**23/24 Annual Quality Account**   
Completed SLT approved document

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**Foreword – DBS Chairman**Quality remains a key principle underpinning the effective delivery of our safeguarding responsibilities here at the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Quality has to be at the heart of everything we do, so that we can achieve our purpose of protecting the public by helping employers make safer recruitment and employment decisions, and by barring individuals who pose a risk to vulnerable people.

In 2023-24 we set out an ambitious but pragmatic business plan, recognising the cost-of-living crisis and continuing to adapt to the new post-COVID world. Our objectives focused on striving for performance improvements, re-enforcing an ‘outcomes’ approach across our processes, and progressing the modernisation of our services through the replacement of legacy systems. The plan included a balanced mix of transformational changes and deliverables that formed part of our ‘business as usual’ activities. Delivery of the plan was supported by the 2023-2025 refreshed strategy, alongside the directorate plans within DBS that helped facilitate our achievements.

During the year, we saw the introduction of a value for money framework, legislative changes to rehabilitation periods across the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and the integration of evaluating efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in all that we do. Furthermore, we continued to progress the objectives most closely relating to our people, embedding the DBS Academy, and continuing to work towards our equality, diversity, and inclusion aspirations.

I am pleased to present the DBS Quality Account for 2023-24, which I trust you will agree provides a breadth of evidence highlighting our progress and achievements. Once again, on behalf of the DBS board, I would like to extend sincere appreciation and thanks to our staff across both operational and support services who continue to contribute to those achievements by demonstrating their passion for quality and safeguarding every day.

**Dr Gillian Fairfield,**  
DBS Chairman

**Introduction – Chair of Quality, Performance and Finance Committee**The Annual Quality Account is a testament to our unwavering commitment to safeguarding and quality assurance, reflecting our collective efforts to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

The past year has been one of significant achievement and progress for DBS. We have continued to deliver on our strategic objectives, modernising our services and enhancing our operational efficiency. Our focus has remained steadfastly on providing reliable, consistent, timely, and accessible services to our customers and partners.

Our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) has been instrumental in guiding our activities, ensuring that we maintain the highest standards of service delivery. Through rigorous data analysis, customer feedback, and continuous improvement initiatives, we have sought to ensure that our actions align with our core values and strategic imperatives of safeguarding, effectiveness, efficiency, and user experience.

The achievements highlighted in this account are a reflection of the hard work and dedication of our staff, the support of our partners, and the trust placed in us by the communities we serve. As we look to the future, we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and are committed to further enhancing our contribution to the national safeguarding landscape.

As Vice Chair of DBS and Chair of the Quality, Finance, and Performance (QF&P) Committee I am pleased to introduce this, our sixth annual Quality Account, outlining how the many quality improvement initiatives undertaken throughout the year come together as part of our journey of continuous improvement.

**Neil Rhodes,**  
Quality, Finance, and Performance Chair and Non-Executive Director.

**Quality statement from the DBS Chief Executive and Directors, Eric Robinson**As the Chief Executive of DBS, I understand that quality is key to our ability as a national safeguarding organisation to deliver on our purpose and vision. I am committed to fulfilling my personal responsibility for delivering the highest possible quality of service while achieving value for money.

I recognise that our people, partners, and stakeholders are vital to our success. Effective support, development, engagement, and collaboration, alongside effective challenge, are some of the fundamental principles needed.

Our refreshed strategic priorities and objectives continue to be focused on investing in our people, making technological improvements, increasing our diversity and inclusivity, and providing reliable, consistent, timely and accessible services.

In line with the approach set out in the Quality Assurance Framework, we continue to seek assurance that DBS is doing the right things, in the right way, at the right time. We analyse and interrogate data, objectively evaluating the effectiveness of our activity, seek feedback from our customers and partners, and invest in innovation and continuous improvement.

Furthermore, our Associate Directors, Heads of Service, Managers, and all colleagues, continue to meet their responsibility for maintaining a culture of quality and strive to deliver quality services.

Signed by Eric, on behalf of SLT.

**Eric Robinson,**  
Chief Executive

**Governance arrangements**This is the sixth Quality Account and the fourth in relation to the DBS Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).

The Interim Director for Barring operations has overall accountability for the Quality Account and the QAF at executive level. Operational governance is maintained by Associate Directors and Heads of Service.

