

**Senior Management Team
Monthly Meeting Minutes
13.30 on Thursday, 16 May 2024**

ATTENDING

Ian Bruce, Ethical Standards Commissioner (Commissioner)
Karen Elder, Head of Corporate Services, (HCS)
Angela Glen, Senior Investigating Officer (SIO)
Sarah Pollock, Hearings and Investigations Officer (HIO)
Melanie Stronach, Public Appointments Manager (PAM)

IN ATTENDANCE

Nikolas Thomsen, Corporate Support Officer (CSO)

1. Welcome and introduction

a. Items for consideration in private

- Appointment rounds of concern

2. Previous minutes

a. Approval

- Previous minutes agreed.

b. Matters arising

- i. HCS to complete review of Scheme of Delegation. Outstanding.
- ii. HCS to investigate extending website contract or tendering. Outstanding. Procurement legislation to be reviewed.

3. Governance and providing assurance

a. Stakeholder engagement – key events

- 19 April – the Commissioner met with the new president of SOLAR to discuss issues of mutual interest.
- 25 April - the Commissioner, SIO and HIO met with the Standards Commission for Scotland's (SCS) Executive Director and Case Manager to discuss prospective revisions to the 2000 Act.
- 30 April – the Commissioner gave evidence, alongside other officeholders, to the Finance and Public Administration Committee further to its enquiry on the officeholder landscape.
- 14 May – the Commissioner met with the new chair of the SCS to discuss issues of mutual interest.
- Further events contained in monthly reports of [Corporate](#), [Standards](#), and [Public Appointment \(PA\) Team](#).

b. Strategic plan

An early draft of the Easy Read version of the strategic plan has been circulated. The HIO commented on the quality of the translation, with the definitions working particularly well. HCS queried the length of the document (20 pages) given Easy Read guidance on this. HCS would be reluctant to dilute the quality of work by further shortening and suggested splitting the document into two – the ‘what we do’ section for general use and the ‘what we want to do’ section covering the strategic plan.

c. Business plans

- Finalise the biennial business plan 2024-2026.
Many of the actions have been assigned to relevant teams and preliminary delivery dates allocated. There are a number of queries around responsibilities and anticipated outcomes to be discussed. The meeting agreed to hold a separate meeting to discuss these.
- Each team has completed or are finalising 4-year action plans cascading from the Strategic Objectives in the Strategic Plan and actions in the Business Plan.

d. Managing risk

- Emerging risks
One emerging risk was identified, in relation to questioning at the Finance Committee’s evidence session into the officeholder landscape.
- Next quarterly review or risks is scheduled for 5 June. This meeting will focus on the risks arising from the new strategic, business and action plans. Any mitigating actions identified will be incorporated into the relevant action plan.

e. Advisory Audit Board (AAB)

f. External audit

g. Internal audit

Update on the latest AAB meeting which was held on 2 May.

- The Commissioner provided an update on ESC’s activities and ESC’s strategic risks were reviewed. This was Andy Shaw’s final meeting as AAB Chair as his term of appointment is ending. The Commissioner thanked him for his advice and support. David Watt’s term of appointment has been extended and he will continue to sit on our AAB as Chair. The Commissioner welcomed this news.
- Audit Scotland introduced the audit plan for 2023/24. The AAB raised a technical query about the use of the ‘less complex bodies’ exemption. Audit Scotland will consider the matter and respond.
- Wylie & Bisset, our internal auditors presented their annual report for 2023/24 and proposed audit plan for 2024/25. The AAB sought further information about the scope of the review of business continuity arrangements and the plan was agreed.
- HCS gave an update on progress against internal audit recommendations. The AAB concluded that the two actions brought forward from 2022/23 were now complete. The remaining actions are on schedule and are incorporated into the CST action plan.
- It was agreed at the previous AAB meeting that Wylie & Bisset’s contract should be extended. ESC has written to Wylie & Bisset to this effect.

h. Annual report and accounts

A template for the annual report and accounts, along with a timetable and details of the content required by statute or direction has been circulated. HCS asked if SMT were content with the proposed date for delivery of preliminary content (13 June). Both PAM and HIO flagged some concerns but aim to have at least outline content prepared by then.

i. Policy review

- Upcoming policy reviews
 - For details see item 3 of the [Corporate Services Monthly Report](#).
 - HCS advised that, given the limited number of changes to the FOI policy, she was considering omitting the SMT review stage and moving to a full staff consultation. The Commissioner queried this as there had been a least one major change – the introduction of the FOI panel. HCS clarified that there were few changes to the policy that SMT and staff were unaware of. HCS is also considering splitting the policy into two sections; policy and procedures. HCS suggested consulting SMT on policy only. The Commissioner would be content with this or moving to a full staff consultation.
 - PAM commented on the challenges of the whole SMT reviewing HR policy by email (e.g. when a number of policies are sent out for comments, the SMT have to read through all the policies to comment and then again following all comments having been made which is particularly time consuming where complex policies such as Family Leave are involved). She suggested it would be helpful for the HRFO to present a summary of the changes at the next SMT meeting. This was agreed.

