

(Observers) Social Work England Board Meeting - 15 May 2025

MEETING
15 May 2026 10:00 BST

PUBLISHED
11 May 2026

Social Work England Board Meeting

Friday 15 May 2026, 10:00 – 12:30

at The Don, Social Work England and by videoconference

AGENDA

Item	Time	Topic	Paper / Ref.	Board Action	Lead
		Welcome	Verbal		Chair
1.	10:00	Apologies for absence and declarations of interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board members' register of interests link 	Verbal	To note/declare	Chair
2.	10:05	Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2026	Paper 01	To approve	Chair
3.	10:10	Matters arising and action log	Paper 02	To discuss and note	Chair
4.	10:15	Chair's report	Verbal	To note	Chair
5.	10:20	Chief executive's report	Paper 03	To discuss and note	Chief Executive
6.	10:30	Audit and risk assurance committee chair's report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business case – Appian re-procurement 	Paper 04* Paper 05* (Papers 04 and 05 are to follow)	To note To approve	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Chair
7.	10:45	Policy committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-option of committee member 	Verbal	To note	Policy Committee Chair
8.	10:50	Remuneration committee chair's report	Verbal	To note	Remuneration Committee Chair
	11:00	Break			
9.	11:05	Finance and commercial report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management accounts to 31 March 2026 	Paper 06	To discuss and note	Executive Director, People and Business Support; Senior Finance Business Partner

Item	Time	Topic	Paper / Ref.	Board Action	Lead
10.	11:20	Quarter 4 performance report 2025/26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fitness to practise performance Q4 2025/26 	Paper 07	To discuss and note	Executive Directors; Head of Business Planning and Improvement
11.	11:45	Corporate risk register	Paper 08*	To discuss and note	Head of Business Planning and Improvement; Risk Manager
12.	12:10	The role of seriousness in FtP proceedings in social work in England	Paper 09	To note	Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy
	12:30	Meeting to close			
	1:00 – 4:00	Board strategy session			Chair

* Papers marked with an asterisk are ‘private’ to protect confidentiality according to our guidance for publishing board papers.

LIST OF ATTENDANCE

Board members:	Dr Andrew McCulloch	Chair, Non-executive Director
	Cheryl Hobson	Non-executive Director
	Dr Adi Cooper	Non-executive Director
	Simon Lewis	Non-executive Director
	Dr Sue Ross	Non-executive Director
	Amrat Khorana	Non-executive Director
	Chris Nicholson	Non-executive Director
Staff in attendance:	Colum Conway	Chief Executive
	Joe Stockwell	Assistant Director, Assurance and Improvement
	Sarah Blackmore	Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement
	Linda Dale	Executive Director, People and Business Support
	Philip Hallam	Executive Director, Regulation
	Natalie Day	Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy
	Rachel Lloyd	Assistant Director, Regulation (Registration, Advice and Adjudications)
Stephen Barnett	Assistant Director, Regulation (Investigations)	

	Stephen Hale	Assistant Director, Digital Programme Manager
	Kaye Gilbert	Senior Finance Business Partner
	Neil Smith-McOnie	Head of Business Planning and Improvement
	Clarissa Allford	Risk Manager
Sponsor team:	Andrew Wise	Department for Education
	Peter Royle	Department for Education
	Sonia Mosley	Department for Education
	Jo Denyer	Department for Education
Public observers:	Ben Jones	Unison
	Richard West	Professional Standards Authority
	Graham Mockler	Professional Standards Authority
Staff observers:	Jasmin Coggins	Data & Insight Analyst
Minute taker:	Penny Clarke	Corporate Governance Manager
	Daniella Shaw	Executive Assistant
Apologies:	N/A	

Minutes of the Social Work England board meeting **for approval**
 Friday 13 March 2026, 10.30am – 1.00pm
 at The Don, Social Work England and by videoconference

Board members:	Dr Andrew McCulloch	Chair, Non-executive Director
	Amrat Khorana	Non-executive Director
	Cheryl Hobson	Non-executive Director
	Chris Nicholson	Non-executive Director
	Dr Adi Cooper	Non-executive Director
	Dr Sue Ross	Non-executive Director
	Simon Lewis	Non-executive Director
	Colum Conway	Chief Executive
Board Apprentice	Bhavna Chandra	Boardroom Apprentice
Staff in attendance:	Linda Dale	Executive Director, People and Business Support
	Sarah Blackmore	Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement
	Phil Hallam	Executive Director, Regulation
	Natalie Day	Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy
	Clare Cocken	Assistant Director, Communication, Insight and Engagement
	Stephen Hale	Assistant Director - Digital Programme Manager
	Joseph Stockwell	Assistant Director, Assurance and Improvement
	Neil Smith-McOnie	Head of Business Planning and Improvement (Item 11 only)
	Clarissa Allford	Risk Manager (Item 11 only)
	Laura Gregory	Interim Senior Finance Business Partner (Items 9 and 10 only)
	Katie Newbould	Head of Policy (Item 12 only)
	Paul Peros	Policy Manager (Item 12 only)
Sponsor Team:	Andrew Wise	Department for Education
	Peter Royle	Department for Education
	Sonia Mosley	Department for Education
Public observers:	Richard West	Professional Standards Authority
Staff observers:	Faith Salih	Head of Legal
Minute taker:	Cathy Glynn	Executive Officer
	Elle Langdown	Executive Assistant
Apologies:	None	

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1. Welcome

- 1.1 The chair welcomed board members, colleagues and observers to the meeting.
- 1.2 There were no apologies received.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 A declaration of interest was made by Amrat Khorana, non-executive director, in relation to an appointment as chief executive officer at the International Prader-Willi Syndrome Organisation.
- 2.2 No further declarations were made.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Paper 01

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting on 23 January 2026 were **approved** as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising and Action Log

Paper 02

- 4.1 There were no matters arising.
- 4.2 The chair reviewed the action log. Actions pending sign off at the 13 March 2026 meeting:
 - **Action 127:** The assistant director, policy and strategy to circulate: the proposed agenda for the AI and the future of social work conference and the academic papers from Gillian Ferguson on AI and climate change in relation to social work. *Corporate governance manager shared the articles and conference links to the board members by email on 20 February 2026. Action closed.*
 - **Action 128:** The executive director for people and business support to share the revised Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) programme roadmap and approach to prioritisation for the upcoming ARAC meeting. *The DDaT programme was on the agenda for the ARAC meeting on 13 February where an update on progress and the draft strategy was shared with the committee. The DDaT roadmap was shared with, and discussed by, ARAC at the deep dive session on 6 March. Action closed.*
 - **Action 124:** Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide an update to the policy committee and board on the progress of the inspections of Best Interests Assessor (BIA) and Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses at an appropriate point once the inspection programme begins. *BIA inspections had concluded, as planned. Reapproval of Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses would start in March 2026, preparation for this was on track. Meetings with course providers in preparation for inspections had started. The outcome of the inspections could be found in the quarterly performance report section of board papers. Action closed.*
 - **Action 129:** The board members to contact the corporate governance manager if they would like to chair/be involved in a Social Work Week event. *Non-executive*

directors had been put in contact with Mathew Devlin if they would like to be involved in Social Work Week 2026. **Action closed.**

5. Chair's Report

Verbal

- 5.1 The chair had attended a practice education session in Ipswich, engaging with social workers and gathering views to inform improvements to the student experience across the sector. The chair noted the alignment of views, the present variability of student experience and highlighted the need for continued progress in this area.
- 5.2 The chair had met with Dame Annie Hudson regarding the independent review of Social Work England.
- 5.3 The chair and chief executive had also met with minister Josh MacAlister, which provided the opportunity for open and constructive discussion relevant to the organisation's direction.
- 5.4 These engagements were described as constructive and informative, particularly in relation to student experience and sector alignment.
- 5.5 The board **noted** the report.

6. Chief Executive's Report

Paper 03

- 6.1 The chief executive introduced his report and highlighted the following key areas:
- He thanked the board and executive team for their work on the business and budget plans, noting the new structure of the business plan and that the new planning process had provided opportunities for the board to be more actively involved in shaping the content.
 - Work was taking place to review internal governance under the *Shaping Success Together* programme. Further detail about this, and the wider work taking place through the programme in relation to culture, values and behaviours, would be shared at the May board strategy session.
 - Learning from the recent BIA inspections was set out in the report and this was informing preparations for AMHP inspections.
 - Progress on fitness to practise activity, including improvements to triage processes and progress towards reducing hearing backlogs by year end.
 - The organisation had been awarded a second place commendation by the Institute of Regulation in its annual awards (innovation category) for recent work in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion within fitness to practise. This was a cross-organisational priority.
- 6.2 The board discussed the approach to AMHP and BIA inspections, including the balance between online and in-person inspections. The chief executive noted that learning from previous inspections was informing the approach. In-person inspections were preferred where possible, however a proportionate and flexible approach would continue, reflecting the nature of mixed-model courses. Feedback and thematic findings from these initial inspections would be reported back to the board.

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6.3 In response to a query from the board, the executive director confirmed that recruitment for a permanent head of finance and commercial was underway and an appointment was expected to be made by the end of March. A new senior finance manager would take up post in the coming week, this would support greater stability in the forthcoming financial year.

6.4 The board welcomed the strong response and rich feedback from the practice education events and agreed to continue exploring ways to engage with students through a range of forums and formats. The feedback would inform the next phase of work in this area.

6.5 The board **noted** the report.

Actions:

- **Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide a report on feedback and thematic findings from the initial AMHP and BIA inspections to a future board meeting.**
- **Executive director, people and business support to update the board on progress and outcomes from the finance and commercial recruitment.**

7. Policy Committee Chair’s Report

Paper 04*

7.1 The policy committee chair introduced the report and highlighted the volume of policy activity, engagement activity and practice education work.

7.2 New members had been welcomed to the committee from the national advisory forum, along with the new chair of the education and training advisory forum, who would continue to attend meetings as an observer.

7.3 The board discussed whether insights from Social Work Week could be captured and used to inform the policy committee agenda. The executive director for professional practice and external engagement confirmed that insights would be gathered and shared across all relevant areas of work, including with the policy committee.

7.4 The policy committee chair highlighted the launch of phase three of the Change the Script campaign, which focused on wider areas of social work, including palliative care and the military, and featured contributions from artists with a social work background.

7.5 The chair thanked the policy committee chair for her report, welcomed new observers to the committee and encouraged wider board participation in committee meetings to support policy development. The next meeting of the policy committee was scheduled for 12 June 2026.

7.6 The board **noted** the report.

Action: Executive director professional practice and external engagement to share learning and insights from Social Work Week to inform policy committee discussions.

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8. Audit and Risk Assurance committee (ARAC) chair’s report

Paper 05*

- 8.1 The ARAC chair reported on discussion at the committee meeting on 13 February. The committee had scrutinised and sought assurances relating to the procurement of transcription and translation services, the draft DDaT strategy, proposed amendments to the regulatory scheme of delegation, and external audit planning.
- 8.2 The National Audit Office’s preliminary audit plan had been presented and discussed; a key point was the increased materiality threshold which would be helpful. ARAC had confirmed that there were no known fraud risks.
- 8.3 The 2025/26 internal audit plan was proceeding well. The plan for 2026/27 had been approved and aligned with the internal quality assurance schedule.
- 8.4 Progress was being made with sustainability objectives and positive assurance was provided that the organisation was ready to meet higher level sustainability disclosure standards.
- 8.5 The committee felt assured about the realism of the budget forecast for year-end and had agreed to carry out an effectiveness review over the coming weeks.
- 8.6 The board **noted** the assurances provided by the ARAC chair and discussed the three papers on the agenda for approval.
- 8.7 In relation to the business case for procurement of transcription and translation services, a number of queries from the board were addressed including internal costs, the proposed 120-year retention period and the implications of evolving technology and AI. Assurance was provided that the contract was a call-off arrangement with no minimum commitment.
- 8.8 The board **approved** the ARAC recommendation to proceed with option one for the procurement of transcription and translation services, noting assurance in relation to contract flexibility, quality management and data retention.
- 8.9 The committee chair introduced the proposed DDaT strategy and summarised the recent ARAC deep-dive session on the DDaT programme, which had taken place on 6 March. The deep dive had increased understanding of the programme, with agreement that the initial focus should be on establishing strong foundations. It was recognised that sequencing of digital developments, costs and priorities would continue to be reviewed as the work progressed. There would be ongoing scrutiny through ARAC, with the DDaT programme becoming a standing agenda item.
- 8.10 The board **endorsed** the proposed DDaT strategy and the planning approach. It was agreed that foundational work should take precedence in the first phase, while emphasising the need to maintain momentum, address urgent priorities such as cyber security, and retain flexibility given the programme’s complexity and interdependencies.
- 8.11 The board **noted** the amendments to the regulatory scheme of delegations.

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Action: Executive director, people and business support to ensure ongoing quality assurance for translation services by obtaining feedback from service users to confirm that the service meets their needs, including dialect and cultural appropriateness.

The interim Senior Finance Business Partner joined the meeting at 11:12am

9. Finance and commercial report

Paper 06

Management accounts to 31 January 2026

- 9.1 The executive director, people and business support, and the interim senior finance business partner introduced the report.
- 9.2 The executive director reported a higher underspend position than presented to the board in December, driven by higher-than-anticipated fee income and an ongoing underspend on legal services. It was noted that there had been a recent acceleration in legal activity and spending was expected to increase in the final months of 2025/26. The release of approximately £400k from a provision made last year was anticipated, and the organisation expected to agree a further adjustment to grant-in-aid with DfE following finalisation of the February management accounts.
- 9.3 Key commercial activity was noted including the legal services re-procurement (with contracts due to be awarded in July), procurement of the transcription and translation services and the plans to re-tender for a support line for individuals involved in the fitness to practise process.
- 9.4 The board expressed continued concern about the persistence of underspends, noting that this had been a recurring feature of financial reporting and had been raised previously by the board and ARAC. They discussed whether the organisation was becoming too reliant on in-year corrections, rather than setting more accurate assumptions earlier in the financial cycle. While the board welcomed signs of improved legal services activity, it was emphasised that improved financial performance must be accompanied by demonstrable operational improvement, particularly in relation to fitness to practise delivery.
- 9.5 The board acknowledged that the position had not materially worsened since the February review but agreed that the management accounts highlighted the need for ongoing scrutiny of forecasting, delivery, and spend management. The board noted that the financial position and confirmed that ongoing scrutiny would focus on delivery against year-end targets and the management of underspend.
- 9.6 The board **noted** the report.

10. Annual budget 2026/27

Paper 07

- 10.1 The executive director, people and business support presented the annual budget plan for discussion and approval.

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- 10.2 The executive director advised that the budget had been strengthened following detailed scrutiny since the January meeting, with assumptions reviewed and refined. The proposed budget included an overall increase in funding, largely driven by sustained pressures with fitness to practise.
- 10.3 Key risks identified within the budget included:
- The outcome of the legal services re-procurement, where final pricing and mobilisation costs would not be confirmed until the first quarter of the financial year.
 - Continued volatility in fitness to practise referral volumes.
- 10.4 The budget proposed significant additional investment in:
- Triage and investigations, including changes to structure process and earlier decision making.
 - Legal services and hearings capacity
 - A new research function to improve understanding of referral drivers and demand trends.
- 10.5 From the report, the board questioned whether the assumed 1% increase for support costs and the research team budget was sufficient due to current cost environment and the apparent cost of the proposed research team. The executive director clarified that this reflected part-year recruitment and the transfer of an existing role.
- 10.6 The board discussed the conservative approach to fee income projections, noting that there had been growth in the size of the register each year to date. Risks were noted regarding annual variability in overseas applications and associated fees and it was agreed that assumptions would be kept under review and adjusted where necessary.
- 10.7 The board challenged the assumed baseline of 230 fitness to practise referrals per month and queried whether this was sufficiently realistic given the sustained upward trend and recent evidence of referral volumes approaching or exceeding 250 per month. The board expressed concerns that the budget risked being constrained by affordability rather than operational demand.
- 10.8 The board scrutinised whether additional investment proposed for triage would be sufficient to prevent backlog growth, rather than simply stabilising the position. The board sought stronger assurance that efficiency gains alone would be capable of offsetting rising demand without further leadership and structural capacity.
- 10.9 The executive director, regulation explained that the process review in triage and investigation aimed to increase early case resolution and improve efficiency. The impact of the proposed changes had not yet been modelled, however they should lead to performance improving at a faster rate than set out in the budget paper.
- 10.10 The chief executive confirmed that the outcomes of the process review, an implementation plan and detailed modelling of the impact on decision-making and timeliness would be presented at the next board meeting in May. The board agreed to discuss further in May, noting the need for assurance that the budget plan would enable sufficient progress to be made.