Day to day scrutiny for both quality assurance activities, encouraging and embedding a culture of learning and improvement is undertaken by established forums including:

* Disclosure Quality Steering Group
* Barring and Safeguarding Quality Summits
* Local change and improvement forums
* Business Change Forum

At a corporate level, appropriate and effective challenge and support are provided through the following groups and teams:

* Strategic Leadership Team
* Strategic Plan Oversight Group
* People Strategic Group
* Change and Transformation Oversight Group
* Associate Directors Group
* Corporate Management Committee

Independent assurance of the DBS approach to quality and continuous improvement, including the effectiveness of both the ability to achieve our vision, purpose and strategic objectives, is provided through a range of external assessments and audit. These include those undertaken by the British Standards Institution (BSI), Customer Service Excellence (CSE) and Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA).

**Quality Assurance Framework**The DBS quality assurance framework, referred to as the QAF, outlines a programme of activity, assessment, and reporting in relation to the quality and effectiveness of DBS systems and services.

It sets out a whole system approach to objectively evaluating a variety of both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources to ensure we keep vulnerable groups, including children, at the centre of what we do, recognising the key role DBS plays in the safeguarding environment. It provides oversight of our activity, addressing the 3 imperatives of Safeguarding: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and User Experience.

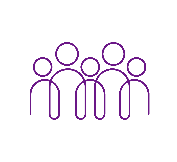
The QAF serves to hold each directorate within DBS to account and gain assurance of the effectiveness of their arrangements to develop a culture that is open, just, and learning based. Quality assurance at DBS is based on working with colleagues and managers and building relationships. It is characterised by both high support and high challenge.

The underpinning principles of the QAF focus on both safeguarding and quality. Quality assurance is based on progress and outcomes, and the experience of our customers, partners, and stakeholders. Quality assurance also considers the impact we have on our responsibility to protect the public. The QAF supports DBS in evidencing whether we are doing the right things, for the right reasons, at the right time.

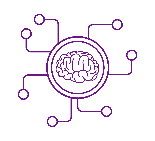
**Safeguarding and Quality charter**Launched in November 2021, the Safeguarding and Quality charter supports the delivery of, and focuses on outcomes for, all our strategic objectives, upholding the OneDBS philosophy.

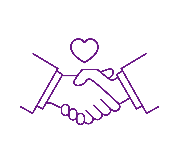
We want our people to understand the link between providing a high quality, accessible, and inclusive services for our customers and the contribution they make, through learning, development, and continuous improvement to the national safeguarding agenda.

We want our partners to recognise us as a safeguarding organisation with a valuable and unique contribution to play in the national and international safeguarding narrative and continue to see us as flexible, responsive, and a source of safeguarding expertise.

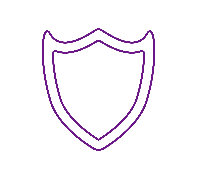
We:

**Seek** to engage a diverse population, including those who benefit from our services and products, as well as those who use them

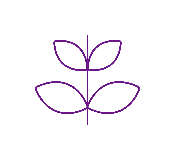
**Influence** by informing and guiding the wider safeguarding debate through our organisational profile, knowledge and expertise



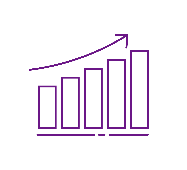
**Meet and strive** to exceed partners expectations, in terms of recommendations, time frames, and performance, with the recognition of how this impacts our ability and our partners ability to safeguard the public

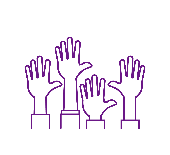


**Demonstrate** how our strategic, business, and financial priorities and planning are informed by, and rooted in, our purpose to protect the public, by helping employers make safer recruitment decisions



**Nurture** an organisational culture where quality is measured by our ability to safeguard first and foremost

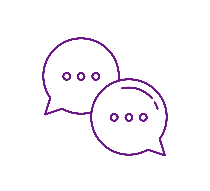
**Prioritise** activities that enhance our ability to safeguard vulnerable groups, safeguard individual civil liberties, and promote employer ability to protect the public



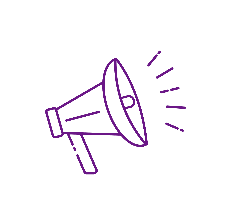
**Challenge** activities that undermine our commitment to safeguarding and quality, both internally and externally