j. Complaints about us

- Complaints received since last meeting
- Outcomes
- Time taken to close
- Days taken

No complaints were received or closed during the period or are outstanding.

k. Consultations received

- SIO responded to the Scottish Government consultation on Children's Rights Act on 14 May. No other consultations have been received and no responses are outstanding

Actions:

- PAO to circulate the next draft(s) of the Easy Read Strategic Plan to the SMT for consideration and agreement via correspondence.
- HCS to issue invitation to SMT for meeting to finalise Business Plan 2024-2026.
- HCS to add possible merger of SCS/ESC or other changes to officeholder landscape to horizon scanning section of risk register.
- SMT to prepare preliminary annual report content by 13 June.
- HCS to decide best review method to finalise FOI policy.
- HCS to invite HRFO to present on changes to Family Leave policies at next SMT meeting.

4. Operational matters

a. Key points for SMT information and consideration

- Approving supplier for staff and SMT EDI training
PAM outlined background to both PAA quotes. Final quote from one to follow and the other is well over the allocated budget. The Commissioner asked if other quotes had been obtained. HCS confirmed that a further external quote had been received which was in line with budget. HIO suggested carrying out a cost benefit analysis to ensure we're selecting the best option. SMT agreed to focus on all staff training and consider specific SMT training in this area at a later date.
- Consideration of proposal to migrate to SharePoint

HCS introduced the proposal. The quotation is well over the allocated budget. The Commissioner queried why this was the case. HCS was still investigating but initial indications are that the preliminary quote used to formulate the budget did not include all elements. HCS confirmed that overall the scope provided by Euro-systems seemed reasonable, but there might be room for some reduction. HCS would like to further investigate with the supplier, seek input from IMITO and review the budget. HIO and HCS discussed possibly pushing the work back and splitting costs over two financial years. The Commissioner asked if more work could be performed inhouse or through shared services offered by the Scottish Government.

- Records management actions prior to migration
 - All teams have begun pre-migration work to ensure records are held in line with our retention schedules (the 'deletion project'). Standards have held a preliminary meeting and agreed to prioritise the deletion of items on the CMS as this is nearing capacity. In addition, the CMS will be treated as the primary location for Standards records. SISO is liaising with the CMS supplier on how best to carry out this work. Thereafter work will be undertaken on the records retained on the server. Public Appointments have begun work identifying records for deletion and the Corporate team are nearing completion of their exercise.
 - HCS raised the issue of data duplication. A recent SAR identified over 1,000 documents for review with the vast majority being duplicates; some of which were held in more than five locations. Due to the volume and complexity of material the response deadline will be missed by two weeks. HCS asked if in future the Standards team would be able to assist with the identification of duplicates. HIO agreed and suggested liaising with the IO at an early stage as they have the best knowledge of the records involved. Following discussion, the HCS suggested amending the current search request format to ask for assistance with duplicates. This was agreed.
- Appeal to Scottish Information Commissioner
The Scottish Information Commissioner has assigned an Investigating Officer to a recent appeal regarding our response to an FOI request. Submissions are to be provided by 22 May. Following discussion with the Commissioner, HCS is preparing a draft response.
- In Private – staff matter
No actions arose from this item.

b. AOB

- CMS Phase 2 Enhancements
There are also budget issues around implementation of the CMS Phase 2 enhancements. A scoping meeting for Phase 2 is still to be held but it is likely that the quote from January 2023 will increase and given the work involved there may be additional input and costs from the website developer.
- The Commissioner advised that he wished to host a Christmas social event with the Standards Commission for Scotland.

Actions:

- i. HCS to factor hosting a Christmas event with the SCS into the calendar.
- ii. HCS to approach both PAAs to obtain or revise their EDI training quotations.
- iii. HCS to carry out cost benefit analysis of these quotes and circulate to SMT.
- iv. HCS to further consider scope, costs and implementation methods for SharePoint migration.

- v. HCS to amend current SAR/FOI search request to address volume and duplication issues.