- 10.11 The executive director, people and business support confirmed that the budget had been designed to be robust and agile, allowing for in-year adjustments should referral volumes or costs exceed projections.
- 10.12 The board **approved** the proposed 2026–27 budget, subject to confirmation of funding levels with the Department for Education.

Action: Executive director, regulation to model and present at the next board meeting, the assumptions and resource requirements for managing FtP referrals at both 230 and 250 cases per month, including the impact of the process review changes and resource flexibility.

Break

The board had a short break and resumed the meeting at 11:50.

The head of business planning and improvement and risk manager joined the meeting at 11:50.

11. Final business plan 2026/27

Paper 08*

- 11.1 The assistant director, assurance and improvement, and the head of business planning and improvement introduced the final 2026–27 business plan.
- 11.2 It was noted that the plan had been revised to better balance qualitative and quantitative measures, clarify outcomes and outputs, and reflect board feedback.
- 11.3 Authority was delegated to the chief executive to approve minor amendments prior to publication, with any material changes to be brought back to the board.
- 11.4 The board **approved** the 2026–27 business plan, noting that in-year adjustments may be required.

The head of business planning and improvement and risk manager left the meeting at 11:55 and the head of policy and policy manager joined the meeting.

12. Reimagining Continuing Professional Development: Update

Paper 09

- 12.1 The executive director, professional practice and external engagement introduced the paper, highlighting the complexity of the CPD landscape, the role of employers and the distinction between regulatory assurance and professional development.
- 12.2 The head of policy summarised work undertaken to review the current CPD approach, which had involved extensive sector engagement through roadshows and other forums, and a reflective phase exploring potential process changes such as different options for CPD recording.
- 12.3 The report noted the three core areas of the CPD review:
- **requirements**, including the potential for thematic CPD for specialist or advanced roles.

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- **recording**, focused on reducing barriers and making it as simple as possible for social workers to record their CPD
- **review of CPD**, including opportunities for AI to support review processes and the sharing of learning with the sector

12.4 The board discussed the need for a mixed-model approach, reflecting the complexity of roles across the profession. The importance of clearer milestones for the coming year was emphasised, particularly in light of pausing the 2.5% sample review, to provide confidence to the profession. The need to confirm short-term arrangements to assure continuing fitness to practise was emphasised, in parallel with work to achieve longer-term systemic improvement. It was acknowledged that there would be challenges in being able to set out a firm timeline at this stage, given the ongoing independent review which could make recommendations in relation to CPD. The board suggested testing and trials could still take place, alongside more proactive communication about the work being undertaken. Clearer messaging was required to address misconceptions about CPD.

12.5 The executive director of regulation emphasised the distinction between assuring continuing fitness to practise and supporting broader professional development through CPD. The board discussed exploring the use of AI to support the review of CPD records, noting both potential benefits and governance considerations.

12.6 The board **noted** the report, emphasising the need for clearer communication on CPD, visible progress and interim assurance arrangements while longer-term reforms were developed. It was agreed that CPD proposals should align with the findings of the independent review.

Action: Executive director for professional practice to develop and communicate clearer milestones and interim steps for the CPD review, including trials or testing, to provide assurance to the board and the profession about ongoing work and progress.

13. External board effectiveness review – completion of improvement plan Paper 10

13.1 The board noted progress against the recommendations arising from the last external board effectiveness review.

13.2 It was confirmed that new board members were now receiving the policy briefs, following a review and update of the circulation list.

13.3 The board agreed that the next internal board effectiveness review would proceed in the coming weeks, with timing aligned to the outputs of the independent review.

13.4 The board **agreed** that all actions were complete and the action plan could be closed.

14. Corporate Governance Paper 11

14.1 The board considered the corporate governance policies, including the code of conduct for board members, the declaration of interests and conflict resolution policy

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and the gifts and hospitality policy and the associated compliance and escalation provisions.

14.2 The board agreed that the policies were generally appropriate in scope and intent.

However, members raised specific concerns regarding the treatment of non-compliance and escalation, particularly in relation to serious breaches of the code of conduct.

14.3 The board noted that, as drafted, the policies did not sufficiently distinguish between minor administrative non-compliance and serious misconduct, and that the escalation routes for significant breaches were not clearly articulated.

14.4 The board expressed concern that the wording could imply that serious matters might be addressed at an operational level, which was not considered appropriate.

14.5 The board emphasised that the governance policies should clearly allow for:

- escalation to the Chair where appropriate;
- referral to the relevant authority, including the sponsor team;
- consideration of referral to external bodies where necessary;
- while avoiding unnecessary prescription of detailed process.

14.6 The board noted that decisions relating to the removal of board members did not rest with the board itself, and that the policies should accurately reflect the governance framework and lines of accountability.

14.7 Subject to the amendments outlined above, the code of conduct and declaration of interests and conflict resolution policy were **approved**. The gifts and hospitality policy amendments were noted, however the board **did not approve** the policy.

Action: Corporate governance manager to make the amendments in the policies and seek the chair's approval.

15. Sustainability update

Paper 12

15.1 The executive director, people and business support reported that the current year's action plan was largely on track, with one delayed area to be progressed. An overview was provided of the approach to refreshing the three-year plan to ensure it would be achievable and focused on areas the organisation could impact.

15.2 The board emphasised the importance of engagement with other agencies to share learning and good practice, and that this could assist in meeting the higher financial disclosure standard.

15.3 The board was **assured** of progress towards current year sustainability objectives and **supported** the proposed approach to refreshing the three-year sustainability plan.

16. Any other business

16.1 There was no other business, and the chair thanked all those in attendance.

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17. Review of the meeting

17.1 The chair reviewed the meeting noting that there was a good balance of challenge and response.

Date and Time of Next Meeting: Friday 15 May 2026, 10.30am - 1.00pm

The meeting ended at 12:45pm

Summary of Actions

- **Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide a report on feedback and thematic findings from the initial AMHP and BIA inspections to a future board meeting.**
- **Executive director, people and business support to update the board on progress and outcomes from the finance and commercial recruitment.**
- **Executive director professional practice and external engagement to share learning and insights from Social Work Week to inform policy committee discussions.**
- **Executive director, people and business support to ensure ongoing quality assurance for translation services by obtaining feedback from service users to confirm that the service meets their needs, including dialect and cultural appropriateness.**
- **Executive director, regulation to model and present at the next board meeting, the assumptions and resource requirements for managing FtP referrals at both 230 and 250 cases per month, including the impact of the process review changes and resource flexibility.**
- **Executive director for professional practice to develop and communicate clearer milestones and interim steps for the CPD review, including trials or testing, to provide assurance to the board and the profession about ongoing work and progress.**
- **Corporate governance manager to make the amendments in the policies and seek the chair's approval.**

* Papers marked with an asterisk are 'private' to protect confidentiality according to our guidance for publishing board papers.



Summary of actions from board meetings up to 15 May 2026

Agenda Item 03 Paper Ref 02

Paper for the

Social Work England Board

Sponsor

The Chair

Author

Penny Clarke, Corporate Governance Manager

Date

15 May 2026

Reviewed by

Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

This paper is for

Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite

Governance and compliance – Cautious

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

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1. Summary

The actions below provide an audit trail of items closed at or since the last board meeting on 13 March 2026. Actions still in progress or yet to complete since the last meeting are listed on the log that follows.

Closed actions following the last meeting on 13 March 2026:

- **Action 124:** Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide an update to the policy committee and board on the progress of the inspections of BIA and AMHP courses at an appropriate point once the inspection programme begins. *Best Interests Assessor (BIA) inspections have now concluded, as planned. Reapproval of Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses are underway. The outcome of the inspections can be found in the quarterly performance report section of board papers.* **Action closed.**
- **Action 127:** The assistant director, policy and strategy to circulate: the proposed agenda for the AI and the future of social work conference and the academic papers from Gillian Ferguson on AI, and climate change in relation to social work. *Corporate governance manager shared the articles and conference links to the board members by email on 20 February 2026.* **Action closed.**
- **Action 128:** The executive director for people and business support to share the revised DDaT roadmap and approach to prioritisation for the upcoming ARAC meeting. *The DDaT programme was on the agenda for the ARAC meeting on 13 February where an update on progress and the draft strategy was shared with the committee. The DDaT roadmap was shared with, and discussed by, ARAC at the deep dive session on 6 March.* **Action closed.**
- **Action 129:** The board members to contact the corporate governance manager if they would like to chair/be involved in a Social Work Week event. *The NEDs were put in contact with Mathew Devlin if they would like to be involved in Social Work Week 2026.* **Action closed.**

Actions pending sign off at the 15 May 2026 meeting:

- **Action 130:** Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide a report on feedback and thematic findings from the initial AMHP and BIA inspections to a future board meeting. *The outcome of the inspections including feedback and findings can be found in the quarterly performance report section of board papers.* **Action to close.**
- **Action 131:** Executive director, people and business support to update the board on progress and outcomes from the finance and commercial recruitment. *Kaye Gilbert, Senior Finance Business Partner, started in post on 16 March and has settled in well. The new Head of Finance and Commercial, Sophie Bennet, is starting on 19 May.* **Action to close.**
- **Action 134:** Executive director, regulation to model and present at the next board meeting, the assumptions and resource requirements for managing FtP referrals at both 230 and 250 cases per month, including the impact of the process review changes and resource flexibility. *This is being presented during the board strategy session on the afternoon of 15 May 2026.* **Action to close.**

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2. Action required

The board is asked to note the progress against the open actions below.

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Social Work England Board Meeting Action Log

Action no.	Date of Meeting	Action	Owner	Due By	Update	Next review	Status
132	13/03/2026	Executive director professional practice and external engagement to share learning and insights from Social Work Week to inform policy committee discussions.	Sarah Blackmore	17/07/2026	An overview of Social Work Week will form part of the Executive Director's report at the next Policy Committee, while an evaluation of this event will also be presented to Board in due course.	17/07/2026	Open
133	13/03/2026	Executive director, people and business support to ensure ongoing quality assurance for translation services by obtaining feedback from service users to confirm that the service meets their needs, including dialect and cultural appropriateness.	Linda Dale	30/10/2026	The procurement of translation services is taking place currently. This will be addressed as part of ongoing contract management.	30/10/2026	Open
135	13/03/2026	Executive director for professional practice to develop and communicate clearer milestones and interim steps for the CPD review, including trials or testing, to provide assurance to the board and the profession about ongoing work and progress.	Sarah Blackmore	17/07/2026	Work is continuing to advance our review of CPD, with regular updates to the Board and the broader profession as part of our ongoing work. Building on recent Board discussions, we will soon be notifying the register of plans to review CPD records for this registration year.	17/07/2026	Open

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Chief executive's report

Agenda Item 05 Paper Ref 03

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
Colum Conway, Chief Executive

Author
Colum Conway

Date
15 May 2026

Reviewed by
Executive Leadership Team

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective
SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Strategic approach - Open

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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1. Introduction

The main part of the board meeting today will be the performance review for quarter 4 2025/26. It is good to note that we have achieved 10 out of our 11 business plan objectives and that the one we missed relates to the development of a new strategic plan which is on hold until the Independent Review is published this year.

It is also good to note that we achieved our target for the number of final hearings concluded and the number of cases awaiting a final hearing is below forecast. The progress on the number of triage decisions is positive and towards the end of the quarter the number of decisions made moved ahead of the number of new concerns raised with us. There is a detailed report on fitness to practise in the main performance report. There is still much to do on timeliness, however the current signs are positive in terms of progress. The work on the process review and its implementation in triage and investigations will be shared with the board.

The number of new concerns remains high, and we are currently concluding initial research on a sample of cases at triage to aid our understating as to why the number of concerns raised with us is increasing. We suspect there is no one underlying reason but rather a range of factors. The outcome of this initial research will be available to the board in due course. At our meeting today we will have a more detailed discussion on the research into seriousness. The performance report also highlights positive progress on the development of a new research team and where the research priorities will be, and on the programme of work for practice education.

To note, the business plan 2026/27 has now been published, the detail and nature of the budget for 2026/27 has been agreed.

We continue to work with the Independent Review team as they move through their process towards publication.

2. Engagement

We have continued to engage widely across the sector this period, including several speaking sessions at key events such as the ADASS spring seminar, where we spoke about our AI research, and held a joint session with BASW on the future of the social work profession. We attended the Institute of Regulation annual conference where we were commended for our fitness to practise and diversity work. We have been asked to sit on a new national steering group on the changing mental health legislation and move to Liberty Protection Safeguards. This has been established by the DHSC and will be chaired by the Chief Social Worker for Adults.

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3. Emerging Technologies

A lot of work and discussion is taking place with the sector and fellow regulators on AI and emerging technologies.

Next week, 20 May we will be co-hosting, along with Skills for Care, a one-day summit entitled 'AI and the future of social work'. The summit will provide an opportunity to bring together the range of discussion and interest in AI and practice. We have an attendance list of 500 people.

We are also exploring the potential impact of emerging technologies on our own work as a key element of our DDaT programme, in a recent internal workshop we agreed on principles and prioritised use cases. We are exploring how we might use emerging technologies in our approach to CPD going forward, and to support timeliness within triage. We will update the board on progress.

4. Social Work Week

We had another very successful week for our 6th SWW this year. 5,347 social workers attended sessions across the week. For the first time, we also held a joint online session with colleagues from BASW to mark World Social Work Day. This was very well attended and received. We also held an in-person meeting that day with National Advisory Forum colleagues and Social Work England social workers.

5. Conclusion

The Quarter 4 performance report at our meeting today will feed into the work that is well under way on our Annual Report and Accounts which will reflect our overall performance through the business year 2025/26. This report will come to ARAC and the board over the next few months before it is then laid before parliament. We are aiming for the report to reflect, acknowledge and balance the challenges we have encountered with the many achievements and positive progress that has been made through the year.

6. Annexes

Annex 1: Chief Executive's meetings

Interim CEO SCIE

UK and Ireland Alliance Partnership

Chief Executives of the Health and Care Professional Regulatory Bodies

Ofsted External Advisory Group

National Practice Group

President and Vice President of ADCS

International Congress Working Group at CLEAR

Lead Reviewer on the Independent Review of Social Regulation

Chief Executive BASW

Chief Social Worker for Adults

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Finance and Commercial Update

Agenda Item 9 Paper Ref 06

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

Author
Kaye Gilbert, Senior Finance Business Partner

Date
15 May 2026

Reviewed by
Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

This paper is for
Assurance and noting

Associated Strategic Objective
SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Financial governance – Cautious

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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1. Summary

This paper provides an update on the following:

- Management accounts for the year ending 31 March 2026
- Recent commercial activity

2. Action required

For discussion and noting.

3. Commentary

Management accounts

A summary set of the management accounts for the year to 31 March 2026 can be found in Annex A.