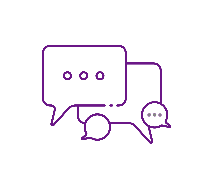
**Focus** quality assurance activities on the customer and partner and the impact we have on our joint responsibility to protect the public



**Reflect** on our work and shared learning, including learning from error and experience, and ensuring a feedback loop as a means by which we define ‘good DBS practice’



**Articulate** and demonstrate what we know about the quality and impact of DBS functions on our customers, and how our arrangements maximise the safety of the public including children, vulnerable adults, and the wider public

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**Communicate** our safeguarding commitment and ambition to reach a wide and diverse population in a manner that embraces inclusivity and equality

**The purpose and scope of the Quality Account**This Quality Account draws together a range of both quantitative and qualitative evidence and provides an assessment of quality assurance activity and the impact of that activity during 2023 to 24.

It provides a review of achievements against the deliverables under each of our strategic priorities and objectives, and the 3 QAF imperatives. It identifies areas of good practice and areas for improvement as well as providing information on service delivery.

The account includes both internal review and evidence from external assessment to ensure a balanced assessment. It reports on the DBS approach to quality, through a safeguarding lens, to ensure focus has remained on our core function of protecting vulnerable groups, including children.

The Quality Account is formally reviewed by the Quality, Finance, and Performance Committee, who provide the DBS board with assurance of progress against the QAF.

**Strategic Objectives**The DBS 2020-2025 strategy was published in April 2020. Recognising that the organisation had moved on since publication, having delivered further improvements to our already well-performing organisation by modernising our services, the way we work, and how we interact with our partners, we released a mid-point refresh of the strategy in May 2023. That refresh included an updated vision and new strategic objectives and maintains our commitment to make tangible improvements to our public services.

Once again, our staff collectively helped to co-create the strategy and have therefore supported DBS in making a real contribution to the evolving national safeguarding arena.

**Our refreshed purpose**Protecting the public by helping employers make safer recruitment and employment decisions, and by barring individuals who pose a risk to vulnerable people.

**Our refreshed vision**We will make recruitment and employment safer, by being a visible, trusted, and influential organisation. We will provide an outstanding quality of service to all our customers and partners. Our people will understand the important contributions they make to safeguarding and feel proud to work within an inclusive and increasingly diverse organisation.

**Our refreshed Strategic Objectives (SO)  
S01. Customer Experience**We will provide increased reliability, consistency, timeliness and accessibility of service for our customers, increasing quality and value for money.

1.1: We will further improve the quality of the barring referrals we receive, quality of the information submitted for disclosure applications, and the quality of referrals we make to local police forces

1.2: We will make it easier for our customers to resolve enquiries and access guidance and advice any time they need it.

1.3: We will listen to our customers and optimise our product range to be digital-by-default with new product options in development

1.4: We will improve the customer experience through excellent communication and service delivery

1.5: Greater accessibility and ease of use of our products and services

**SO2. Technology**We will drive efficiencies and value for money across DBS and foster a culture of innovation through modern, stable, secure, and accessible technology estate.

2.1: We will deliver new citizen facing products and services for our customers and partners

2.2: We will embrace data to inform insight and drive an intelligence-led organisation

2.3: We will provide our people with new tools, so they are better supported in their work and introduce new capabilities to be a more efficient organisation

2.4: We will strengthen our operating model to further realise value, innovation, and sustainability

**SO3. Making a Difference**We will strengthen our reputation as a recognised and trusted provide of public services, and as a source of specialist expertise, who actively contributes to safeguarding across the communities we serve.

3.1: We will increase the impact and reach of DBS through establishing direct relationships with and support, third sector, or equivalent organisations which champion safeguarding and the rehabilitation of offenders

3.2: We will enhance the way we operate our statutory functions relating to information gathering

**SO4. Our People and Organisation**We will make DBS a modern workplace, with a talented and diverse workforce who are empowered to do their jobs and to fulfil their public duty.