5. Operating an effective complaints system

a. Key points for SMT information and consideration

- Case volume and workflow
 - A total of 15 complaints about councillors/members (13 cases) were received during April 2024. This is consistent with complaint volumes received in the same month in both 2022 and 2023. We had four new Member complaints (2 cases). A total of 2 new complaints about MSPs (2 cases) were received in April 2024.
 - New complaint handling processes – managing new complaints more effectively (triage/allocating RAG rating/ complaints checklist), expanded peer review process and the Scheme of Delegation - are working well. Currently allocating Councillor and Member cases received to end January 2024 and to April for MSP cases. The SIO and HIO noted that the new approaches are beginning to have an impact. In quarter 4, the average stage two timescale was 5 months (150 days) compared to 7 months (210) in quarter 3.
 - Caseflow of councillors and members complaints, which continue to make up the majority of case work, looks stable with an even flow of completed cases moving towards SCS referral. There are 23 cases at the open investigation stage with at least 6-8 referrals in May.
 - The HIO was the case presenter at the latest hearing and the SCS panel agreed with the ESC findings in four out of the six issues of complaint. Currently, there are three upcoming Hearings.
- Pilot Complaints Allocation Plan (CAP) update
 - The HIO and SIO ran a session with their team on the 7 May, to discuss the proposed approach to the Complaint Allocation Plan Trial. The plan is designed to ensure an equitable division of cases (and work) amongst team members and reduce waiting times and improve stakeholder experience. The HIO and SIO will aim to build capacity into the operating model to ensure that the team can respond to current and predicted future demand
 - Following the incorporation of staff feedback, the trial will commence around 10 June.
- In Private – application of the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
One action arose from this discussion (see below).

b. AOB

- The investigations manual has been updated and republished reflecting input from staff and the SCS.
- The first phase of Plain English training will be rolled out to the Standards team over four sessions starting in June.
- The HIO and SIO met with their counterpart from the Public Sector Ombudsman for Wales on 14 May. It was a wide ranging and helpful discussion, with a particular focus on areas where we could collaborate in the future such as training.
- CMS enhancement project is ongoing. Some improvements are now operational such as a case dashboard being available at login.

Actions:

- i. HIO to develop guidance for team members on how to manage challenging behaviour that sits below the trigger points set out in the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

6. Regulating appointments to boards

a. Key points for SMT information and consideration

- The PAM advised that the statistics provided in the Public Appointments report have been amended. These provide some additional information not previously reported (closed rounds and applicant surveys), and provide current stats in an easier to read format.
- The review of PAA Service Level Agreement contract is ongoing and legal advice may be required. Tendering for new PAAs continues to be impacted. The diversity consultant tender has previously been impacted but may now proceed separately.
- An interim applicant survey report (covering the results from 20 rounds run in the first 5 months of the 2022 Code being implemented) is nearly finalised. It will be published on our website
- The Public Appointments team have started work on developing “snippets of good practice” which will soon be ready for publishing on the website. This provides small areas where good practice has been identified to assist in learning across appointment rounds.
- The joint communications day between SG officials and PAAs seems to have been considered a success, with learning taking place across the day on topics such as social inclusion, attracting applicants to chair roles and attracting younger applicants.
- In Private - Appointment rounds with issues currently being advised on
No actions arose from this item.

Actions:

- i. No actions

7. Items for Team Meeting

a. Date of next Team Meeting

- 22 May

b. Finalising details of Quarterly Team Meeting

- The meeting is scheduled for 22 May and will be held onsite. Thirteen staff can attend in person and one will attend remotely. HIO asked and meeting discussed how best to manage integration of the remote staff member.
- Given the temperature in ESC's own offices, the SLAB board room will be used for the meeting.
- SMT discussed what the third topic should be and how best to present it.
- The two-hour meeting will consist of three topics
 - IT policy – HCS, 20 minutes
 - Style Guide and MS Word Accessibility training – CSO, 30-40 minutes
 - Communications strategy and stakeholder engagement - breakout sessions – detail to be confirmed.

c. This month's policy briefings

- Newsletter reminder – Domestic Abuse policy
- Line manager 1-1 reminders – Work-Life Balance policies (on hold until finalised)
- Team Meeting refresher – Style Guide (and MS Accessibility)

- Factsheet – Confidentiality
- ESC led training session – IT Policy

Actions:

- i. HCS to prepare content and format for public relations topic.

8. AOB

- The Commissioner informed the SMT that the Scottish Government is seeking officeholder input regarding shared services. ESC will respond by the end of May.
- ESC's annual refresh of its register of interests has been completed. The Commissioner has reviewed and noted that updated declaration of interest forms will be required for the AAB.
- The Commissioner has been invited to and would like to attend a standards network meeting on 10 October. This clashes with that month's SMT meeting. The meeting agreed to seek an alternative date.
- HIO and PAM asked if, further to earlier discussions, the SMT meetings for August and January were to be suspended. This was confirmed.

Actions:

- i. HCS to prepare response to SG shared services survey.
- ii. HCS to seek updated declaration of interests forms from AAB members.
- iii. HCS to find alternative date for October SMT meeting.
- iv. HCS arrange for meeting date calendar invitations to be updated.

9. Next meeting

- 13.30 on Thursday, 13 June 2024

10. Meeting papers

The following papers provided background and supporting information to the meeting.

- [Corporate Monthly Report April 2024](#)
- [Standards Monthly Report April 2024](#)
- [Public Appointments Monthly Report April 2024](#)

CORPORATE MONTHLY REPORT

May 2024

Report to the Senior Management Team on 16 May 2024 covering corporate activities during April 2024. Any statistics provided covers the previous calendar month (April 2024) unless otherwise stated.