Key highlights are set out below:

- Year 2025/26 revenue expenditure, net of fee income, is £14.69m, compared to the budgeted amount of £14.68m, an overspend of £7,143. Following two in-year budget adjustments in October 2025 and February 2026, the financial performance KPI has been achieved with a variance of 0.0%.
- Budget figures have been re-stated in March 2026 to reflect the latest adjustment to grant-in-aid (GIA) that was agreed in February 2026, a £1.2m reduction. This follows receipt of a revised GIA letter from the DfE on 31 March 26.
- The slight overspend of £7,143, after the returned GIA monies to DfE, reflects the difficulty in estimating precise final figures. Some minor adjustments on intangible assets/revenue items were made in March 2026 which tipped the position into overspend.
- Fee income was £179k above budget, though very close to forecast – a difference of only £153.
- We have released the remaining 2024/25 financial provision, and provided a new provision for 2025/26 to cover anticipated future costs relating to the implementation of worker status for our partners. This includes payments to some partners for goodwill offers that have been accepted but not yet paid.
- Full-year capital expenditure is below budget, with an underspend compared to budget of £111k (4.0%). This was caused by delay to some activities that were due to start in February and March 26.

2026/27 budget

- The Department for Education (DfE) confirmed our budget settlement for 2026/27 on 20 April 2026.

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- A briefing paper was shared and approved by the board, providing details of the financial settlement and how we propose to mobilise our business and budget plans for 2026/27. These plans respond to current operational pressures within Fitness to Practise and seek to proactively mitigate the risk of underspend arising again in the year ahead, via carefully managed over-planning of activity. Adjustments will be made as required throughout the year, based on financial performance.

4. Commercial Update

- Procurement of legal advocacy services is at the evaluation stage, we remain on track to complete the process and award contracts to two suppliers in June/July 2026.
- The plan to re-procure translation and transcription services is underway, documents are in review after successful market engagement with suppliers, the aim is for the tender to go live later in May 2026.
- Procurement of an emotional support line for social workers/witnesses has been completed and contract discussions with the successful supplier are taking place ahead of an expected start date in June.
- A business case to re-procure our Appian licences is on the agenda for today's board meeting.

5. Conclusions and/or Recommendations

N/A

6. Annexes

Annex A – management accounts

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Annex A – Year ended management accounts and full year forecast – March 2026

Income and Expenditure Statement

Directorates	Year to date amount	Year to date budget	Year to date £ variance	Year to date % variance	Full year forecast	Full year budget	Full year £ variance	Full year % variance
Fee income	(11,420,457)	(11,241,726)	178,731	1.6%	(11,420,304)	(11,241,726)	178,578	1.6%
Executive Leadership Team								
Wages & Salaries	614,881	571,547	(43,335)	(7.6%)	603,403	571,547	(31,856)	(5.6%)
Support	42,545	40,000	(2,545)	(6.4%)	38,050	40,000	1,950	4.9%
Total	657,426	611,547	(45,879)	(7.5%)	641,453	611,547	(29,906)	(4.9%)
People & Business Support								
Wages & Salaries	3,531,156	3,815,417	284,261	7.5%	3,009,383	3,815,417	806,034	21.1%
Support	3,553,048	2,964,470	(588,578)	(19.9%)	3,446,437	2,964,470	(481,967)	(16.3%)
Total	7,084,205	6,779,887	(304,317)	(4.5%)	6,455,820	6,779,887	324,067	4.8%
Regulation								
Wages & Salaries	8,294,968	8,472,586	177,618	2.1%	8,826,424	8,472,586	(353,837)	(4.2%)
Support	6,893,985	6,776,296	(117,689)	(1.7%)	6,732,698	6,776,296	43,598	0.6%
Total	15,188,954	15,248,882	59,929	0.4%	15,559,122	15,248,882	(310,240)	(2.0%)
Professional practice and external engagement								
Wages & Salaries	2,669,514	2,715,503	45,989	1.7%	2,761,563	2,715,503	(46,060)	(1.7%)
Support	511,486	569,891	58,405	10.2%	557,258	569,891	12,633	2.2%
Total	3,181,001	3,285,394	104,394	3.2%	3,318,822	3,285,394	(33,427)	(1.0%)
Total Expenditure	26,111,585	25,925,711	(185,874)	(0.7%)	25,975,217	25,925,711	(49,506)	(0.2%)
Net Expenditure	14,691,128	14,683,985	(7,143)	(0.0%)	14,554,913	14,683,985	129,072	0.9%

Depreciation/Amortisation	2,423,563	2,262,000	(161,563)	(7.1%)	2,425,848	2,262,000	(163,848)	(7.2%)
Net Expenditure inc Depreciation	17,114,691	16,945,985	(168,706)	(1.0%)	16,980,761	16,945,985	(34,776)	(0.2%)
Capital Expenditure	2,637,157	2,748,000	110,843	4.0%	2,705,000	2,748,000	43,000	1.6%
Total	19,751,848	19,693,985	(57,863)	(0.3%)	19,685,761	19,693,985	8,224	0.0%

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Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2026

	Cost £	Depreciation £	N.B.V £
Fixed Assets			
Buildings	1,264,299	(1,064,559)	199,740
Right of Use Asset	1,129,345	(681,416)	447,929
IT Equipment	1,465,057	(1,095,499)	369,558
Fixtures & Fittings	346,497	(322,147)	24,349
Internally generated system	11,495,766	(5,563,699)	5,932,067
Forge System (WIP)	3,185,895	0	3,185,895
	18,886,858	(8,727,321)	10,159,537
Current Assets			
Prepayments			663,639
Bank			5,256,014
Debtors			(778)
			5,918,875
Current Liabilities			
Accruals			(3,178,130)
Deferred Income			(5,071,990)
Payables			(2,310,742)
			(10,560,862)
Working Capital (Current Assets less Current Liabilities)			(4,641,986)
Non-Current Liabilities			
Short Term - PFI Finance Lease Liability Additions			(1,152,302)
Lease liability payments			612,871
Lease interest			(95,093)
Provisions			(203,535)
			(838,060)
Total Assets & Liabilities			4,679,490
Taxpayers equity			4,679,490

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Social Work England

Quarterly report for January – March 2026



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Executive summary



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Executive summary

Business plan progress

We have achieved 10 of our 11 business plan objectives.

We have made significant progress to deliver outputs in the DDAT programme and plan delivery of projects during 2026/27. Objective RAG changed from Amber to Green.

The objective to refine our approach to social work education and training (BP 1.4) is Amber as we continued to experience delays in progressing our review of the education and training standards, rules and guidance.

Our published AI research has achieved significant reach with 4,606 web visits and 1,565 downloads.

We delivered engagement activities for phase 3 of Change the Script and Social Work Week, including online sessions involving over 5,300 attendees.

Performance update

We achieved 15 of our 18 KPIs.

The Q4 figure of 27 weeks for FTP1 is higher than the target of 26 weeks by March 2026.

The Q4 figure of 49 weeks for FTP2 is within the target of 54 weeks by March 2026.

We did not achieve the target for FTP3. Additional Case Examiners are now in post and have been allocated caseload. We expect the volume of cases at this stage to reduce from Q1, with improvements in timeliness from Q2.

The Q4 figure of 148 weeks for FTP4 is higher than the target of 92 weeks by March 2026. This is due to volumes at triage and case examiner stages.

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Business plan progress



Business plan progress overview

Business plan progress

ID	Business plan objective description	RAG
1.1	Build trust and confidence in social work and in regulation by engaging with the profession, stakeholders, people with lived experience and the public.	Green
1.2	Embed our research function to enhance and inform our understanding of the profession, and to positively impact public policy through evidence-based advice and insight.	Green
1.3	Reflect on the learning from our recent review of continuing professional development (CPD) to advance a more comprehensive and valued approach to our CPD requirements, with staged implementation.	Green
1.4	Refine and develop our approach to social work education and training, working in partnership with providers and the social work sector to improve the consistency and quality of courses, and the readiness of graduates for professional practice.	Amber
1.5	Build a more in-depth knowledge of the practice education landscape to inform and support the critical role of practice educators, including exploring potential regulatory levers.	Green
2.1	Take action to improve timeliness in our triage, investigations and case examiner functions whilst maintaining decision making quality and fairness.	Green
2.2	Use the additional funding to take action to address the hearings backlog.	Green

Business plan progress overview

Business plan progress

ID	Business plan objective description	RAG
2.3	Identify and realise further efficiency and effectiveness opportunities in our hearings and case review functions.	Green
3.1a	Develop and publish a new strategy for 2026 to 2029	On hold
3.1b	Align and strengthen approach to annual business planning and performance management	Green
3.2	Finalise and start to implement our new digital, data and technology strategy.	Green
3.3	Adopt and embed our new behaviours framework.	Green

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Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Communications, engagement and insight

Business plan progress

1.1: Build trust and confidence in social work and in regulation by engaging with the profession, stakeholders, people with lived experience and the public.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We launched phase 3 of our Change the Script campaign which highlighted unseen social work roles. We worked in partnership with Turner Prize-winning artist Helen Cammock, unveiling ‘Social Work Happens Here’ plaques and produced video case-study content. The campaign generated strong media interest (over 100 pieces of coverage) and had high levels of engagement on our digital channels.
- We delivered the sixth annual Social Work Week with 18 online sessions and more than 5,300 attendees, offering sector-wide engagement on topics from lived experience to AI and anti-racist practice, with session recordings to be shared via YouTube.
- We continued to work with Skills for Care on planning the ‘AI and the future of social work’ one-day summit in May.
- We have published the outcomes from our adjudicator panel disposal consultation.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

Outcome and impact

- Both Social Work Week and Change the Script strengthened trust and confidence in social work by engaging thousands across the sector and increasing the profession’s visibility through high-profile national media activity.

Key planned activity next quarter

- Alongside Skills for Care, we’ll deliver the ‘AI and the future of social work’ conference.
- We’ll evaluate Social Work Week 2026
- We’ll continue to deliver phase 3 of our Change the Script activity and evaluate this phase of the campaign.
- We’ll finalise plans for our 2026/27 engagement and communications programme
- We will design and launch the 2026 social work survey.
- We’ll develop plans to engage more strategically with students so that they build a deeper understanding of our role and the importance of being a regulated profession.

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Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.2: Embed our research function to enhance and inform our understanding of the profession, and to positively impact public policy through evidence-based advice and insight.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We published both pieces of AI-related research, and shared our findings in external outreach events, including at Social Work Week.
- We finalised the tender pack to commission research that focuses on social work student placement sufficiency and quality.
- We analysed 500 pre-triage referrals from the last business year to better understand who's raising concerns with us, why, and what they expect from us as a regulator.
- We continued to develop our draft research strategy.
- We began the recruitment process for a head of research.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

Outcome and impact

- Our published research is contributing to sector knowledge, delivering on our commitment to be a learning organisation.
- The AI research is receiving excellent coverage, with 4,606 views and 1,565 downloads. We've also spoken at and continue to be invited to speak at events, including our upcoming AI summit.
- We've made good progress, through strategy development and recruitment, on achieving our future ambitions for research.

Key planned activity next quarter





- We will publish the seriousness research.
- We will appoint a head of research.
- We will finalise our draft research strategy.
- We will award and commence the placements research.

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.3: Reflect on the learning from our recent review of continuing professional development (CPD) to advance a more comprehensive and valued approach to our CPD requirements, with staged implementation.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We used the practice education discussion forums to build our knowledge of what CPD looks like for those in specialist and advanced roles.
- We presented an overview of our work, developing proposals and plans for next steps to the Board.
- We responded to the PSA’s performance analysis in relation to the CPD standard.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Outcome and impact

- We shared our progress and thinking with the Board, demonstrating transparency to them and the sector.
- We improved our knowledge of CPD in specialist roles and received positive feedback from the engagement.
- Our work over phase 2 has prepared us well to set out our plans for our future approach to CPD.

Key planned activity next quarter

- We’ll continue to develop our proposals for changes to our CPD requirements in preparation for a consultation in 2026.
- We’ll carry out the internal review of a sample of CPD records and begin to use the findings to inform the development of our long-term approach to CPD review.
- Design the user testing to explore improvements to recording experience.

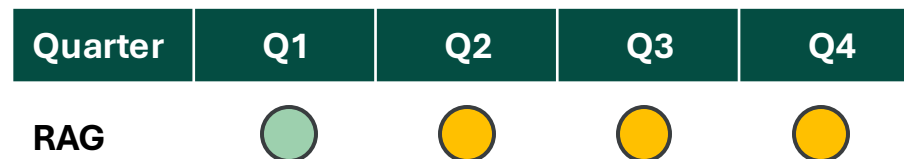
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Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.4: Refine and develop our approach to social work education and training, working in partnership with providers and the social work sector to improve the consistency and quality of courses, and the readiness of graduates for professional practice.



Activity and assurance

Education and training standards review

- We briefed the independent review team on our work to date on our proposed review of the education and training standards, so we can advance this work in a timely manner following completion of the independent review.

Social care reform

- We discussed potential models of annotation for the new lead child protection practitioner role with DFE colleagues.
- We continued to engage with the DHSC as they begin to prepare for their consultation on Liberty Protection Safeguards.

Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP) and Best Interest Assessors (BIA)

- We completed the final BIA reapproval inspection (15 in total) and the first AMHP reapproval inspections. We will complete all 19 AMHP reapproval inspections by June 2026.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- We continue to experience delays in progressing our review of the education and training standards, rules and guidance, but are working on a revised timeframe to publish following conclusion of the independent review.

Outcome and impact

- Consulting with both departments ensures that we are closely involved with all areas of their reform work.
- We are assured that BIA and AMHP courses are meeting the relevant standards and where they are not, we are taking action to address.

Key planned activity next quarter

- We will participate in the DfE's Early Career Development Programme Expert Group.
- We will take the learning from our AMHP and BIA reapproval cycles and begin to draft a report that shares that learning with the sector.
- We'll design and implement a programme of research and engagement that further develops our understanding of placement quality and sufficiency.
- We'll continue to engage with colleagues in the departments to support work relating to social care reform.

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.5: Build a more in-depth knowledge of the practice education landscape to inform and support the critical role of practice educators, including exploring potential regulatory levers.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We completed the practice educators survey, receiving over 4,400 responses.
- We delivered 5 discussion forums, engaging with 162 practice educators and other stakeholders on professional recognition, potential guidance and CPD.
- We met with the practice education development group and shared findings from our education landscape research and the workforce survey.
- We commissioned General Medical Council Services International to develop an options appraisal on different models of professional recognition.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Outcome and impact

- We have a clearer picture of the shape and experiences of the practice education workforce.
- Attrition at the events was very low, and we received warm and positive feedback from attendees.
- This first phase of exploration and information gathering has equipped us to be able to consider and shape appropriate regulatory frameworks for this workforce.

Key planned activity next quarter




- We will complete the analysis of the survey feedback and incorporate it into the outcomes report.
- We'll begin the next phase of the work, focusing on potential EQA and professional recognition options.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.1: Take action to improve timeliness in our triage, investigations and case examiner functions whilst maintaining decision making quality.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We engaged an additional consultant to provide further input into the process review and are concluding the review.
- We commenced allocation of cases to our new cohort of case examiners.
- The team continued to optimise accepted disposals.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Monthly triage referrals continue to increase. Referrals are 38% higher in 2025/26 when compared with 2024/25.

Outcome and impact

- There was a significant increase in the number of triage decisions made during Q4 by comparison to previous quarters

Key planned activity next quarter




- The process review will present final recommendations and then move into implementation.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.2: Use the additional funding to take action to address the hearings backlog.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We've worked effectively with our external legal provider to progress cases by risk and age. We held 46 final hearings in Q4.
- We inducted more than 50 new FtP partners who will give us further capacity to resource hearings in 2026/27.
- We have progressed the project to reprocure our external legal services, as well as moving from a single provider to two. The tender went live in March.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

Outcome and impact

- Our hearings caseload at the end of 2025/26 is lower than forecast.

Key planned activity next quarter





- We will continue to address the backlog in line with budget.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.3: Identify and realise further efficiency and effectiveness opportunities in our hearings and case review functions.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- The new in-house advocacy team started to take on case work and advocate for some mandatory hearings. This will continue to scale up in Q1 2026/27.
- We revised the adjudicator consensual disposal (ACD) guidance following the public consultation, which we published on 1 April 2026. We are identifying cases that may be appropriate for ACD.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

Outcome and impact

- Cases awaiting a hearing are being dealt with at an increased rate, and this will continue into 2026/27.