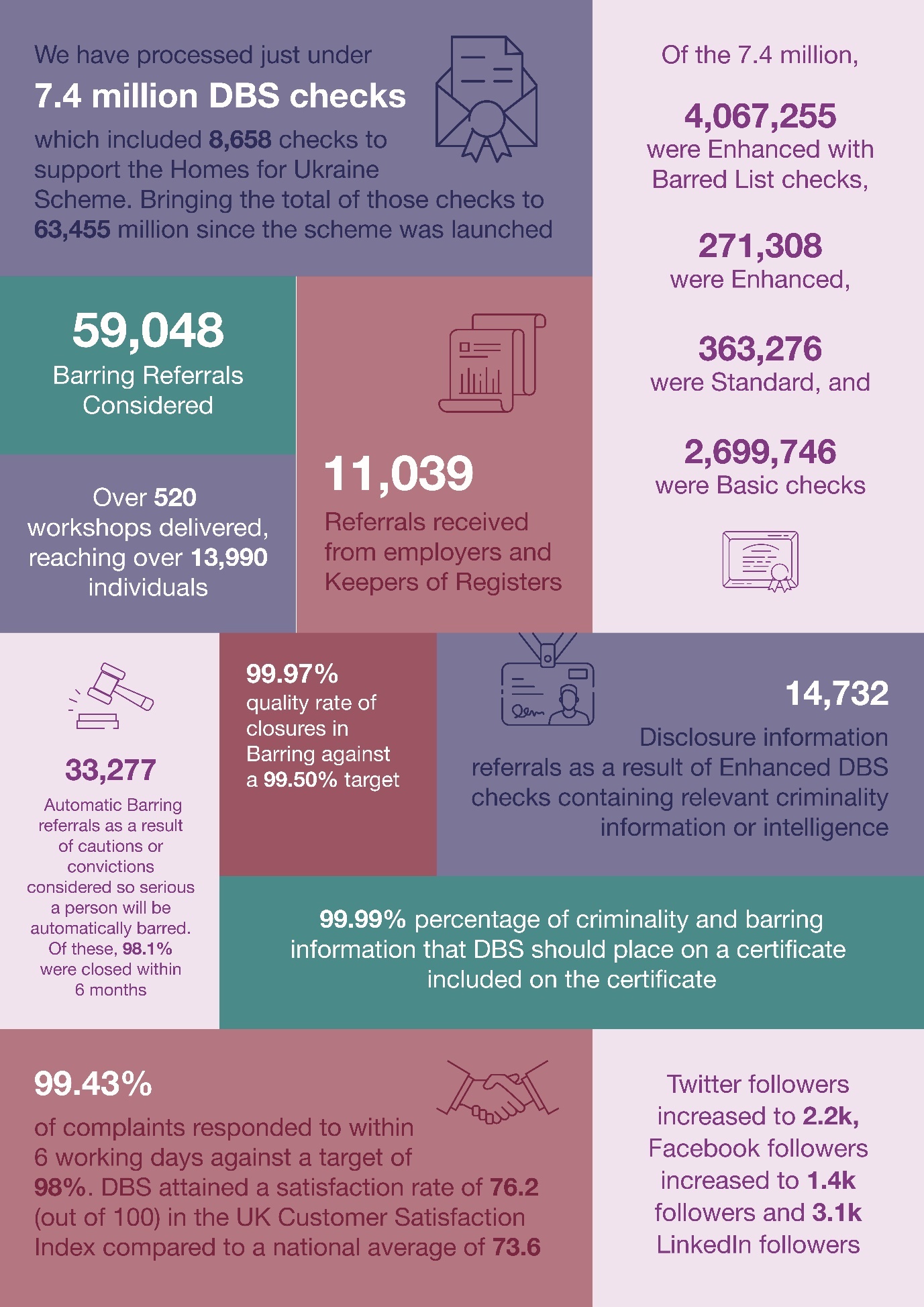
4.1: We will be an employer of choice in the public sector

4.2: We will improve diversity across the organisation with equality and inclusivity embedded in the way we work

4.3: We will continue to ensure staff are appropriately rewarded and fairly recognised for their achievements

4.4: We will have the most effective workplaces to best align with our ways of working and our workforce

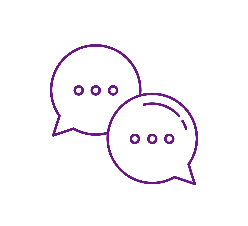
4.5 We will continue to align DBS with cross-government standards and good practice