1. Stakeholder engagement

- 8 April – HCS and SISO held account meeting with supplier of Case Management System
- 16 and 17 April – HCS attended Scottish Government's Leading in a Digital World course (Days 4 and 5)
- 18 April – ESC met with the SCS Case Manager to discuss issues of mutual interest
- 24 April – HCS takes part in Scottish Government Cloud Platform research
- 26 April - ESC met with the SCS Executive Director to discuss issues of mutual interest
- 8 May – HCS and CSO meet IT managed support provider
- 8 May - ESC met with a new member of the SCS to brief her on the work of his office
- 8 May - ESC met with a former Commissioner to discuss the work of the office
- 9 May – HCS attends National Records of Scotland surgery

2. Accommodation

- a. Issues regarding high temperatures onsite have been reported to SLAB. A temporary fix has been implemented and the issue should be fully resolved on 15 May.
- b. There are no other property or facilities issues to report.

3. HR

- a. [Monthly Policy & Training report \(link to ESC internal document\)](#)
 - i. Reviews of the IT Policy, Fixed Asset Register, Guide to Information and SMT Terms of Reference completed.
 - ii. HCS has reviewed the revised FOI Policy and associated documentation. The number and type of changes are limited and the HCS is currently considering whether to issue the next version straight to staff consultation.
 - iii. HCS will resume review of the organisational Scheme of Delegation and development of that for Corporate Services.
 - iv. Carer's Leave, Work Life Balance, Absence and Hours of Work and Annual Leave policies with SMT for consideration.
 - v. Review of the File Plans and Retention Schedules are underway across the organisation. This work forms part of the wider project to migrate to SharePoint and will be ongoing throughout 2024.
 - vi. The annual review of the Policy Register and End of Year Financial Procedures will take place in May. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy is also scheduled for review.
- b. [Recruitment and induction](#)
 - i. There are no recruitment exercises currently underway. Induction of the latest team member continues.
- c. [Training programme for 2024/25](#)
 - i. The FOISA training module is complete and available to staff.
 - ii. A preferred supplier of Plain English training has been agreed and dates for the first cohort confirmed.

iii. **Submissions from potential providers for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training have been received. (SMT Meeting agenda item)**

iv. Internal training on MS Word accessibility tools and our Style Guide and IT policy will be provided in May.

d. **Other HR matters to report.**

i. Annual declaration of interests forms have been completed by all staff and the register of interests has been updated and is awaiting assessment.

4. Finance

a. **Monthly Finance report (link to internal ESC document)**

Staff costs are slightly under budget. ESC follows the SPCB paycales and we await details of any costs of living increases for 2024/25. All other costs are in line with budget.

b. **End of financial year**

ESC's financial year ended on 31 March. Work to finalise the accounting record for 2023/24 is complete and production of the financial statements will begin.

5. Information governance

a. **IT and cyber-security issues**

i. Following initial testing of Phase 1 of the case management system enhancements, the full rollout planned for 26 March was postponed. The revised rollout and staff training is planned for mid-May. Overall the project is taking longer than anticipated. Phase 2 has been commissioned with dates for a scoping meeting being sought.

ii. Work to achieve our Cyber Essentials Plus reaccreditation has begun.

iii. **Our IT support provider has provided a quote for migrating to SharePoint. This will be considered by the SMT. (SMT Meeting agenda item)**

b. **Records management**

i. The Corporate Services Team continues to update its records in line with current the File Plan and Retention Schedule. This work is required to address an action in our Records Management Plan and in preparation for our planned migration to SharePoint in September. The work has been going well and a revised File Plan and Retention Schedule is emerging. **This project is being rolled out across the organisation. (SMT Meeting agenda item)**

ii. Since the last meeting one Freedom of Information request has been received with the material being released in full. There are no other outstanding requests and no requests for review have been received. The FOI Panel was not required. There is one appeal open with the Scottish Information Commissioner. **An Investigating Officer has been assigned and our response is due by 22 May (SMT Meeting agenda item).**

iii. One subject access request has been received and a response is being prepared. There are no other open requests.

iv. One potential data breach was recorded in the period. This was low-level and was remedied immediately.

6. Miscellaneous matters

a. There are no such matters to report this month.

STANDARDS MONTHLY REPORT

May 2024

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides the SMT with an up to date picture of operational performance. Data is used to describe volume, throughput and case turnaround. This is set out alongside a summary of where cases are in the system, referrals to the Standards Commission for Scotland (“SCS”) in the monthly period since the previous SMTM, completed and planned Hearings. Ongoing efforts to improve processes and system performance are also summarised in the report below.