Key planned activity next quarter

- Confirm cases that are appropriate for ACD.
- The internal advocacy team will take on more of the mandatory work.









Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

3.1a: Develop and publish a new strategy for 2026 to 2029

3.1b: Align and strengthen our approach to annual business planning and performance management.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
3.1a				
3.1b				

Activity and assurance

3.1a : The development of the strategy continues to be on hold while we await the outcomes of the independent review.

We have agreed with the DfE that the current strategy will be extended to 31 March 2027.

3.1b: This work was concluded in September, and a final version of our new approach to business planning was presented at the board's strategy meeting in September 2025.

Outcome and impact

- Nothing to report.

Key planned activity next quarter

- **3.1a:** We will continue to prepare to consult on the new strategy later this year while we await the outcome of the independent review.

Changes to risk, any further concerns





- No change

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Digital, data and technology

Business plan progress

3.2: Finalise and start to implement our new digital, data and technology strategy

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

DDaT strategy: The DDaT strategy received approval from the Board and we will now publish it internally

Roadmap: We have a target roadmap for 2026/27, and a prioritised backlog of tasks and projects for each workstream. Key 2025/26 deliverables:

- We made infrastructure changes to enable multi-factor authentication for online accounts (with further work planned for 2026/27 to enable rollout to social workers and other users)
- We are refining our Data Governance Charter to inform the delivery of data governance projects during 2026/27
- We have delivered planned outputs from our workforce planning work, including proposed DDaT structures

Emerging technologies: We prepared an emerging technology adoption plan, including principles, proposed governance changes, and 24 use cases for adoption.

We provided a progress update and ran a deep-dive workshop with ARAC on the roadmap and critical path for delivery.

The programme is on track, with key pieces of work progressing across the 5 workstreams (design, data, technology, people and governance).

Outcome and impact

- It is too early to report impact

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- The status of the programme has changed from *amber* to *amber/green* because we have made significant progress to deliver outputs for live projects, and to plan the roadmap for delivery of DDaT projects during 2026/27.

Key planned activity next quarter





- Progress on key tasks and projects: service ownership, user research strategy, qualifications data governance, people and finance data reporting, data architecture, security, technical debt, testing, agree implementation plan for the workforce and training, digital change process review

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

People

Business plan progress

3.3: Adopt and embed our new behaviours framework

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We continued delivery of the leadership development programme and began leadership coaching for those who requested it.
- We continued to support teams to embed the behaviours, via regular communications and sharing of resources
- We worked with an external provider to develop a theory of change to align activity to outcomes and define clear impact measures.
- We worked with an external provider to review our governance framework and develop recommendations to clarify and streamline internal governance and decision-making, aligned to the behaviours.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Outcome and impact

- Our quarterly Pulse survey in February 2026 indicates that more people are taking action to align to the new behaviours (83% of respondents, up from 65% in Q3)
- We expect to see the impact of modified policies and governance arrangements from Q1 onwards.

Key planned activity next quarter

- Continue to make changes to our policies to align with and encourage our behaviours.
- Implement agreed amendments to our governance framework.
- Rollout of e-learning to support embedding the behaviours.
- All team meeting themed around 'fearless' and its associated behaviours.

Quarterly performance report for January – March 2026



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KPI performance overview

Performance update

ID	KPI	Target	RAG
EQA1	Time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision	≤ 60 working days (median)	53
REG1	Time taken to approve UK registration applications	≤ 10 working days (median)	4
REG2	Time taken to approve restoration applications	≤ 20 working days (median)	6
REG3	Time taken to answer emails	≤ 5 working days (median)	1
REG4	Time taken to answer phone calls	≤ 8 minutes (median)	3
FTP1	Time taken to complete triage	≤ 26 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q4: ≤ 26 weeks (median)	27
FTP2	Time taken to conclude investigation	≤ 54 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q4: ≤ 54 weeks (median)	49
FTP3	Time taken to complete case examination process	≤ 12 weeks (median)	27
FTP4	Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at case examination	≤ 92 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q4: ≤ 92 weeks (median)	148
FTP5	Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at hearing	No target. Weeks (median)	245

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KPI performance overview

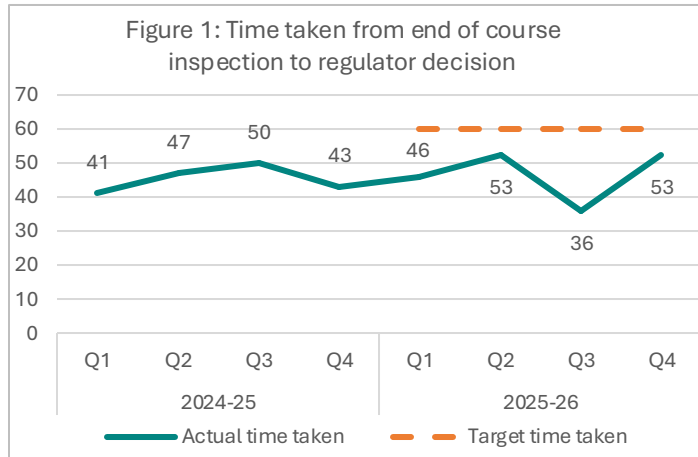
Performance update

ID	KPI description	Target	RAG
FTP6	Time taken to approve interim orders	≤ 20 working days (median)	19
IG1	Time taken to complete FOI requests	≥ 90% within statutory deadline	100%
IG2	Time taken to complete subject access requests	≥ 90% within statutory deadline	100%
C1	Corporate complaints response time	≥ 80% within 20 working days	95%
P1	Retention rate	≥ 80%	89%
P2	Sickness absence over last 12 months	≤ 7.8 days per person	7
FIN1	Forecast year-end variance to budget	+/- 1.5%	0.0%
IT1	System availability excluding planned outages	≥ 99%	100% ¹

¹ Figure showing as 100% due to rounding.

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EQA1: Time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision
Target: ≤ 60 working days (median)



Commentary

- We met this KPI.

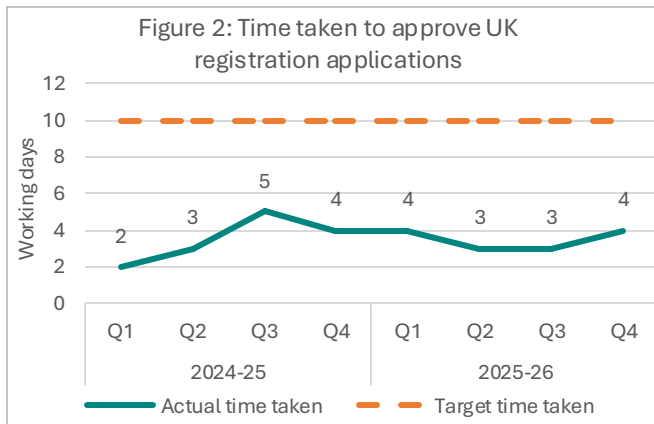
Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

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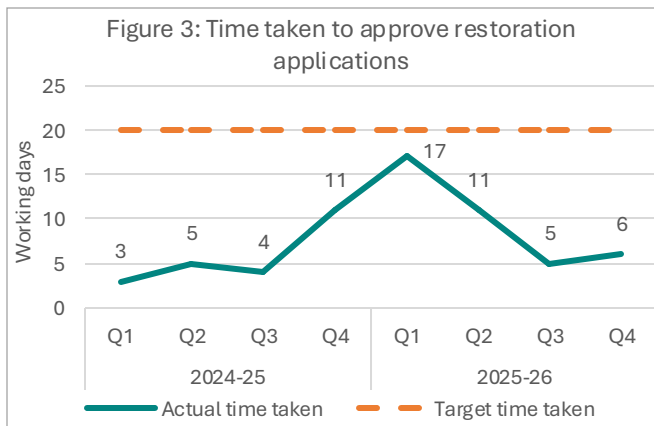
REG1: Time taken to approve UK registration applications

Target: ≤ 10 working days (median)



REG2: Time taken to approve restoration applications

Target: ≤ 20 working days (median)



Commentary

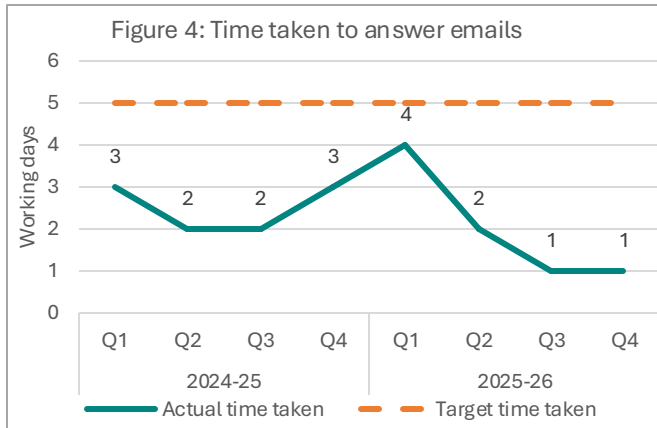
- We met both of these KPIs, and we have continued to focus on the timeliness of restoration applications

Changes to risk, any further concerns

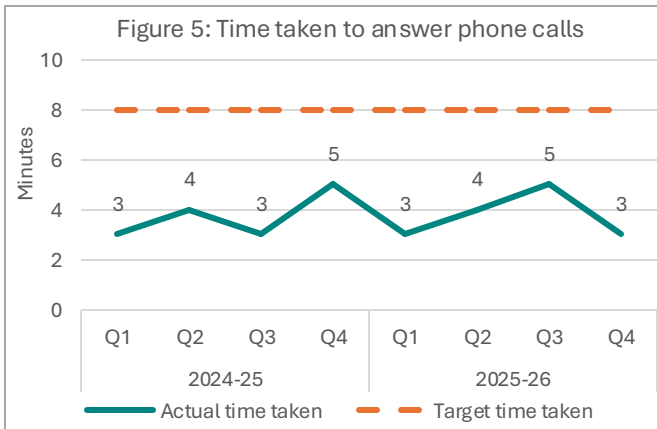
- No change.

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REG3: Time taken to answer emails
 Target: ≤ 5 working days (median)



REG4: Time taken to answer phone calls²
 Target: ≤ 8 minutes (median)



Commentary

- We met both of these KPIs. In Q4 we have seen a small decrease in the number of emails and phone calls. This may be linked to the new online communications functionality released into the case management system, which allows staff to email applicants, social workers, and other parties directly from the case management system.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

² Q3 Figure differs from value in previous publication due to data error.

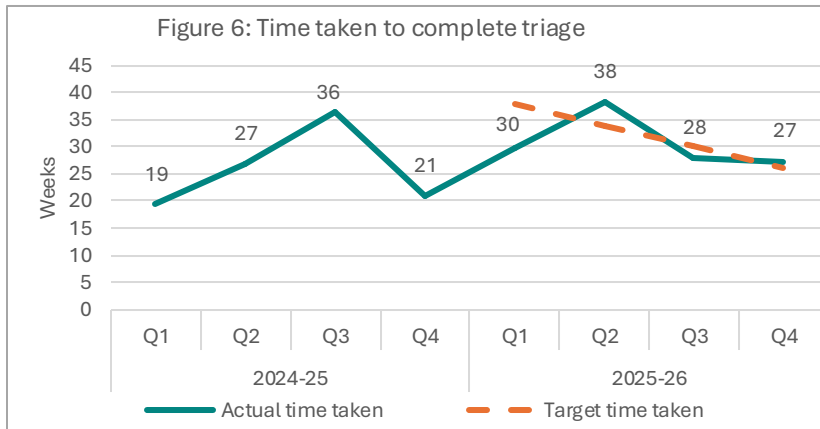
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Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

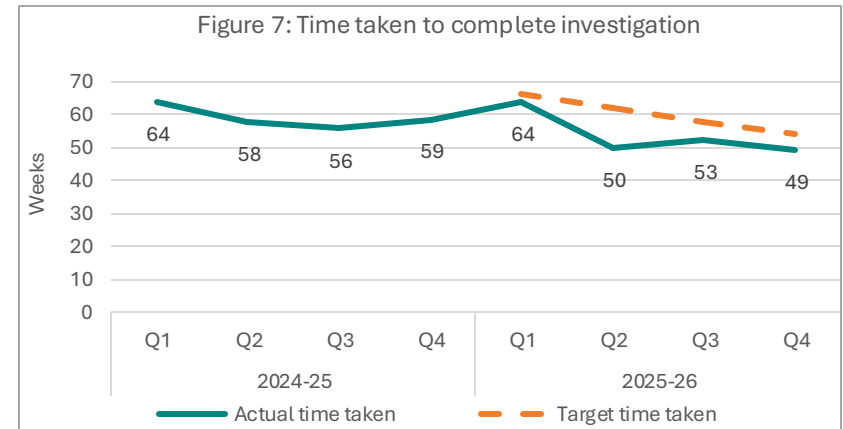
Fitness to practise KPI overview

Performance update

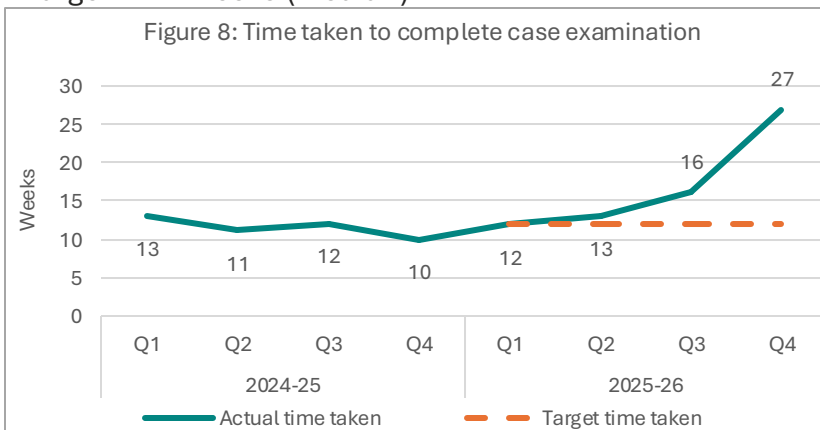
FTP1: Time taken to complete triage
 Target: ≤ 26 weeks (median) by March 2026.
 Q4 target: ≤ 26 weeks (median)



FTP2: Time taken to complete investigation³
 Target: ≤ 54 weeks (median) by March 2026.
 Q4 target: ≤ 54 weeks (median)



FTP3: Time taken to complete case examination
 Target: ≤ 12 weeks (median)



Commentary

- Timeliness is impacted by the high numbers of referrals and will be volatile until the backlog is reduced. We are consistently concluding higher numbers of triage cases than 2024/25.
- We are meeting timeliness targets in investigation, with the time taken tracking lower than projected throughout 2025/26.
- Vacancies have adversely affected timeliness at the CE stage. A new cohort of CE's are now picking up cases, with a second cohort starting in April

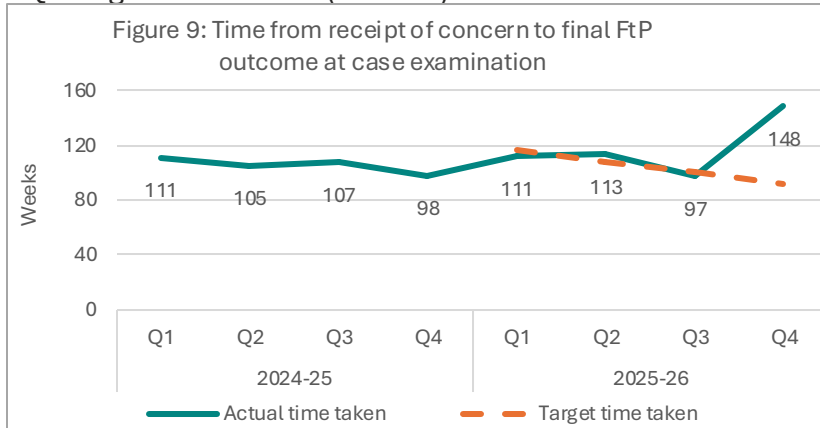
³ Some figures differ from previous publications. This is an expected change due to cases being adjourned back from the Investigations stage after previously being reported as closed at Case Examiner.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

