activity in fitness to practise, following the end of the project to conclude legacy cases transferred from the previous regulator (HCPC). The increase in research and development

expenditure is due to a higher than normal level of policy research activity compared to the previous year whilst the advertising and marketing expenditure relates to the #ChangeTheScript campaign. The fall in utility expenditure is the result of credits received from our landlord reflecting the reduction in the wholesale prices of electricity.

Board costs relate to the fees paid to the interim chair of the board, Andrew McCulloch and the non-executive directors as disclosed in the remuneration and staff report.

Amortisation, depreciation and other non-cash charges

Amortisation, depreciation and other non-cash charges	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 £000
Amortisation	1,562	390
Depreciation	473	467
Provision	42	0
Non-cash items relating to leases	0	(23)
Total	2,077	834

Depreciation is charged on all property, plant and equipment expenditure as shown in note 9. Amortisation is charged on internally generated software as shown in note 10. The provision charge relates to an ongoing legal case as shown in note 8.

5. Receivables

Receivables	2024 £000	2023 £000
Other receivables	19	0
Prepayments	676	630
Total	695	630
Amounts falling due after one year	0	0

6. Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents	2024 £000	2023 £000
Balance at 1 April	6,251	6,042
Net change in cash and cash equivalents balances	(3,201)	209
Balance at 31 March	3,050	6,251

The balances were held at Government Banking Service.

7. Payables

Payables	2024 £000	2023 restated* £000
Amounts falling due within one year		
Trade and other payables	307	841*
Accruals	2,462	5,907*
Deferred Income	3,463	3,121
Lease liabilities as a result of IFRS 16	105	90
Capital accruals	265	287
Total	6,602	10,246
Amounts falling due after one year		
Lease liabilities as a result of IFRS 16	764	833
Total	764	833

Deferred income has increased from last year due to an increase in the number of registered Social Workers. The level of trade and other payables, as well as accrued expenditure has reduced from last year due to an improvement in the prompt receipt and payment of supplier invoices.

Social Work England recognises financial liabilities when it becomes party to the contracts that give rise to them.

Financial liabilities include trade and other payables, lease liabilities under IFRS 16 and accruals, for the year-ended 30 March 2024, there were financial liabilities of £3.14m (£7.13m 2022 to 2023 restated).

8. Provisions

Provisions	Litigation Cost £000	Dilapidations £000	Total £000
At 1 April 2022	0	0	0
Arising in the year	0	136	136
Amounts utilised	0	0	0
At 1 April 2023	0	136	136
Arising in the year	42	0	42
Amounts utilised	0	0	0
At 31 March 2024	42	136	178
Amounts falling due within one year	42	0	42
Amounts falling due after more than one year	0	136	136

Provisions have been made for property dilapidations and litigation costs. The provision for dilapidations represents the estimated settlement cost to Social Work England in relation to the dilapidation clauses included in a property lease. These costs are expected to be incurred on the termination of the property lease. The provision has been calculated based on our best estimate considering independent professional assessments of the wider market.

The legal fees provision relates to an ongoing legal case and reflects our best estimation of the future litigation cost.

9. Property, plant and equipment

Property, plant and equipment	Land & Buildings £000	Furniture, Fixtures & Fittings £000	IT Equipment £000	Right-of-use Asset (Lease) £000	Total £000
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2023	1,265	319	1,193	1,123	3,900
Additions	0	8	3	0	11
Revaluation	0	0	0	0	0
Disposals	0	0	(23)	0	(23)
At 31 March 2024	1,265	327	1,173	1,123	3,888
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2023	(847)	(319)	(657)	(197)	(2,020)
Depreciation charge	(73)	(0)	(237)	(163)	(473)
Disposals	0	0	23	0	23
At 31 March 2024	(920)	(319)	(871)	(360)	(2,470)
Carrying value:					
31 March 2024	345	8	302	763	1,418
31 March 2023	418	0	536	926	1,880