2. Biennial Business Plan

- a) On 15 April the ESC met with the SIO and HIO to discuss the Biennial Business Plan and the Standards team action plan arising from this. Good progress has now been made in developing the teams’ action plan which spans a four period, but with a specific focus on plans for the first two years initially. The timescales for delivering the activity sets out in the Standards team action plan has also been translated across to the Business Plan.
- b) Key priorities in the first year include further improving our processes and approach to managing an efficient and effective complaints management system, enhancing stakeholder engagement and developing a quality assurance framework. The action plan has been developed in collaboration with the team, who will all contribute to discreet projects identified within it.

3. Stakeholder engagement

- a) On 25 April the Commissioner, SIO and HIO met with the Executive Director and the Case Manager at SCS to discuss and consider potential amendments to the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. A number of areas were discussed including the duty to promote adherence to the Code and Ethical Standards Framework and delays by any parties to respond to a request for information in the course of an investigation. A joint response will now be finalised and submitted by the SCS and the ESC to stakeholders for views.
- b) On 30 April, one of the IOs attended the Public Appointment Advisors/Public Appointments Team Communications day. This provided an excellent opportunity to learn more about the work of another part of the organisation and for the feedback and learning to be shared with the rest of the Standards team. As part of our strategic objectives, we are committed to identifying opportunities for cross-functional working with other sections of the office and will seek to support these as and when they arise.

4. Operating an effective complaints system – Operational performance

Current Activity

Table 1 sets out current complaint and case volumes as they relate to Councillors, Members and MSPs, up until the end of April 2024.

Table 1 - Current complaint and case volumes

Stage	Cases	Complaints
Councillors		
New	44	66
Admissibility	21	62
Investigation	19	28
Interviewing	3	3
All info gathered	1	1
Draft decision	2	2
Proposed report	1	15
Further investigation		
Members		
New	4	15
Admissibility	3	14
Investigation	2	10
Interviewing		
All info gathered		
Proposed Report		
MSPs		
New	1	1
Stage 1	1	3
Stage 2		
Lobbying		
New	1	1
Stage 1	1	3

Only highlights are provided in the report below. The full background data and further statistical analysis is available to staff via the following [link](#). ([link to internal ESC document](#))

- a) A total of 15 complaints about councillors/members (resulting in 13 cases) were received during April 2024. This is consistent with complaint volumes received in the same month in both 2022 and 2023. A total of 2 new complaints about MSPs (resulting in 2 cases) were received in April 2024, which is lower than preceding months except January, where no MSP complaints were received.
- b) Caseflow management for councillors and members complaints, which make up the large majority of case work, has significantly improved with all cases now lodged and triaged against a “Red, Amber, Green” (“RAG”) rating based on volume /complexity. The caseflow pipeline is currently well balanced with cases evenly distributed across all key stages. The present position looks stable with an even flow of appropriate cases moving towards SCS referral. There are 26 cases at the investigation stage with 6-8 expected for referral in May. Reports have been drafted for each of the 6 cases, which are now out for representation, or being finalised.
- c) We are currently allocating complaints up to January 2024 for Councillor and Members. We are allocated up to April 2024 for complaints about members, and April 2024 for complaints about MSPs.

- d) Complaints alleging disrespectful behaviour (which for our recording purposes includes bullying and harassing behaviour) continues to be the largest category of complaints with more than 60% of open complaints relating to either allegations of disrespect towards other councillors or members of the public. The second largest category quasi-judicial or regulatory applications complaints (such as planning or licensing applications) add up to just over 10% of open complaints.

Reports referred to SCS

- Table 2 sets out the reports referred to SCS during April 2024. Where the SCS have decided to hold a Hearing, details of these are provided in Table 4.

Table 2 – Reports referred to SCS

Case Ref	Date of Referral	ESC Decision	SCS Action
LA/AC/3864 (b)	10/04/2024	Breach	No action
LA/DG/3817	11/04/2024	No breach	No action
CSE//3793	22/04/2024	No breach	Report sent to devolved public body under Section 24 policy
LA/NL/3889	23/04/2024	No breach (due to A10)	No action
LA/S/3867	24/04/2024	Breach	Hearing
LA/As/3999	29/04/2024	No breach	No action

Hearings held by the SCS

- Table 3 sets out details and the outcomes from Hearings held in April 2024. The Commissioner presented at the Hearing on 10/04/2024. The Hearing Panel largely agreed with the findings of the Commissioner's Report.

Table 3- Hearings held in April 2024

Case Ref	Date of Hearing	Outcome of Hearing	Sanction
LA/I/3764	10/04/2024	Breach of 5.5 and 7.4b	1 month suspension

Future Hearings

- Table 4 lists Hearings scheduled by SCS based on reports referred up until the end of April 2024. Notably:
 - the Pre-Hearing meetings (PHM) for NPA/C/3831 and LA/SB/3722 took place on-line on 08/04/2024 and 24/04/2024 respectively, attended by the SIO and HIO respectively.
 - The PHM for LA/As/3958 will take place on 08/05/2024 on-line. The HIO will attend.
- Two new members have been appointed to the SCS, one of whom - Dr Lezley Stewart took up her post on 29 April. Dr Stewart has worked for the Church of Scotland for over 25 years in Dundee and Edinburgh, serving as an ordained Office Holder. The other newly appointed member, Morag Ferguson who is currently Head of Corporate Services at East Lothian Council will join the SCS in June.