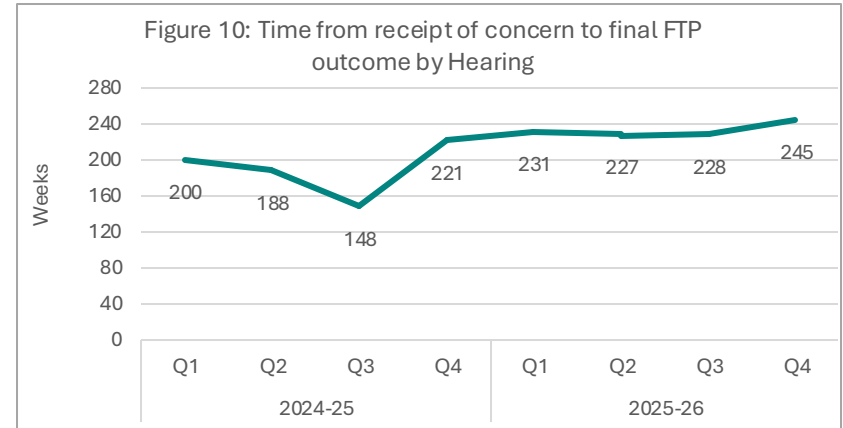
Fitness to practise KPI overview

Performance update

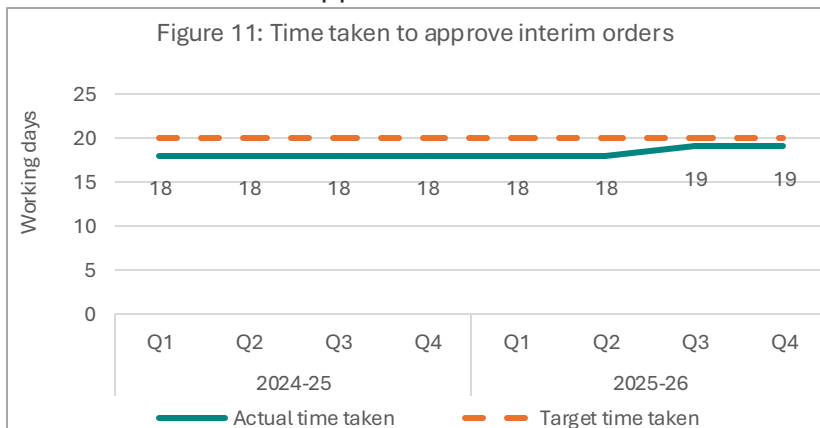
FTP4: Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise ⁴ outcome at case examination
 Target: ≤ 92 weeks (median) by March 2026.
 Q4 target: ≤ 92 weeks (median)



FTP5: Time from receipt of referral to final fitness to practise outcome at hearing



FTP6: Time taken to approve interim orders



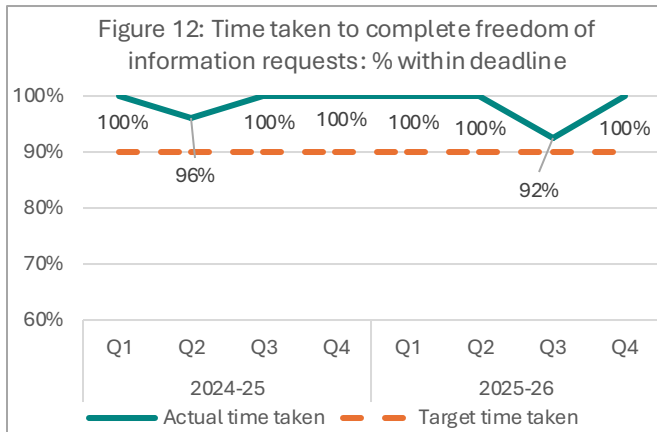
Commentary

- FTP4 performance is being affected by volumes at triage and case examiner stages. We expect fluctuations as teams prioritise reducing the volume of cases based on risk and case age.
- FTP5 is similarly affected as we continue to hear more cases with a prioritisation based on risk and age.
- We have achieved the KPI for FTP6.

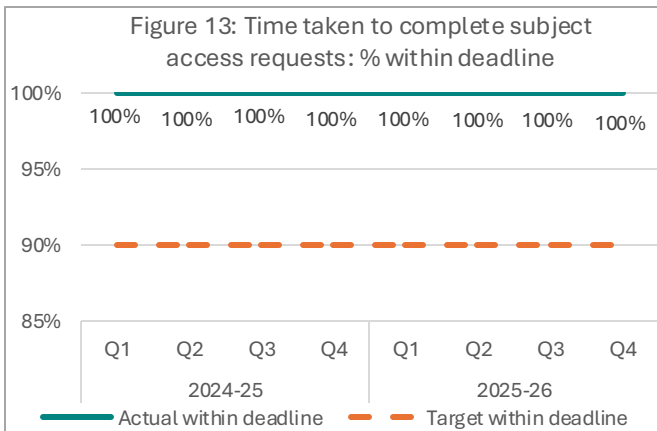
⁴ Some figures differ from previous publications. This is an expected change due to cases previously closed at the Triage stagelater being reopened and closed at Case Examiner.

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IG1: Time taken to complete FOI requests
 Target: ≥ 90% within deadline



IG2: Time taken to complete subject access requests
 Target : ≥ 90% within deadline



Commentary

- We met both of these KPIs.

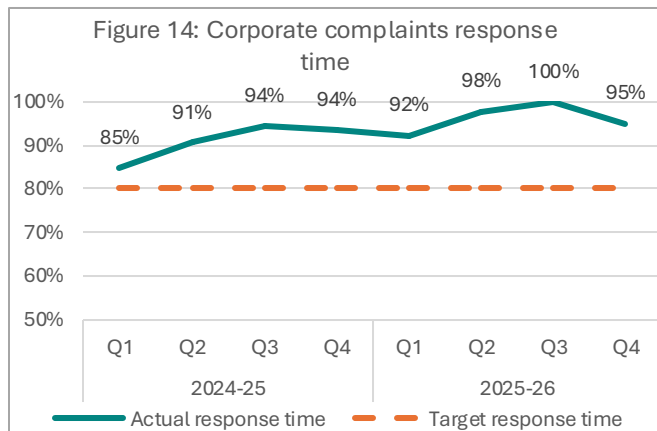
Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

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C1: Corporate complaints response time

Target: ≥ 80% within 20 working days



Commentary

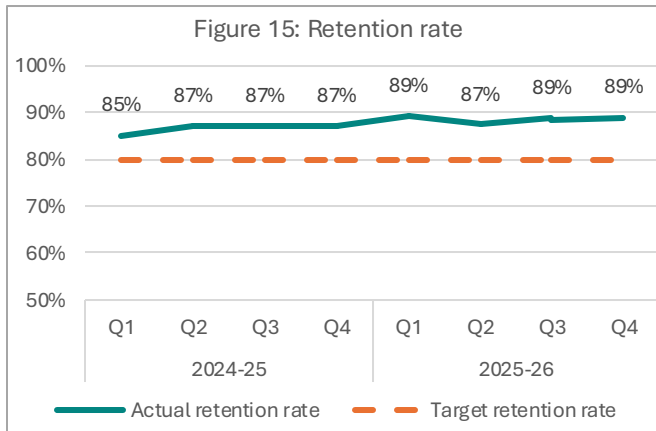
- We responded to 2 complaints outside the target in Q4. Both complaints required in-depth legal advice and in each case the reason for the delay was explained to the complainant in advance of the deadline. We are starting to find that more complaints are requiring input from legal due to their complexity and claims regarding compliance with statutory duties.
- It is worth noting that our median response time over the previous 12 months is still 15 days.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

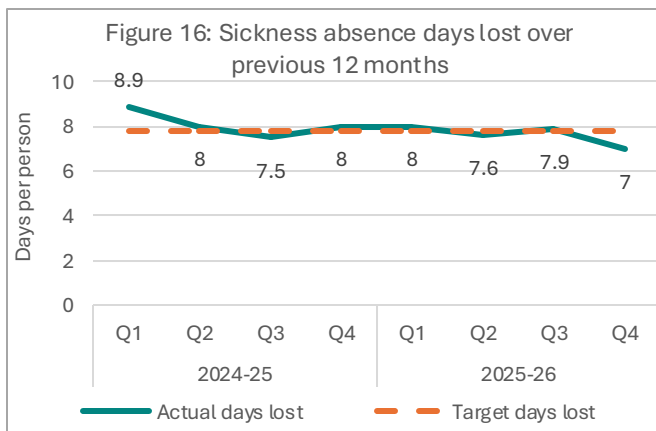
P1: Retention rate⁵

Target: ≥ 80%



P2: Sickness absence over last 12 months⁶

Target : 7.8 days



Commentary

- Sickness absence over the previous 12 months has fallen since Q3 from 7.9 to 7 days lost per employee.
- We have focussed on proactive identification and direct support to line managers with sickness absence cases. We continue to utilise our occupational health service for support and advice.
- Mental health continues to be the top reason for absence. A weekly connect in January signposted mechanisms and tools to support colleagues with their mental health.
- Our retention rate remains stable at 89%.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

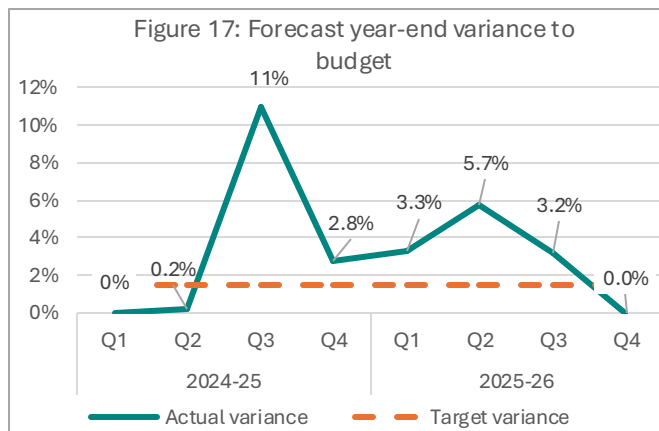
- No change.

⁵ Some figures differ from previous publications. This is due to a number of staff moving from Fixed-Term to Permanent contracts, the latter of which is relevant to the Retention calculation.

⁶ Some figures differ from previous publications due to retrospective changes to data. Figures for the 2024/5 have been recalculated in-line with our usual process, and the year-end position has changed from 7.9 to 8 working days

FIN1: Forecast year-end variance to budget

Target: +/- 1.5%



Commentary

Following in-year budget adjustments that were made in October 2025 and February 2026, the financial performance KPI was achieved with a variance of 0.0%.

Budget figures were re-stated in March 2026 to reflect the latest adjustment to grant-in-aid (GIA) that was agreed in February 2026, a £1.2m reduction. This follows receipt of a revised GIA letter from the DfE.

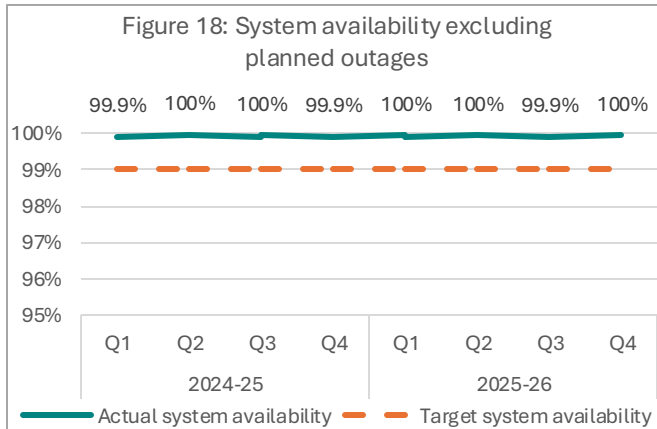
Full year 2025/26 revenue expenditure, net of fee income, was £14.69m, compared to the re-stated budget of £14.68m, a slight overspend of £7,143. This reflects the difficulty in estimating precise final figures.

The budget plan for 2026/27, approved by the board, responds to current operational pressures and proactively mitigates the risk of underspend arising again in the year ahead via carefully managed over-planning of activity. Adjustments will be made as required throughout the year, based on financial performance.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Financial risk will be kept under close review in the first half of 26/27, as there continue to be significant areas of uncertainty (e.g. mobilisation of key supplier contracts)

IT1: System availability excluding planned outages
 Target: $\geq 99\%$



Commentary

- We met this KPI.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

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Annex A

Q4 2025-26 performance data



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Education and training

Performance data

Education and training		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision (working days)	2025-26	N/A	38	54	47	47	58	34	36	46	56	42	52
	2024-25	41	30	42	47	38	47	50	56	61	43	37	42
Time taken for report to be written and agreed after inspection end date	2025-26	N/A	25	30	28	35	26	25	29	29	31	30	24
	2024-25	27	25	28	28	29	29	36	32	30	30	22	29
Time taken for the regulator decision after final report sent to regulator	2025-26	N/A	3	14	6	7	14	4	4	9	18	5	12
	2024-25	5	3	5	10	6	8	8	8	5	2	8	4
Number of course inspections decisions made	2025-26	0	7	5	3	1	2	2	2	3	2	3	5
	2024-25	10	8	9	13	4	12	15	5	9	6	7	3
Number of BIA reapprovals decisions made	2025-26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	5
	2024-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of AMHP reapprovals decisions made	2025-26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2024-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of approvals decisions made (including AMHP & BIA approvals)	2025-26	0	7	5	3	1	2	2	2	2	0	2	0
	2024-25	4	3	3	6	2	3	4	2	4	3	0	1

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Registration

Performance data

Registration			Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of registered social workers	2025-26	105,007	105,337	105,454	106,294	107,070	108,088	108,406	107,741	105,590	105,982	106,317	106,521	
	2024-25	103,000	103,133	103,353	104,270	105,025	105,814	106,395	105,625	103,893	104,351	104,594	104,857	
Number of social workers joining the register	2025-26	275	380	280	888	856	1,188	640	379	621	411	356	290	
	2024-25	245	198	332	966	812	946	843	378	515	479	267	319	
Number of social workers leaving the register	2025-26	123	49	161	42	76	169	320	1,063	2,773 ⁷	19	18	85	
	2024-25	103	65	109	48	56	157	263	1,186	2,216	16	23	56	
Number of new registration applications received	All applications	2025-26	349	457	521	1,230	1,226	1,352	605	594	219	406	286	270
		2024-25	298	255	580	1,356	976	1,569	677	542	285	411	283	525
	UK graduates	2025-26	235	338	413	1,104	1,125	1,233	507	463	170	341	227	187
		2024-25	139	122	451	1,221	858	1,442	535	431	190	312	172	392
	Overseas graduates	2025-26	114	119	108	126	101	119	98	131	49	65	59	83
		2024-25	159	133	129	135	118	127	142	111	95	99	111	133
Median time taken to approve registration applications (working days)	All applications	2025-26	5	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	8	7	6	5
		2024-25	8	12	2	3	3	4	7	3	4	5	8	3
	UK graduates	2025-26	5	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	6	5	5	3
		2024-25	2	2	1	2	2	4	6	2	3	5	6	2
	Overseas graduates	2025-26	12	20	17	21	19	20	21	22	23	21	23	21
		2024-25	65	48	35	26	21	23	19	15	21	19	17	19
Number of restoration applications received	2025-26	57	42	52	70	71	59	58	77	528	88	74	86	
	2024-25	59	61	72	60	49	71	62	85	526	101	72	67	

⁷ This figure differs from previous submissions. This is due to renewals movements continuing past the submission of the most recent report.