**Key Achievements in Numbers**

* Almost 7.4 million DBS certificates issued.
* We have processed just under 7.4 million DBS checks, which included 8,658 checks to support the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Bringing the total of those checks to 63,455 million since the scheme was launched.
* Of the 7.4 million, 4,067,255 were Enhanced with Barred List checks, 271, 308 were Enhanced, 363,276 were Standard, and 2,699,746 were Basic checks.
* 59,048 Barring referrals considered
* 11, 039 referrals received from employers and Keepers of Registers,
* 14,732 disclosure Information referrals as a result of Enhanced DBS checks containing relevant criminality information or intelligence,
* 99.97% quality rate of closures in Barring against a 99.50% target
* 99.99% percentage of criminality and barring information that DBS should place on a certificate included on the certificate
* 33,277 Automatic Barring referrals as a result of cautions or convictions considered so serious a person will be automatically barred. Of these, 98.1% were closed within 6 months
* Over 520 workshops delivered, reaching over 13,990 individuals
* Twitter followers increased to 2.2K, Facebook followers increased to 1.4K followers and 3.1K LinkedIn followers
* 99.43% of complaints responded to within 6 working days against a target of 98%
* DBS attained a satisfaction rate of 76.2 (out of 100) in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index compared to a national average of 73.6

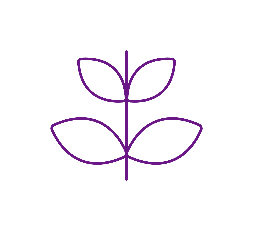
**Imperative: Safeguarding**

**Strategic outcomes:   
#1 An outstanding quality of service  
#2 A visible role in the safeguarding landscape**

  
Towards the end of the 2023-24 performance year, the 2 operational areas within DBS, Disclosure Operations and Barring and Safeguarding, were brought together as part of an organisational restructure, to sit under one Executive Director for Operational Services.

The aim of bringing these 2 areas together is to create a directorate which provides a coherent, efficient, and effective service for customer and partners, to improve engagement and development opportunities, and to provide enhanced quality services which deliver our legislative functions, strategic objectives, vision and purpose.

Although now operating as one directorate, work remains ongoing on the leadership structure and this Quality Account will therefore reflect activity both in terms of the individual workstreams, as well as any combined service.

**Operational Services Training**

**Safeguarding Level 1 Training and Safeguarding eLearning**Safeguarding training takes our staff through some of the fundamentals of safeguarding, and how our work makes a difference. Training is accessed through face-to-face training and refresher training through e-learning. This reporting year, 73% of staff have completed either Safeguarding Level 1 classroom training or Safeguarding e-learning. This falls short of the 85% expectation and was impacted by the increase of work in progress across operational business areas and the resulting delay in releasing staff to attend the training. Training leads will continue to monitor completion rates and will liaise with managers to encourage uptake during 2024-25.

**Barring operational training refresher training and learning**Several internal learning support materials were developed during 2023-24, to provide additional support for all Barring and Safeguarding staff. These included:

* e-learning about relevant conduct and risk of harm
* training material to support new mentors
  + - * refresher training on evidence evaluation, the structured judgement process, appropriateness, proportionality, using CCTV evidence, assessing credibility, Secretary of States Guidance, and the Test for Regulated Activity was delivered to team managers, deputy team managers and caseworkers.

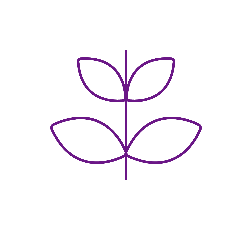
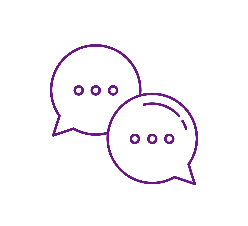
Several other learning opportunities were provided during 2023-24. This included a programme of continuous professional development for staff to upskill and enhance their knowledge and understanding of a variety of safeguarding topics. This was carried out via a range of masterclasses, which were delivered virtually and face to face including:

* North Yorkshire County Council - role of the multi-agency child exploitation lead, attended by 70 staff
* role of the Parole Board attended by 62 staff

**Themed Case Conferences**

A themed case conference on mental health was held, which was attended by team managers, caseworkers, heads of service and associate directors of Barring and Safeguarding. It focused on a specific area of casework and from this, a ‘points to consider’ bulletin was produced to support caseworkers in these areas.

Overall, the development of safeguarding learning resources, refresher training and provision of quality support services has contributed to an improvement in the quality of barring decisions, as evidenced by the improvement in quality performance indicators.



**Disclosure staff training**Since the responsibility for managing disclosure task specific training considerable numbers of staff successfully completing the training and becoming effective members of their team.