Table 4 – Future scheduled hearings

Case Ref	Date of Hearing	In Person/On-line	Case Presenter
LA/SB/3722	13/05/2024	On line	HIO
NPA/C/3831	27/05/2024	On line	SIO
LA/As/3958	04/06/2024	On line	HIO
LA/S/3867	01/07/24	In Person	Commissioner

5. Operating an effective complaints system – Change and innovation

• Complaints allocation plan

- a) We have developed and introduced for internal consultation a pilot complaints allocation plan (CAP) that we plan to implement from the beginning of June. Since 2019 the Standards team have not worked to any formal allocation plan although team members were able to allocate cases for themselves - this provided a level of independence and flexibility. The new approach is intended to:
- ensure equitable division of cases (and work) amongst team members
 - reduce waiting times and improve the stakeholder experience
 - build capacity into the operating model to ensure that we are able to respond to current and predicted future demand
 - deliver the strategic objectives of the Strategic Plan and meet the requirements from internal audit.
- b) The internal consultation on the pilot CAP will end on 24 May, after which the pilot CAP will be finalised and put into practice week commencing 3 June. The pilot CAP also refers to expected timescales for day to day case progression so that response times to external communications are standardised across the team. The pilot CAP and its operation will be closely monitored for the next 6 months thereafter, with a review scheduled by 06 December.
- c) Given that the 2024/25 financial year will include an election period, and given previous trends, the office can expect a surge in case volumes nearer the third quarter. To prepare for this, the team will prioritise case queue clearance for the second quarter, with additional caseload of approximately 18-20% each in order to reflect a 40-50% decrease in unallocated cases. This is an increased workload but only for the quarter with a view to better plan and prepare for any complaint volume increase later in the year.
- d) We have reviewed previous case numbers to inform our future optimum operating model. In 2023/24, we received a total of 227 cases. This figure is comparable with case numbers in the previous five years, with the exception of 2022/23. Moving forward, we want to ensure we have capacity in place to deal with approximately 250 cases, which is a 10% increase on the average case numbers in the last five year period. This is necessary and should assist avoiding future overly long case queues as the capacity is set at marginally more than demand, with a reasonable surplus to allow for short term variation in either capacity or demand.

- **Investigations Manual**

The quarterly review and update of the Investigations Manual (“the Manual”) was completed in April. The Manual reflects important updates and changes in practice which we have put in place over the last quarter including the introduction of a new complaints information checklist and peer review checklist. Greater reference to where the Scheme of Delegation is also in operation has also been included in the updated version.

- a) All team members were invited to suggest changes to the Manual and were consulted on the final changes that were included. The revised version of the Manual was republished on our website in April 2024. The Manual’s next quarterly review is in the Summer.

- **Plain English**

- a) We have started to review all our publicly available complaints information, to produce easy read versions of this material. Easy Read is intended to be a way of making written information easier to understand, by using simple language and illustrating pictures.
- b) The work is being led by the Public Appointments Officer in conjunction with the HIO/SIO on behalf of the Standards team. Three areas of focus have been identified in stage 1 of the project as follows and involve developing Easy Read guides that cover - *What is a complaint?* *What can I complain about?* and *How do I make a complaint?* Work to date has established the need for guides to include only reference to and brief outlines of legislation and Codes of Conduct (to inform the document) so as to keep the guides purposeful and easy to understand.

- **Training and development**

- a) We have secured a supplier to deliver Plain English training across the organisation. This training will be rolled out from June 2024 and colleagues from the Standards team will make up the first cohort. The training comprises four sessions which will focus on key skills including writing shorter sentences, using paragraph headers to improve structure and using readers’ language to avoid jargon. It is envisaged that such training will assist us in communicating our messages clearly and effectively with stakeholders.
- b) Both the SISO and ISO recently attended training relating to our Complaints Management System (CMS). The training was provided as part of our wider CMS improvement project which is intended to better support the Standards team to work more efficiently and effectively. The first round of CMS improvements was put in place on 01 May 2024.

6. Miscellaneous matters

- There are no such matters to report this month.

7. Recommendation

- The SMTM is asked to note the information set out in the report and refer to the meeting agenda for items for further discussion/approval.