Registration

Performance data

Registration		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to approve restoration applications (working days)	2025-26	15	18	15	10	14	11	9	4	5	7	6	5
	2024-25	3	3	2	3	7	5	5	6	4	9	12	17
Number of misuse of title cases opened	2025-26	17	11	7	5	7	5	10	8	20	15	2	8
	2024-25	9	4	10	4	3	6	11	7	25	18	22	19
Number of misuse of title cases closed	2025-26	24	22	19	20	7	13	3	6	30	20	12	12
	2024-25	14	7	5	12	8	8	1	9	18	4	5	11
Median time taken to conclude misuse of title cases (working days)	2025-26	22	14	12	24	58	9	22	20	0	6	33	41
	2024-25	88	32	54	53	62	64	5	24	0	9	0	16
Number of phone calls received	2025-26	1,314	1,309	1,359	1,752	1,571	2,630	2,866	4,760	3,346	1,464	1,178	1,272
	2024-25	1,455	1,400	1,473	1,782	1,793	2,670	3,381	5,107	4,208	1,912	1,377	1,613
Median time taken to answer phone calls (minutes)	2025-26	4	2	3	3	3	7	8	3	9	4	3	2
	2024-25	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	2	8	5	4	5
Number of emails received	2025-26	2,438	2,404	2,380	2,611	2,915	4,215	3,966	5,052	4,039	3,263	2,241	2,312
	2024-25	3,387	2,793	2,473	2,973	3,022	4,074	4,058	4,402	3,462	2,595	2,513	2,759
Median time taken to answer emails (working days)	2025-26	3	2	7	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1
	2024-25	4	1	5	3	4	2	1	2	2	3	3	3

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Continued professional development

Performance data

Continued professional development		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Percentage of social workers that have submitted at least one piece of CPD	2025-26	3%	4%	5%	7%	8%	16%	33%	96%	0.3%	1%	2%	3%
	2024-25	4%	5%	6%	7%	10%	17%	33%	96%	0.3%	1%	2%	3%
Percentage of social workers meeting all CPD requirements	2025-26	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	11%	26%	95%	0.05% ⁸	0.2%	0.5%	1%
	2024-25	1%	2%	2%	3%	5%	11%	26%	96%	0.04%	0.2%	0.4%	1%

⁸ This figure differs from previous submissions due to data error . .

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Fitness to practise - triage

Performance data

Fitness to practise – triage ⁹		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of concerns received	2025-26	193	184	210	250	211	194	233	204	237	252	242	260
	2024-25	128	158	151	158	140	156	155	150	193	180	191	175
Median time taken to complete triage (weeks) ¹⁰	2025-26	25	31	31	37	42	35	33	25	17	36	31	23
	2024-25	22	21	11	28	26	27	38	33	36	28	18	17
Number of open triage cases	2025-26	1,907	1,926	1,993	2,083	2,128	2,134	2,215	2,254	2,380	2,448	2,481	2,424
	2024-25	1,298	1,344	1,399	1,436	1,458	1,505	1,527	1,573	1,696	1,769	1,843	1,887
Median time open cases have spent in triage (weeks)	2025-26	25	26	25	24	22	22	22	23	24	25	25	25
	2024-25	22	23	25	27	28	29	26	27	27	28	27	27
Number of concluded triage cases ¹⁰	2025-26	187	179	148	175	173	205	182	176	128	201	226	349
	2024-25	157	123	112	128	122	105	136	107	78	126	135	138
Percentage of cases closed at triage	2025-26	87%	80%	79%	87%	82%	86%	82%	86%	78%	82%	89%	86%
	2024-25	80%	82%	83%	78%	80%	74%	89%	81%	76%	79%	85%	80%
Percentage of cases progressed to investigation	2025-26	13%	20%	21%	13%	18%	14%	18%	14%	22%	18%	11%	14%
	2024-25	20%	18%	17%	22%	20%	26%	11%	19%	24%	21%	15%	20%

⁹ 2024-25 figures differ from last year's submissions. We have grouped three stages (concern, pre-triage and triage) into one triage stage, and recalculated these metrics accordingly.

¹⁰ Some figures differ from previous submissions. These are expected changes due to cases being re-opened after publication.

Fitness to practise - investigation

Performance data

Fitness to practise - investigation		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to complete investigation (weeks) ¹¹	2025-26	64	57	64	50	50	51	68	36	40	39	46	75
	2024-25	66	73	33	63	65	32	56	46	63	54	58	80
Number of cases into investigation (including adjournments)	2025-26	29	40	34	33	35	37	45	29	33	40	33	57
	2024-25	42	34	30	44	57	39	25	26	23	37	31	43
Number of open investigation cases	2025-26	464	460	441	434	430	434	438	443	436	440	446	480
	2024-25	567	555	547	552	535	537	522	506	493	487	465	471
Median time open cases have spent in investigation (weeks)	2025-26	55	53	47	46	45	44	37	38	39	38	39	38
	2024-25	44	45	49	50	50	44	63	55	55	44	55	28
Number of concluded investigation cases	2025-26	35	42	53	40	38	33	40	24	40	36	27	23
	2024-25	46	45	38	38	74	37	40	42	37	41	53	37

¹¹ Some figures differ from previous submissions. These are expected changes due to cases being re-opened after publication.

Fitness to practise – case examiner

Performance data

Fitness to practise – case examiner		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to complete case examination (weeks) ¹²	2025-26	12	11	13	7	13	14	16	14	17	26	27	27
	2024-25	14	12	13	11	11	12	13	12	10	13	12	8
Number of cases into case examination (including adjournments)	2025-26	39	43	53	41	40	32	43	22	37	35	27	22
	2024-25	54	43	41	40	74	39	42	45	36	44	53	40
Number of open case examination cases	2025-26	80	101	120	119	130	129	139	137	154	172	177	170
	2024-25	133	142	140	122	123	111	82	89	87	91	101	80
Median time open cases have spent in case examination (weeks)	2025-26	7	7	7	8	9	10	11	13	12	14	14	16
	2024-25	9	10	11	12	8	8	8	6	7	8	5	7
Number of concluded case examination cases	2025-26	32	18	31	32	23	23	20	19	15	13	14	20
	2024-25	33	22	30	41	40	39	59	29	34	27	33	45
% of cases closed at case examination	2025-26	47%	67%	61%	81%	74%	57%	65%	68%	73%	69%	57%	85%
	2024-25	45%	91%	80%	78%	70%	72%	80%	83%	74%	67%	70%	78%

¹² Some figures differ from previous submissions. These are expected changes due to cases being re-opened after publication.

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Fitness to practise – case examiner

Performance data

Fitness to practise – case examiner		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
% of cases progressed to hearings	2025-26	53%	33%	39%	19%	26%	43%	35%	32%	27%	31%	43%	15%
	2024-25	55%	9%	20%	22%	30%	28%	20%	17%	26%	33%	30%	22%
Median time from receipt of concern to final FtP outcome at case examination (weeks)	2025-26	122	144	84	111	104	136	85	120	116	141	131	160
	2024-25	104	107	133	100	93 ¹³	109	113	99	98	106	103	85
Number of cases closed with 'No Impairment'	2025-26	6	7	9	15	9	4	9	9	3	2	2	15
	2024-25	8	11	15	22	14	18	32	17	14	13	17	22
Number of cases closed with 'Impairment'	2025-26	9	5	10	11	8	9	4	4	8	7	6	1
	2024-25	7	9	9	10	14	10	14	7	11	5	6	13
Number of Accepted Disposals offered ¹⁴	2025-26	4	11	10	17	11	8	9	10	8	4	3	5
	2024-25	14	7	11	21	20	10	10	14	7	10	15	14

¹³ This figure differs from previous submissions. These are expected changes due to cases being re-opened after publication.

¹⁴ Some figures differ from previous submissions. This is due to retrospective changes being captured on the system after the data had been compiled and reported.

Fitness to practise – hearing

Performance data

Fitness to practise – hearing		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time from receipt of concern to final FtP outcome at Hearing (weeks)	2025-26	231	217	260	337	204	214	230	229	226	232	255	251
	2024-25	198	229	193	226	166	185	181	230	133	174	221	228
Number of cases into hearings	2025-26	27	7	13	8	6	14	7	8	7	6	7	6
	2024-25	19	5	12	14	12	11	13	6	11	12	11	16
Number of open cases in hearings	2025-26	428	431	440	442	446	449	447	444	441	435	425	403
	2024-25	392	391	386	386	393	399	410	414	421	426	426	412
Median time open cases awaiting a hearing (weeks)	2025-26	140	103	106	106	109	112	115	113	115	119	117	118
	2024-25	79	82	84	108	113	118	114	116	125	129	133	140
Number of concluded hearings ¹⁵	2025-26	1	3	2	4	2	7	8	9	7	7	16	24
	2024-25	5	6	2	6	4	3	2	1	1	4	11	19
Median time concluded cases spent in pre-hearing (weeks) ¹⁵	2025-26	162	132	140	160	114	165	155	167	131	174	186	179
	2024-25	105	115	172	140	115	99	79	166	86	92	117	120

¹⁵ Some figures differ from previous submissions. This is due to a change in calculation to take the earliest decision on a case as opposed to the latest.

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Fitness to practise – interim order and quality

Performance data

Fitness to practise – hearing		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time take to approve interim orders (working days)	2025-26	14	18	18	N/A	18	19	19	19	17	17	20	19
	2024-25	17	18	26	N/A	18	18	18	18	21	18	17	18 ¹⁶
Number of interim order application hearings	2025-26	2	6	4	0	2	8	2	4	2	1	1	5
	2024-25	1	3	1	0	3	3	1	2	4	3	2	2
Number of interim orders imposed	2025-26	2	6	4	0	2	8	2	4	2	1	1	4
	2024-25	1	3	1	0	3	3	1	2	4	3	2	1

Fitness to practise – internal quality		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
FtP internal quality score	2025-26	100%	89%	100%	91%	N/A ¹⁷	94%	84%	89%	N/A ¹⁷	86%	96%	88%
	2024-25	97%	88%	94%	87%	90%	88%	97%	97%	97%	100%	87%	94%

¹⁶ This figure differs from previous submissions.

¹⁷ No Decision Review Group meeting held in month.

People

Performance data

People		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Retention rate ¹⁸	2025-26	89%	89%	89%	88%	88%	87%	88%	88%	89%	88%	89%	89%
	2024-25	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	87%	86%	87%	87%	87%	86%	87%
Headcount of staff	2025-26	276	271	276	279	288	285	300	309	308	314	316	325
	2024-25	233	232	234	237	241	247	250	255	258	263	264	275
Days lost to sickness per employee over previous 12 months ¹⁹	2025-26	8.2	8.2	8.1	8	7.8	7.6	8	7.9	7.9	7.8	7.4	7
	2024-25	8.9	8.8	8.9	8.9	8.5	8	7.7	7.5	7.5	7.2	7.4	8

¹⁸ Some figures differ from previous publications. This is due to a number of staff moving from Fixed-Term to Permanent contracts, the latter of which is relevant to the Retention calculation.

¹⁹ Some figures differ from previous submissions. This is due to retrospective changes being captured on the system after the data had been compiled and reported.

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Corporate complaints

Performance data

Corporate complaints ²⁰		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Corporate complaints responded to within timescales	2025-26	91%	90%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	87%	100%
	2024-25	74%	94%	91%	83%	100%	92%	96%	100%	88%	94%	100%	89%
Number of corporate complaints received (stage 1 only)	2025-26	5	9	10	17	6	10	16	14	18	16	7	11
	2024-25	18	12	6	9	8	16	15	10	12	11	5	12
Number of corporate complaints that missed 20-day timescale	2025-26	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
	2024-25	5	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1
Median response time over previous 12 months (working days)	2025-26	16	16	15	16	16	16	16	15	15	15	15	15
	2024-25	15	15	15	15	16	16	16	15	16	16	16	16

²⁰ Some figures differ from previous submissions. This is due to retrospective changes being captured on the system after the data had been compiled and reported.

Annex B

Q4 2025-26 course reapproval and approval decisions



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Course approval decisions

Provider	Course	Region	Inspection dates		Link to inspection report	Decision
			From	to		
Leeds Beckett University	Practice of Best Interests Assessor Module	Yorkshire and Humberside	28 October 2025	29 October 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/wmzpmw4m/20260130_lbur1_b_bia_final.pdf	Approved
Bournemouth University	MCA 2005 (BIA)	South West	07 October 2025	08 October 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/tbynh1lp/20260213_bur1_b_final.pdf	Approved with conditions
Middlesex University	Best Interest Assessor	London	04 November 2025	05 November 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/oisjz1nj/200226_bia-report_mur1_b_rd.pdf	Approved with conditions
University College Birmingham	BA Hons (Social Work) Apprenticeship	Midlands	09 December 2025	12 December 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/4m2b0dv3/19022026_ucb_cpp500501_ba_pgdiptinal.pdf	Approved
University College Birmingham	Pg Dip Social Work Apprenticeship (Full time)	Midlands	09 December 2025	12 December 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/4m2b0dv3/19022026_ucb_cpp500501_ba_pgdiptinal.pdf	Approved
Northumbria University, Newcastle	Law and Practice for Best Interests Assessors	North East	04 November 2025	05 November 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/pkmezmzf/bia-report-final-nunr1_b-04032026.pdf	Approved with conditions

Course reapproval decisions

Provider	Course	Region	Inspection dates		Link to inspection report	Decision
			From	to		
Sheffield Hallam University	Best Interest Assessor	Yorkshire and Humberside	12 November 2025	04 December 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/kbu/f3lew/20260331_shur1_bcp334_final-v5.pdf	Non approval
Bond Solon (in association with Teesside University)	Best Interest Assessor	London	25 November 2025	26 November 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/okyp1cew/20251219_bsr_bia_final.pdf	Approved with conditions
University of Brighton	SS7132 Deprivation of Liberty safeguards; Skills and assessments	South East	02 December 2025	03 December 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/2tyji1dq/20260323_ubrir1_bcp324_ba_final_1-1-1.pdf	Approved with conditions
University of Lancashire	Best Interest Assessor (SW4120)	North West	02 December 2025	03 December 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/wc/hliqts/bia-inspection-report-uclr1_b.pdf	Approved with conditions



Fitness to practise – performance Q4 2025/26

Agenda Item 10 Paper Ref 07a

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
Philip Hallam, Executive Director, Regulation

Author
Philip Hallam, Executive Director, Regulation
Stephen Barnett, Assistant Director, Regulation (Investigations)
Rachel Lloyd, Assistant Director - Regulation (Registration, Advice, and Adjudications)
Alexandra Hayward, Fitness to Practise Performance Manager

Date
15 May 2026

Reviewed by
Colum Conway, Chief Executive

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective
SO6: Review our fitness to practise case resolution approach, to improve service quality and fairness, and ensure value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Statutory regulatory functions – Open

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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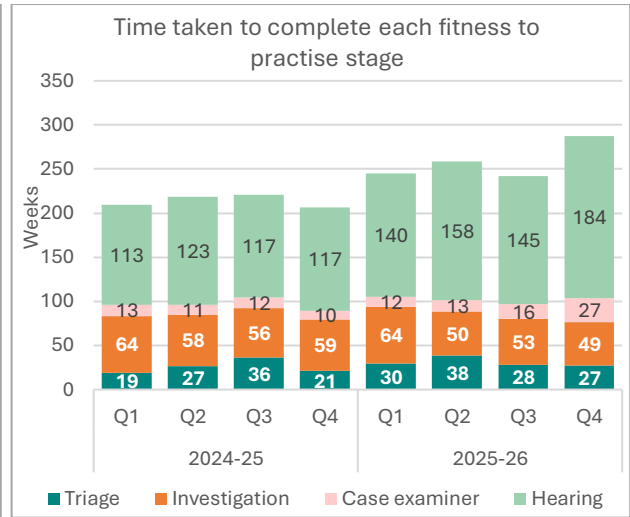
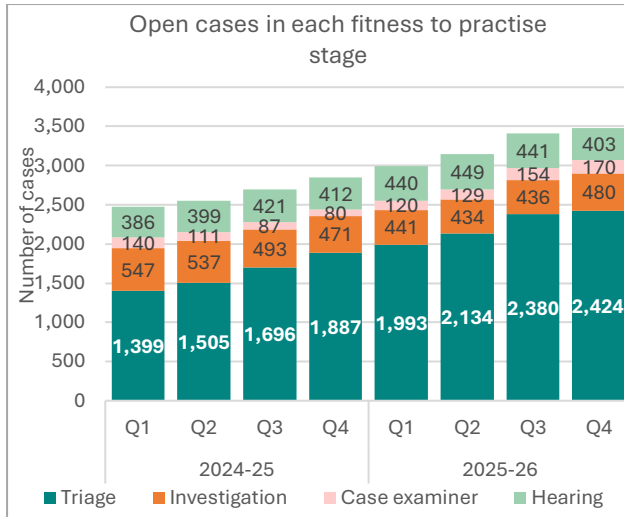
1. Summary

This report sets out performance across the fitness to practise service for the fourth quarter of 2025/26. This paper focuses on the throughput of cases at each stage of fitness to practise and sets out performance at the end of the financial year. The paper also considers closure rates and decision-making outcomes, and references performance against timeliness indicators. It sets out activities that have taken place over the quarter and looks ahead to activities planned for the next quarter.