Property, plant and equipment	Land & Buildings £000	Furniture, Fixtures & Fittings £000	IT Equipment £000	Right-of-use Asset (Lease) £000	Total £000
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2022	1,265	319	951	1,329	3,864
Additions	0	0	440	0	440
Disposals	0	0	(198)	0	(198)
Adjustments	0	0	0	(206)	(206)
At 31 March 2023	1,265	319	1,193	1,123	3,900
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2022	(774)	(319)	(658)	0	(1,751)
Depreciation charge	(73)	0	(197)	(197)	(467)
Disposals	0	0	198	0	198
At 31 March 2023	(847)	(319)	(657)	(197)	(2,020)
Carrying value:					
31 March 2023	418	0	536	926	1,880
31 March 2022	491	0	293	0	784

10. Intangible assets

Intangible assets	Assets under construction £000	Internally generated software £000	Total intangibles £000
Cost or valuation			
At 1 April 2023	568	7,808	8,376
Additions	2,182	0	2,182
Transfers	0	0	0
At 31 March 2024	2,750	7,808	10,558
Amortisation			
At 1 April 2023	0	(390)	(390)
Amortisation charge	0	(1,562)	(1,562)
At 31 March 2024	0	(1,952)	(1,952)
Carrying value:			
31 March 2024	2,750	5,856	8,606
31 March 2023	568	7,418	7,986

Intangible assets at 31 March 2024 relate to a suite of digital services that have been developed to enable Social Work England to carry out its regulatory role.

Further development of the suite of digital services is ongoing and continues to be categorised as assets under construction.

Intangible assets	Assets under construction £000	Internally generated software £000	Total intangibles £000
Cost or valuation			
At 1 April 2022	6,159	0	6,159
Additions	2,217	0	2,217
Transfers	(7,808)	7,808	0
At 31 March 2023	568	7,808	8,376
Amortisation			
At 1 April 2022	0	0	0
Amortisation charge	0	(390)	(390)
At 31 March 2023	0	(390)	(390)
Carrying value:			
31 March 2023	568	7,418	7,986
31 March 2022	6,159	0	6,159

11. IFRS 16 – Leases

IFRS 16 - Leases	31 March 2024 Property Lease £000	31 March 2023 Property Lease £000
Leases for which IFRS 16 applies in full		
Not later than one year (cash flows)	133	92
Later than one year and not later than five years (cash flows)	815	761
Later than five years (cash flows)	0	180
Total	948	1,033
Less future interest charges	79	110
Present value of obligations	869	923
Analysed as:		
Payables: amounts falling due within 1 year	105	90
Payables: amounts falling due after more than 1 year	764	833
Total	869	923

12 Commitments

Commitments are the value of non-cancellable contracts not already on the statement of financial position, which commit Social Work England to expenditure in future periods.

12.1 Capital commitments

Contracted capital commitments at 31 March not otherwise included in these accounts	31 March 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 £000
Intangible assets under construction	0	1,600
Total	0	1,600

Intangible assets under construction is the committed cost of work to be undertaken by an external supplier to continue development of Social Work England's suite of digital services. At 31 March 2024 there was no financial commitment as we had not committed a statement of works with the supplier, compared to 31 March 2023 where a statement of works of £1,600K had been committed.

12.2 Other financial commitments

Contracted financial commitments at 31 March not otherwise included in these accounts	31 March 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 £000
Software licences	539	0
Total	539	0

Software licenses is the committed cost for the use of software licences over a 2-year period where a non-cancellable contract exists. There was no financial commitment at 31 March 2023 as the contract in place at that date was for a 1-year period and the value formed part of the statement of financial position.

13. Related party transactions

Related Party Transactions	2023 to 2024 £000	2022 to 2023 £000
Department for Education	13,219	15,493

Social Work England is sponsored by the Department for Education and for the purposes of these accounts, the department is regarded as a related party. There were material transactions with the Department for Education in respect of grant-in-aid. In addition, Social Work England is co-sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care, with which there were no financial transactions.

There were no other related financial transactions during the year 2023 to 2024.

14. Events after the reporting period date

The accounts were authorised for issue by the accounting officer on the date of the certification by the comptroller and auditor general. These accounts do not consider events after that date.

There were no adjusting or non-adjusting events between 31 March 2024 and the date of certification.

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