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS MONTHLY REPORT

May 2024

1. Stakeholder engagement

- 26 April – Public Appointments manager met with official from OCPA (Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, covering England and Wales) to exchange ideas and overview of work plans.
- 30 April – Joint communications day with Scottish Government officials and Public Appointment Advisers (PAAs) – also attended by an Investigating Officer and a Corporate Service Support Officer (as a cross office learning opportunity)

2. Update on Biennial Business Plan

- Action plans for 2024-28 and more detailed for 2024-26 have been prepared.
- Diversity Delivers strategy refresh is postponed and likely to commence in July / August 2024.
- Easy Read version of the Strategic plan being developed

3. Current appointments volume and status

- 4 new PAA allocations were made in the current financial year to end April (8 in previous year).
- Total rounds open at 30/04/24 were 26 compared to 30 at 30/04/23.
- 4 Reappointments were publicised since the beginning of the financial year to the end of April compared with 5 in 2023/24
- 4 rounds concluded in financial year to date with 0 panel chair end of round reports received.
- Since the beginning of the calendar year 2024, 40 applicant surveys have been run, with an overall response rate of 30%
- See graphs below for more information on volumes and status of current appointment rounds.

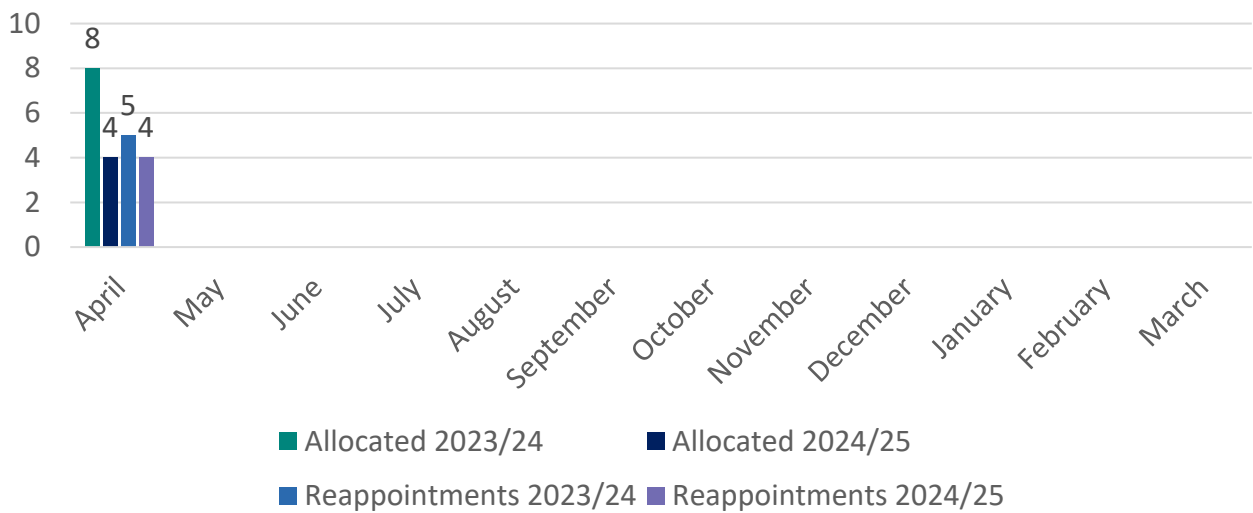
4. Contacts and Enquiries

- 25 Contacts and Enquiries have been responded to by us in the financial year up to 30/04/24 (52 in financial year 2023/24 up to 30/04/23).
- No reports of non-compliance have been made under the 2022 Code in the financial year to date to 30/04/24.
- See graphs and tables below for further information.