Headline performance for this quarter is as follows:

- We have closed more cases at triage in Q4 than in any previous quarter and above our forecast. Over the course of the year 59% more triage decisions were made than in 2024/25.
- The number of open triage cases remains higher than forecast earlier in the year. There has been a 38% increase in referrals in 2025/26 compared with the previous financial year.
- Investigations performance is better than forecast with 2025/26 generally showing a trend of improved timeliness.
- As expected, case examiner vacancies earlier in the year, and the need to train new case examiners once recruited, have impacted case examinations' performance; the first cohort of new case examiners were allocated cases in March and the second cohort will be ready to take cases in late April.
- Additional resources at the post-case examinations stage have allowed for more cases to be progressed and readied for hearing than originally forecast. Alongside this, our re-forecasts of throughput across the earlier stages of fitness to practise has reduced the expected number of cases we anticipated would be referred for hearings in Q4 of this year, and into 2026/27. Therefore, fewer cases are awaiting a hearing at the end of the financial year than modelled at the beginning of the financial year.
- We met our targets for scheduled hearings for the year.

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2. Triage

Triage continues to be affected by a backlog of cases, and the large and sustained increase in the number of referrals coming in. However, the triage service made significantly more decisions in Q4 than in any previous quarter, and 59% more triage decisions were made in 2025/26 than in 2024/25. In March 2026 the overall triage caseload fell for the first time in the year.

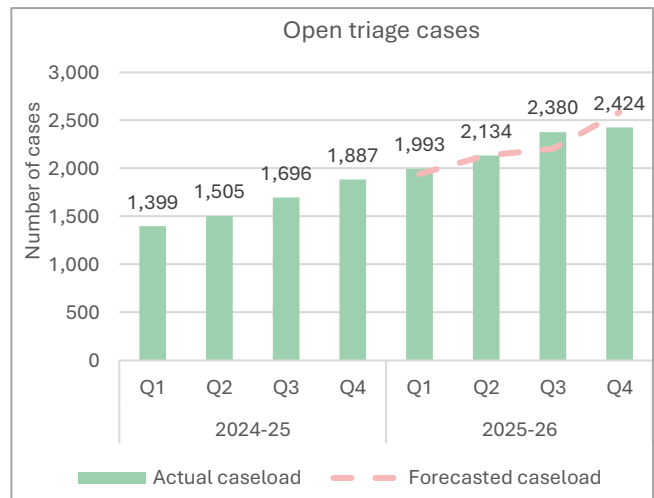
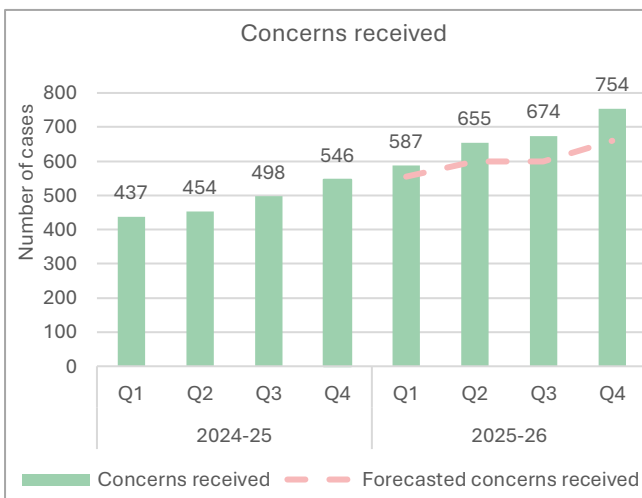
The key performance indicator, time taken to complete triage, has improved in Q4 and is close to target. However, as previously discussed with the board, there will be continued volatility in this indicator throughout the next financial year as older backlog cases are closed alongside newer ones.

We received 38% more referrals in 2025/26 than in 2024/25. Q4 has also seen a higher number of new concerns received than in previous quarters in 2025/26. The average number of concerns received during 2023/24 and 2024/25 was 154 per month, and the average for 2025/26 was 223. We have re-modelled the incoming referral rate again to reflect this further increase and will continue to review referral rate changes and available resources.



Colleagues in the policy team will be presenting initial findings from their research on the potential reasons for the increase in referrals to ELT in May 2026. We are also continuing to liaise with other regulators who have seen similar increases in referrals over the last 18 months.

Triage decision making in Q4 was above forecast - the total number of triage decisions made was 776 against an April 2025 forecast of 702. Each month in Q4 has seen an increase in decisions made. This improvement has been led by the appointment of a new Head of Triage role, and the testing of new ways of working related to the outcomes of the process review. The high number of decisions in Q4 has also been supported by the recruitment of temporary senior decision makers and some use of overtime.



The open caseload at the end of Q4 was 2,424, significantly higher than the original April 25 forecast of 1,267, and despite additional resources being brought in and more decisions being made. Planned reductions in caseload have been undermined by the sustained increase in referrals throughout 2025/26.

Closure rates in 2025/26 continue to be higher than our assumption of 80% of cases closing once the triage test is applied. In Q4, closure rates at the triage stage were at 86% (see below).

The table below highlights the higher number of triage decisions made in 2025/26 when compared to 2024/25. This financial year we made 59% more triage decisions when compared to last year. However, the number of decisions made was outstripped by the number of new referrals coming in. This has led to volume of cases at the triage stage increasing, albeit there are early signs of this number beginning to reduce at the end of Q4.

Triage decisions						Total decisions made
FY	Q	Closed		Progressed		
2025-26	Q4	667	86%	109	14%	776
	Q3	401	83%	85	17%	486
	Q2	471	85%	82	15%	553
	Q1	422	82%	92	18%	514
2024-25	Q4	326	82%	73	18%	399
	Q3	267	83%	54	17%	321
	Q2	275	77%	80	23%	355
	Q1	319	81%	73	19%	392

The KPI for time taken to complete the triage stage of the fitness to practise process will fluctuate over the course of the financial year as older cases are concluded or progressed. For Q4 the time taken was 27 weeks against the quarterly target of 26 weeks. The end of year KPI target is 26 weeks.

Actions we have taken this quarter to address the high volume of cases in triage, and improve our approach, have included:

- Appointment of a new role of Head of Triage. This has clearly helped improve performance during Q4 including through the testing of new ways of working.
- The process review project to streamline processes across triage and investigations has almost concluded. During Q4 we brought in an external consultant to specifically add to the work that has been done in triage.

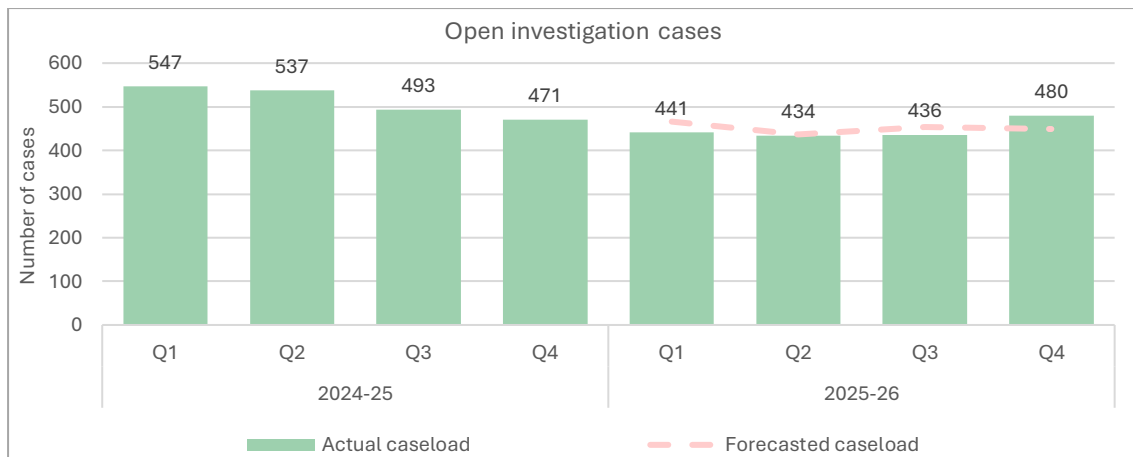
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- Recruitment and retention remains a challenge within the service, with a number of staff moving to other roles in the organisation during this period. However, we continue to recruit to fill roles and have also reviewed the triage service structure as part of the process review.

3. Investigations

Performance in the Investigations service is better than forecast and has generally been improving throughout 2025/26.

- Time taken to conclude investigations is better than the Q4 target at 49 weeks.
- The overall caseload has risen during Q4 and the service has also been taking on responsibility for cases referred by case examiners that are awaiting a hearing. This is intended to improve communication and risk management for this cohort of cases.
- The open caseload has been lower than forecast throughout 2025/26, with the throughput of decisions being corresponding lower also.



Our targets, and results, in the investigations service for Q4 are as follows:

Investigation throughput 2025/26					
FY	Q	Forecast Jan 25	Forecast April 25	Actual	Variance to April forecast
No. of decisions	Q1	147	147	130	-17
	Q2	161	161	111	-50
	Q3	176	176	104	-72

	Q4	176	176	86	-90
Caseload	Q1	473	466	441	-25
	Q2	512	519	434	-85
	Q3	541	550	436	-114
	Q4	596	605	480	-125

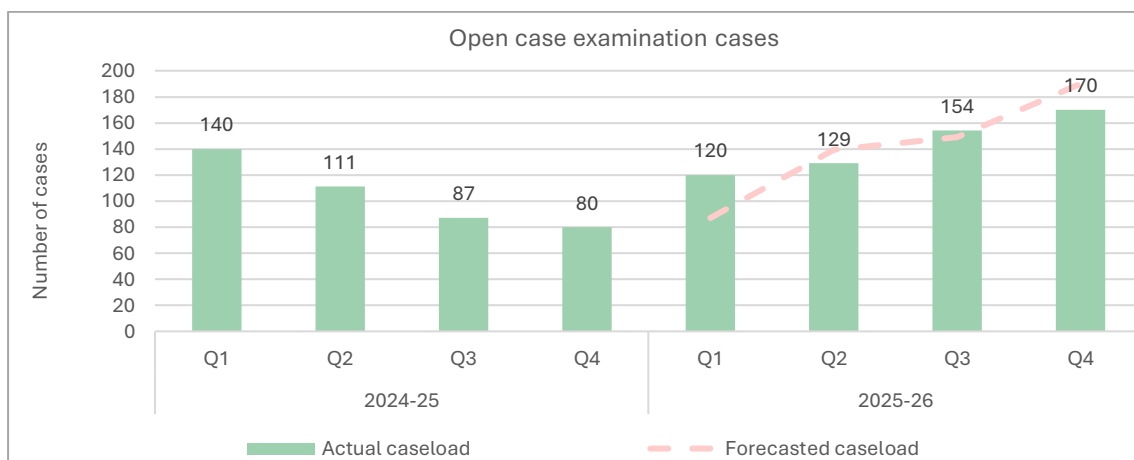
The open caseload is affected by a higher percentage of cases being closed at triage than originally planned (and therefore fewer cases progressing into an investigation), as well as the backlog in triage. Consequently, there are fewer cases in the investigations service than originally modelled.

As with triage, the KPI for time taken to complete the investigation stage of the fitness to practise process has fluctuated over the course of the financial year as older cases are concluded or progressed. However, performance on this indicator is tracking better than originally planned. For Q4 the time taken was 49 weeks against an end of year KPI target of 54 weeks.

We continue to improve our approach to the investigation of cases, and activities taken in the investigations service this quarter have included:

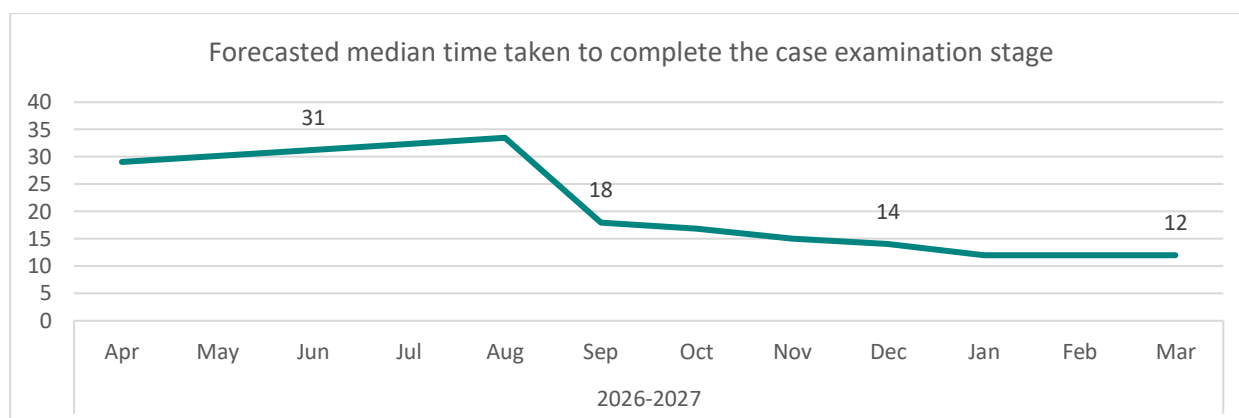
- Progressing the process review and re-engineering project (alongside the triage process review). Recommendations for Investigations are now settled, and a final report will be shared with the Executive Leadership Team in May 2026.
- Further work on establishing improved management and monitoring of cases that are currently awaiting a hearing.

4. Case examination



As previously discussed with the board, performance at the case examination stage over the last two quarters has been impacted by 3 vacancies within the team, following a long period of relative stability. Case examiners make decisions in pairs (one lay and one professional case examiner). As a result, a vacancy directly affects the number of cases we can conclude. These vacancies have now been filled, and we have also recruited additional resource to address the backlog. The first cohort completed their training in March 2026 and started to make decisions on cases, the second cohort will conclude their induction and training in April 2026.

As forecast, Q4 median time taken to complete the case examination stage of the fitness to practise process has risen to 27 weeks against the target of 12 weeks. Now that new case examiners are making decisions the open caseload will start to reduce (and has begun to do so in April 2026). As older cases are concluded the KPI will start to reduce from Q2 2026/27, returning to target by the end of the FY.