In addition to training Disclosure agents, the training team have continued to support other areas of the Operational Services directorate, such as the Disclosure Assurance and Compliance Team (DACT) and the Quality Support and Excellence (QSE) team. Over 70 staff have completed Police National Computer (PNC) training, 49 staff completed ‘Unsures’ training, and 81 staff completed the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA)Training.

In relation to ROA specifically, this training was delivered following an automated solution to fix an existing manual workaround for legislative changes introduced in October 2023. It was not without its challenges, however, the extended Quality Assurance applied enabled support for agents to work independently using the new ROA rules. With the increased Senior Agent resources available, flexible redeployment of staff has become more the norm, to assist other workstreams, without compromising on quality standards. 

With the ongoing recruitment requirements to meet our Public Service Standards targets in 2023 -24, we worked with the DBS Academy to deliver “Train the Trainer” sessions and we developed facilitator packs to ensure consistency with our training approach. As a result, we saw some real quality improvements in comparison to previous year and have applied robust mechanisms to support the quality agenda.

With the improvements to the training, we have seen less of a dip in quality during recruitment campaigns to our evening shift where the majority of R0 PNC is now processed.

This investment in training resulted in sustained improvements in quality ratios across each of the Disclosure workstreams.

Operational Services Quality Assurance  
  
**Barring and Safeguarding**   
The Barring quality rate of closures was achieved at 99.97% against a target of 99.5%. This was the third year that performance has successfully been achieved against this measure.

Performance against the Tier 2 quality rate of closure (HRE) was also achieved, 98.34% against a target of 97.50%.

All 3 of our timeliness targets for Barring were achieved in 2023-24.

* 98.1% of Automatic Barring cases were completed within 6 months (against a target of 96.01% (same as 2022 -23)
* 59.5% of cases where we were Minded to Bar were closed within 9 months (against a target of 50.0%, an improvement against 47.8% in 2022 - 23)
* 85.3% of cases where we were Not Minded to Bar were closed within 6 months against a Tier 2 measure: target of 78.0%, an improvement against 85.1% in 2022 to 23



**Key performance indicator and second tier check**The tier 1 key performance indicator (KPI) is based on the number of incorrect barring outcomes (IBOs) and safeguarding events. Out of the 15428 eligible cases in 2023-24 that were closed in Barring, 5 incorrect barring outcomes were identified, and no safeguarding events were identified. This means that 99.7% of cases were not an incorrect barring outcome.

In the same period, a total of 1,626 casework decisions were checked through the quality assurance process, of which 27 were High Risk Events (HREs). This means that 98.3% of case closures were not an HRE, against the tier 2 target of 97.5%. A HRE is defined as where there is a high degree of certainty and consensus that an event or seriously flawed decision has the potential to result in harm to a member of a vulnerable group, including children.



**Safeguarding Incident Management System**

In addition to the KPIs, there are additional internal quality sub-measures which are monitored and reported on during the year, to provide a ‘whole system’ view of casework quality.

The Quality, Support and Assurance team carry out quality checks on

barring casework decisions and rate the decision against the barring and safeguarding incident management system (SIMS). These are categorised below.

Safeguarding events

Where all lines of defence and quality checking have failed and there is clear evidence a member of a vulnerable group, including children has suffered as a result or where the incident has been a contributory factor to the harm experienced by a member of a vulnerable group, including children.

Risk cases

There is a high degree of certainty and consensus that an event or seriously flawed decision has the potential to have an avoidable negative impact on an individual who is not a member of a vulnerable group, including children.

No risk cases

Where the outcome is considered to be correct, but casework quality issues have been identified which impact upon the defensibility of the decision.

Cases meeting the required standard

Information gathering actions

There is a high degree of certainty and consensus that further information is required to determine the correct outcome of the case.

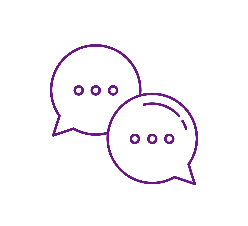
Procedural events

A procedural error outside of the decision-making process which impacts on the quality/productivity of the service.