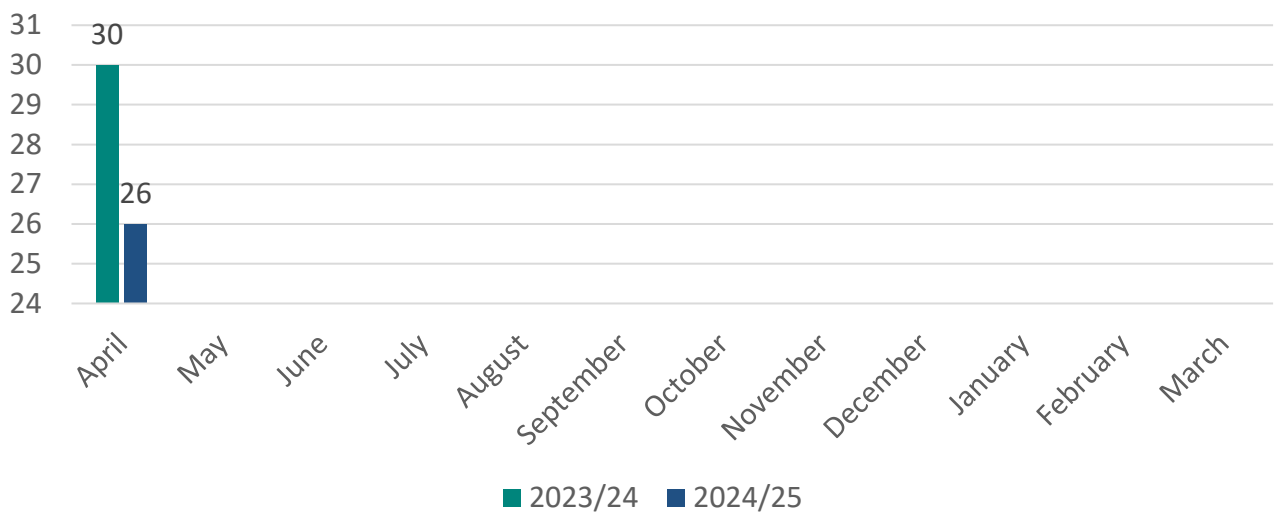
5. Tables and Graphs

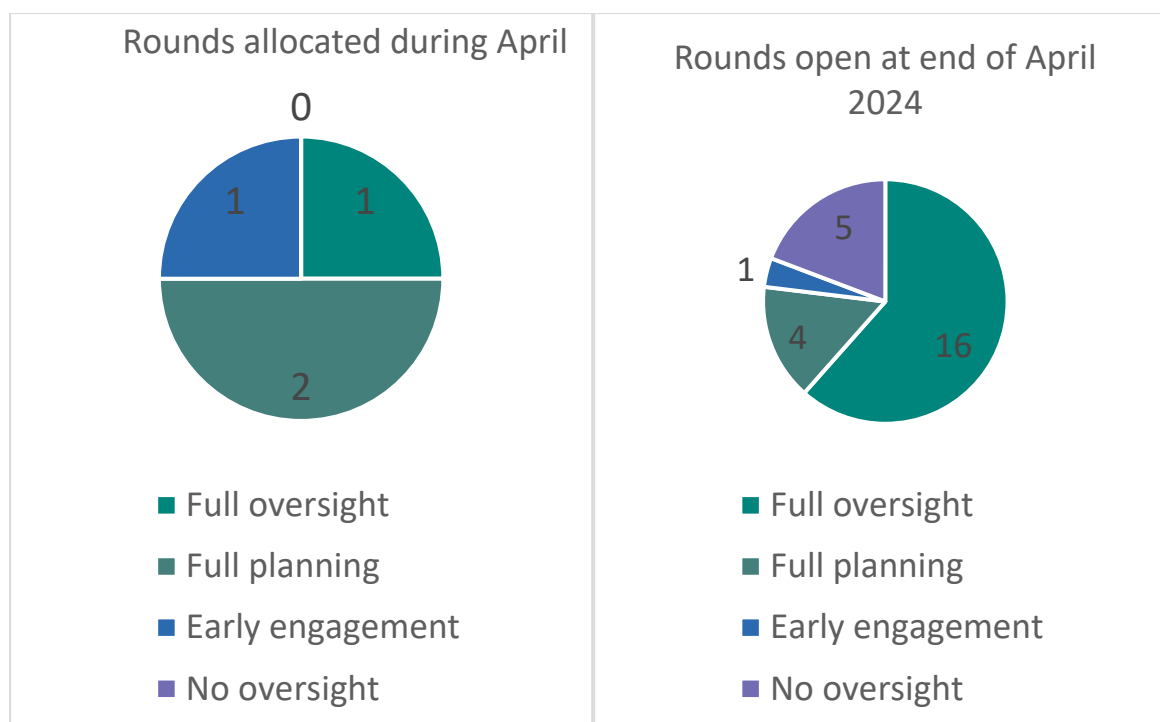
2024/25		Reappts.	2023/24		Reappts.
Number of rounds allocated in year to date (until 30/04/2024):	4	4	Number of rounds allocated in year to date (until 30/04/2023):	8	5
Full oversight	1		Full oversight	4	
Full planning	2		Full planning	4	
Early engagement	1		Early engagement	0	
No oversight	0		No oversight	0	
Number of rounds currently open (as at 30/4/24):	26		Number of rounds currently open (as at 30/4/23):	30	
Full oversight	16		Full oversight/ High risk	17	
Full planning	4		Oversight to planning/ Medium risk	8	
Early engagement	1		Oversight early engagement	2	
No oversight	5		No oversight/ forward look/ low risk	3	
Number of rounds concluded since beginning of financial year	4				
Number of panel chair end of round reports submitted since beginning of financial year	0	0%			
Since the beginning of 2024 Calendar Year:					
Number of rounds with an applicant survey open (or concluded)	40	100%			
Overall response rate		30%			

Rounds allocated and reappointments made in year to date



Rounds open at the end of the month





April (as at 30/04/24)	
Enquiry type	14 Enquiries Total
Advice on Code	9
Advice on Good Practice	0
General enquiry on work of office	2
Other	0
Request to discuss exceptional circs	3
	14
Report type	11 reports total
PAA End of round report	0
PC end of round report	0
Concern about appt round	1
Report an update on a round	5
Report good practice	2
Other	3
Report non-compliance	0
	11