Of those cases concluded at the case examination stage, outcomes have been as follows:

		Case examiner decisions						Total decisions made
FY	Q	Closed no further action		Accepted disposal		Referred to hearing		
2025-26	Q4	19	41%	14	30%	13	28%	46 ¹
	Q3	21	39%	16	30%	17	31%	54
	Q2	28	36%	28	36%	22	28%	78
	Q1	22	27%	24	30%	35	43%	81
2024-25	Q4	52	50%	24	23%	29	28%	105
	Q3	63	52%	32	26%	26	21%	121
	Q2	54	45%	34	28%	32	27%	120
	Q1	34	40%	25	29%	26	31%	85

¹ One additional case closed by other means in Q4

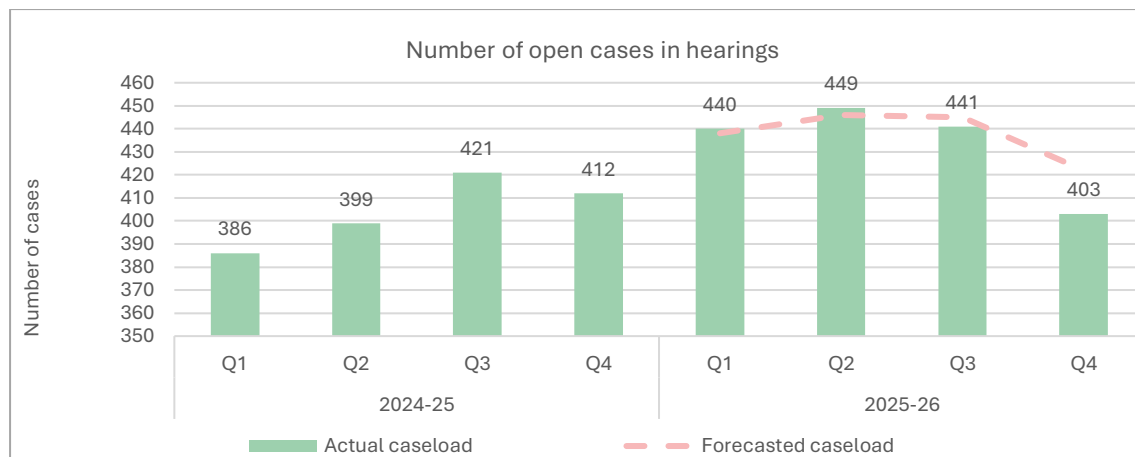
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The referral rate to hearing was within the forecast range, with 28% of cases referred this quarter.

For 2025/26, we have also set out a target for the median time taken from receipt of a concern to the closure at the case examination stage. By the end of the year, we have set out that this time taken should be 92 weeks. For this quarter, the time taken is 148 weeks. As with KPIs above, this KPI will be subject to volatility until the volume and age of cases reduces. For the previous 3 quarters this KPI was 111, 113 and 97 weeks respectively.

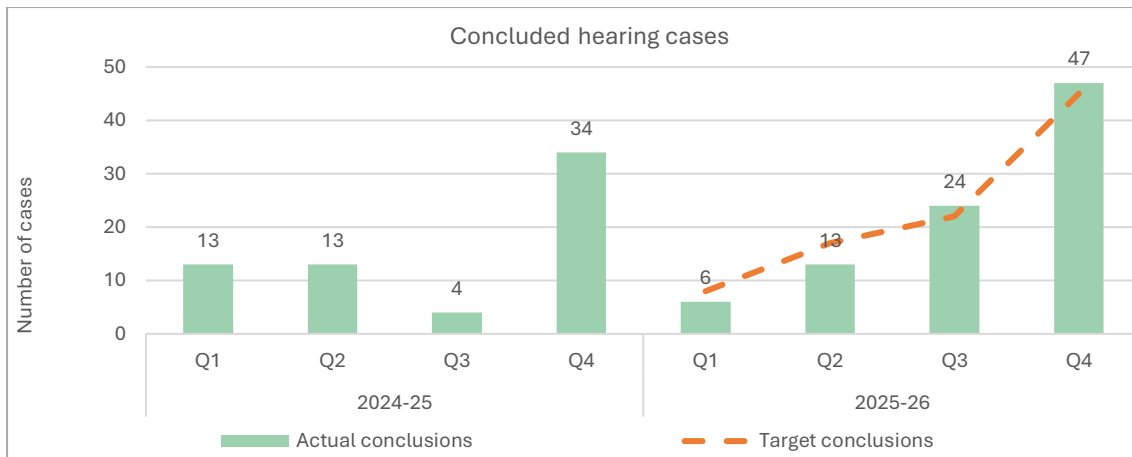
5. Hearings

There are currently 403 cases at the hearings stage of the fitness to practise process. Over the course of the quarter, 13 cases have been referred by case examiners, against a forecast of 18.



We continue to work closely with our external legal provider to use our available financial resources to progress as many cases for hearing as possible. Additional resources available this year are enabling more cases to be progressed than previously anticipated. Q4 saw significant increases in the number of final hearings held and we ended the year with a caseload of 403, lower than the original forecast of 538. We forecast that 91 cases would be concluded at the hearings stage by the end of the financial year, and 93 cases were concluded.

We continue to identify and schedule cases for listing in 2026/27.



The process of procurement for a second legal provider to provide extra capacity to address the hearings backlog continues. This process is currently due to conclude in Q1 of 2026/27, and we anticipate that a second provider would be able to add extra capacity from Q2 2026/27.

We continue to monitor the time taken from receipt of concern to the final outcome at the hearings stage. Timeliness here will continue to be affected by the backlog of cases awaiting conclusion at this stage. For Q4, this KPI is 245 weeks.

This quarter, 47 cases were disposed of via a final hearing, with the following outcomes:

Hearing outcomes	2025-26				2024-25 ²			
	Q4	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3	Q2	Q1
No impairment, no further action	16	3	5	2	6	1	1	4
No impairment, advice	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No impairment, warning	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	2
Impaired, no further action	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Impaired, advice	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Impaired, warning order	3	1	0	0	6	0	0	0
Impaired, conditions of practice order	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	2
Impaired, suspension order	5	8	3	3	6	0	3	3
Impaired, removal order	19	10	5	1	13	3	8	2

In addition to the above outcomes, we have also concluded three additional cases by other means, taking the total number of concluded final hearings to 93 at the end of Q4.

² Some figures differ from previous submissions. This is due to a change in calculation to take the earliest decision on a case as opposed to the latest.

We also held three additional hearings for remittal cases this financial year.

6. Interim orders and case review

We continue to meet our KPI target for the time taken to approve interim orders.

In Q4, 7 interim order applications were considered by adjudicators, and 6 orders granted (6 suspension orders)

Our case review team continue to support social workers subject to interim or final orders, and in Q4 60 interim order review and 21 final order review hearings events were held.

7. Other fitness to practise activities

In Q4 there were four ongoing judicial review claims at permission stage (two in respect of cases closed at triage, one in respect of a referral where a triage decision has not yet been made and one brought by a former registrant). There is also one ongoing judicial review at permission stage where Social Work England has been named as an interested party.

Alongside this, we continue to receive learning points from the Professional Standards Authority relating to cases they have considered through their section 29 process. This process allows for the Professional Standards Authority to review final fitness to practise panel decisions and disseminate any learning identified. We review these learning points and share internally and with our partners.

Our Decision Review Group continues to review decisions from across the different stages of the fitness to practise process. Our internal quality score for Q4 is 87%, and for the year is 91%.

In Q4, our legal team received 2 new applications to review a case examiner decision, and we had 4 applications ongoing. Of these applications:

- 1 was considered at stage 1 of the process, 0 have progressed to stage 2 of the process and 0 are awaiting consideration at stage 2
- 1 case was referred back to the case examiners for a fresh decision
- 4 cases were determined ineligible and subsequently closed

In Q4 we have received 5 applications for voluntary removal from the register by registrants currently in the fitness to practise process. We made 1 decision in the quarter, with the application being granted.

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8. Looking ahead to Q1 2026/27

We will continue to pro-actively monitor and make adjustments to our referral assumptions and our decision-making targets in 2026/27. On the assumption that referral rates remain high, our current modelling shows a reduction in the triage backlog throughout 2026/27 and into 2027/28. Our process review will conclude in May 2026 and will include recommendations for introducing new approaches to triage management and revised resource models responding to current referral rates. This will include proposals for a restructured staffing establishment in triage, alongside the need for temporary triage roles in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

In **investigations** we will continue to work closely with our external legal provider to ensure that a pipeline of ongoing work at all stages is maintained. 200 cases awaiting a hearing will have greater oversight from the Investigations team, and our external legal provider has been undertaking a review of all these cases to help progress them ahead of further pre-hearing work. The procurement of a second external legal provider is due to conclude in Q1 of 2026/27.

Our process review in **triage and investigations** will report to ELT in May with the implementation of recommendations planned throughout 2026/27.

In **case examinations** the 2 new cohorts are being embedded in the team and supported to scale up their caseload, as they grow in experience. This will address the backlog. We will conclude our review of the case examiner establishment, to ensure that we build in further capacity to scale up at pace if we experience unexpected vacancies.

In **hearings and case review** we will continue to list cases for hearing as expeditiously as possible, using resources available to us and working closely with our external legal provider. Now that our process for adjudicator consensual disposal is available, we will also consider any cases that might be suitable for conclusion using this process.

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The role of seriousness in FtP proceedings in social work in England

Agenda Item 12 Paper Ref 09

Paper for the

Social Work England Board

Sponsor

Sarah Blackmore, Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement

Author

Ben Redmond, Research and policy officer

Date

15 May 2026

Reviewed by

Natalie Day, Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy

This paper is for

Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO6: Review our fitness to practise case resolution approach, to improve service quality and fairness, and ensure value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and appetite

Statutory regulatory functions – Open

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

N/A

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1. Summary

Seriousness is central to assessing the severity of a potential impairment to practice and to determining an appropriate sanction. However, given the nuanced contextual factors, the way seriousness is used and understood can vary throughout Social Work England’s fitness to practice (FtP) process and requires decision makers to take a broad approach to determining seriousness in any given case. Many other regulators report similar experiences.

The concept of seriousness needs to allow clear and consistent decision making. It also needs to leave space to consider nuanced contextual factors in each case. Research and engagement with FtP decision makers has an important role to play in developing clearer and more consistent approaches to seriousness.

In 2025, we commissioned ICE Creates to undertake research exploring how the concept of seriousness influences FtP proceedings and outcomes, with a focus on social work in England. The key objectives were to explore:

- How Social Work England has described and applied the concept of seriousness in FtP outcomes.
- How health and social care regulators, and the Professional Standards Authority, define seriousness and how this has evolved over time.
- How seriousness is understood and interpreted within complex aspects of FtP such as misconduct, dishonesty and the public interest.
- How decision makers use concepts, guidance and case law related to seriousness in Social Work England’s FtP proceedings.
- The role of human factors, such as the workplace environment, in determining seriousness in FtP cases.

As part of this project, 4 separate research activities were carried out, including a literature review, case analysis, interviews, and focus groups (albeit with a relatively small sample). The findings give a helpful steer of how seriousness is being approached in Social Work England and across other professional health and care regulators. This paper provides a high-level overview of findings, conclusions and next steps.

2. Action required

For assurance and noting.

3. Commentary

Findings

Defining seriousness

Certain types of FtP case were understood to be serious by all regulators. These cases often involve a clear breach of public trust, direct risk of harm to service users, or behaviours that

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are seen as fundamentally incompatible with professional practise. Cases involving the following attributes were commonly seen as serious:

- criminality
- abuse of power and professional boundaries
- abusive and aggressive behaviour
- confidentiality and data integrity

Challenges in defining seriousness

However, the research findings highlighted that assigning seriousness to some types of cases may be less straightforward. Cases where boundaries between a registrant’s personal and professional life were blurred were considered particularly complex, such as:

- drink driving
- recreational drug use
- family court proceedings
- the right to protest

Dishonesty is usually viewed as serious when assessing cases. However, contextual factors may influence how serious a case involving dishonesty might be. Public perception also adds a level of complexity when defining seriousness but is difficult to measure as it can vary across different groups of people and over time. Public perception is more likely to be a consideration where a case has attracted significant public attention. This may also be more likely in cases which relate to a registrant’s private life.

Cases involving behaviours that may be considered discriminatory were also considered complex. This may be due to factors such as:

- The varied beliefs and evolving public discourse on divisive issues
- The impact of social media in making private opinions and beliefs public

Assigning underlying intent (such as cultural misunderstanding, lack of awareness or malice) was seen as difficult in cases where registrants had acted in a way that might be discriminatory. This added a level of uncertainty and complexity to decisions around seriousness. Separating isolated mistakes from a pattern of misconduct was also highlighted as challenging for regulators.

Some broader factors shaping how seriousness may be viewed in a case included:

- context (such as staffing levels, role clarity, training, and the working environment)
- behaviour leading up to the event
- level of responsibility and seniority
- attitude and behaviour after the event (such as attitude, honesty, and early engagement)
- outcome of the behaviour, particularly in terms of harm or potential harm caused

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Regulators involved in the study suggested that over time they have developed a clearer, more proportionate understanding of seriousness despite challenges in defining it.

The impact of seriousness on FtP outcomes

Judgements around the seriousness of a case were found to have an impact on outcomes. Serious concerns are more likely to be referred to case examiners or practise committees, particularly if removal is a potential sanction. Interim orders may be imposed early to mitigate ongoing risk. Putting an interim order in place will also lead to faster case progression to make sure the public are protected and confidence is maintained in the profession.

Serious cases are more likely to proceed to a final hearing. This ensures that allegations are adequately pursued and decisions are guided by formal sanction frameworks.

Barriers to the understanding and application of seriousness

The study identified some key challenges in defining and applying seriousness across regulators. These included:

- A lack of clear definition of seriousness in guidance allows flexibility but creates uncertainty and potential for inconsistency
- Assessing seriousness involves individual judgement. A lack of clearly defined criteria may lead to subjectivity and risk of bias in decision making
- Aligning decision makers’ professional judgement with public expectations is sometimes challenging. If public perception changes this can impact public understanding of what is considered serious
- Complex FtP cases require more resources and time to guarantee consistency in decisions around seriousness

The study also looked at challenges specific to social care and social work. These included:

- It can be more challenging to obtain clear and consistent evidence as activities often take place in complex, interpersonal settings - evidence often heavily relies on witness accounts and contextual information
- There is less social work specific case law compared to professions with a longer history of regulation
- Perceptions that there can be limited guidance on seriousness available for decision makers

Social Work England currently draws on a wide range of case law from varied professional contexts, including previous social work regulators. This is an approach shared by regulators across all regulated professions.

Improving the understanding and application of seriousness

The challenges around seriousness are something which all regulators, including Social Work England, must consider in their FtP process. We saw broad participation in this research from other health and social care regulators, and strong interest in emerging findings.

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Social Work England already has strategies in place to help ensure consistent and rigorous decision making, particularly in complex cases. These include:

- A collaborative approach to decision making, ensuring a range of expertise and perspectives
- A consideration of contextual factors early in the FtP process
- Guidance and case law in place to support all decision makers

The study identified approaches which may further support the understanding and application of seriousness across all professional regulators. These include:

- Taking a case-driven approach to assessing seriousness, shaped by the specific circumstances of each case rather than fixed checklists or rigid processes
- Using existing resources like sanctions guidance, case law, internal audits, and thematic reviews to support and refine judgements
- Accessing sector-specific expertise, especially when cases involve behaviours that might be misinterpreted without professional context
- Ensuring that open, respectful debate and reflection are central to decision making processes
- Developing greater clarity on core factors influencing decisions around seriousness, such as dishonesty, risk of harm, and abuse of trust
- Building a shared understanding of public confidence through cross-sector dialogue

Some approaches which may support good practice were also identified which are specific to social work regulation. These include:

- Strengthening the emphasis on seriousness early in the FtP process
- A greater focus on collective and tiered decision making. Referring complex cases to decision making groups or escalating it through a tiered FtP process helps to ensure balanced decisions around seriousness
- Providing greater advice or support to social workers to enable them to engage in the FtP process at the earliest opportunity
- Bridging the gap between public perception and regulatory understanding
- Strengthening decision-making through improved frameworks and guidance
- Developing clearer standards to support consistency in decision making, especially for cases related to criminal convictions

4. Next steps

The findings from this research have been useful in improving our understanding of how seriousness is considered by professional health and social care regulators in England. Additionally, by sharing our findings with the public we hope to highlight the complexity of fitness to practise and how the seriousness of the concerns we receive affects our decision making.

Internally, this research will inform our work to improve our triage process and provide an evidence base when updating our guidance for decision makers at all stages of fitness to practise in the future. It will also complement our ongoing work to understand and take action in relation to higher numbers of referrals.

Lastly, the findings will support and inform our fitness to practise approach in case examination, investigation and triage. This is one step in our journey to explore the concept and application of seriousness further and will inform our future work in this area.

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