

Report to:	QSMTM
Report by:	Euan McCulloch, Head of Enforcement
Meeting Date:	20 January 2026
Subject/ Title: (and VC no)	Investigations performance report 2025/26 Q3
Attached Papers (title and VC no)	None

Purpose of report

The purpose of this Committee Report (CR) is

- to update the Senior Management Team (SMT), and provide it with assurance, on investigations performance in Quarter 3 of 2025/26
- to make recommendations to SMT as set out below

Recommendation and actions

1. I recommend:

- that SMT notes investigations performance in Quarter 2 of 2025/26, specifically
 - a) effective performance against all measures, for cases under active investigation
 - b) the substantial – and continuing – upsurge in incoming cases
 - c) the consequent challenges in progressing the full caseload effectively, particularly the remaining “Blue” cases but also the “Green” ones and those still at validation
- that SMT notes the measures being taken to address the various caseload handling issues identified
- that this report and accompanying papers are published in line with the “Publication” section below.

Executive summary

2. Investigations performance for the Quarter is summarised in the following reports presented to the relevant Investigations Performance Meetings

- VC 238849 (November)
- VC 240726 (December)
- VC 242027 (January)

and considered in the following minutes of those meetings

- VC 240200 (November)
- VC 241327 (December)

(January meeting held 20/01, not yet minuted)

2. From these reports and minutes, I would highlight the following for further consideration by SMT
 - Application numbers reached a peak of 135 in October and levelled out to (a still comparatively high) 73 in November and December. 802 applications had been received by the end of the calendar year, so the annual figure could conceivably be close to double the annual average of 548 highlighted in the last quarter's report.
 - Performance against all measures has remained effective, as regards cases under active investigation.
 - Following the last QSMTM, we started to allocate "Blue" cases again. Some were also closed as frivolous, and fewer than 100 now remain unallocated. Resolution work being undertaken by the PIOs will also have an impact on this figure.
 - Unfortunately, the number of "Green" cases becoming available for allocation is becoming less manageable, with 58 cases on the Allocation Spreadsheet at the time of writing.
 - "Green" allocations (and balancing them with continuing allocation of the "Blue" caseload) will be discussed further at today's IPM and I will report on this verbally at the QSMTM.
 - The substantial batches of new applications referred to in the last quarter's report have since been closed, but further work is still required on the handling of AI-generated requests/applications.
 - Another key area of concern relates to the increasing number of cases awaiting validation (133 as at 31 December: it has risen to over 150 since). In part, this has arisen during the induction period for the new VO (and to that extent is not surprising, particularly given overall application numbers), but there are indications that there are particular kinds of challenge that need to be tackled if the process is to function effectively. A group has been set up to monitor the caseload at this level and identify/implement appropriate action, and aspects of the IH (particularly in relation to frivolous applications and applicants challenging our reasonable requirements) will be reviewed.

Risk impact

4. The level of applications carries with it a number of risks in terms of investigations performance, as described above, with potential impact on meeting objectives (including those agreed with Parliament), reputation and staff morale. With these in mind, close attention will be required to the mitigation measures referred to above.
5. Previously untested means of dealing with challenging applications, particularly those received in substantial batches, will carry with them the risk of legal challenge. This, including the prospect of a challenge being successful, needs to be considered fully in each case when determining the appropriate course of action.

Equalities impact

6. No impact on any of the protected characteristics has been identified.

Privacy impact

7. None: nothing in this report relates directly to specific identifiable individuals.

Resources impact

8. The upsurge in application numbers presents inevitable challenges for the existing staffing establishment, however effectively the incoming caseload is managed. It is to be hoped that temporary measures put in place for the current year, together with more permanent measures proposed for 2026/27 (if approved in the budget allocation), will be adequate to meet these challenges, but the situation will require regular monitoring.

Operational/ strategic plan impact

9. This a key element of the performance monitoring and review required as part of Activity 2 under “Regulation and Enforcement” in the current Operational Plan. This monitoring and review also has a key contribution to make to ensuring that we meet Objective 4 (*Deliver fair defensible decisions in a timely manner*) in the 2024/28 Strategic Plan.

Records management impact (including any key documents actions)

10. None

Consultation and Communication

11. The Deputy Heads of Enforcement have been consulted in the preparation of this CR.

Publication

12. I recommend that this CR is published in full.