**Figures and targets**

**In 2023 – 24**

* 99.97% of cases closed that were not considered to be safeguarding events as defined by SIMS: Target (≥99.75%)
* 98.7% of cases quality checked, that were not considered to be risk incidents as defined by SIMS: Target (≥97.5%)
* 95.6% of cases quality checked that were not considered to be no-risk incidents as defined by SIMS: Target % (≥ 90%)
* 85.8% of cases quality checked that were not considered to meet SIMS criteria (cases meeting the required standard): Target (≥ 80%)
* 98.6% of cases that are quality checked that were not considered to be information gathering actions as defined by SIMS: Target (≥ 98%)
* 94.8% of cases that are quality checked that were not considered to be procedural events as defined by SIMS: Target (≥ 94%)



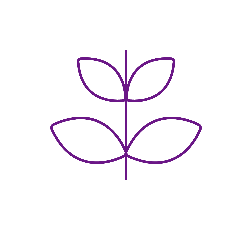
**Barring and Safeguarding decision-making root cause analysis**A root cause analysis (RCA) is undertaken on a selection of high-risk events (HREs) (an incorrect decision to place an individual on one or both Barred Lists) each month to help understand key issues and identify learning for the decision maker or wider organisation. ‘Lessons learned’ bulletins are then produced and communicated to staff, as well as feeding into training to provide a continuous learning cycle.

During the year, a total of 20 Barring and Safeguarding RCA interviews have taken place. This is a selection of the HREs identified through quality checking, where it is considered the most learning can be obtained.

A total of 14 ‘lessons learned’ bulletins were produced, following RCAs, which highlight learning and key messages to individuals and the wider organisation. These were all made available to staff through an electronic library to aid accessibility.

In addition, key learning was highlighted from appeal cases and appeal hearings, and 36 key judgements were circulated. Themes from RCA/quality checking include the following:

* Minimising the harm / potential for harm from an individual’s behaviour.
* Over empathy with the referred individual.
* Critical thinking – by looking at allegations individually and not considering the information as a whole, links between incidents and similar fact evidence was not identified.



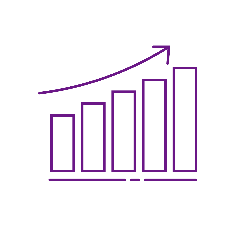
**Barring quality assurance wrap-around service**

During the year, a total of 289 requests for use of the quality advisory and quality wrap-around services were fulfilled, providing advice, signposting, and supporting the decision-making process and colleagues, prior to a final decision being made. The wrap-around service provides advice and information on a one-to-one basis and is available to all Barring and Safeguarding staff.

**Disclosure Assurance 23/24**During the reporting year 23/24, 529,210 quality checks were undertaken by the Disclosure Assurance and Compliance Team (DACT) of these:

522,384 (98.71%) were correct and 6,826 (1.29%) errors were identified. Of these, 6,292 errors were false negatives (certificate was blank when information should have been included) and 534 were false positives (incorrect information contained on the certificate). All 6,826 errors were resolved prior to dispatch. The majority of errors are still attributable to either Registered Body (RB)/applicant error or DBS agent error, which is consistent with previous trends.

Comparing the previous reporting year 2022 - 23 to the current year 2023 - 24, 503,237 quality checks were undertaken. Of these 496,380 (98.64%) were correct and 6,857 (1.36%) errors were identified. Of these 6,208 were false negatives and 649 were false positives. All 6,857 errors were resolved prior to dispatch. Comparing the 1.36% error rate in 22/23 to the 1.29% error rate in 23/24, shows a 0.07% reduction in errors found relative to quality checks carried out. The majority of errors are attributable to either RB/applicant error or DBS agent error, which is consistent with previous trends.  
  
1 Police National Computer matching error was found in the 16,800 Certificate Outcome Checks carried out during the reporting year ensuring we met our KPI’s for Quality. The error was found as part of the 1400 end to end checks completed in January 24. The offence captured as part of this error QA check was filtered once processed through the system and therefore, a clean disclosure was issued.  
  
Through the quarterly Quality Steering Group meetings, we continued to promote the importance of quality to all stakeholders within Disclosure Operations. We continue to monitor error rates and call out any spikes or discrepancies in data and then offer our support, making recommendations for corrective action.

**Assurance Improvements**  
The Operational Services Disclosure Quality Assurance Team have successfully integrated Dispute Team Leader checks (both Data Entry and Data Source) and Sensitive Applications Team bespoke emails into their suite of Quality Assurance (QA) checks over the last year. As such, managers were provided with concise reports and analysis on a monthly basis regarding staff performance.

Quarterly performance statistics and analysis was also provided by the QA Team to ensure Managers were aware of their Team’s performance throughout the year with regards to their yearly accuracy targets.

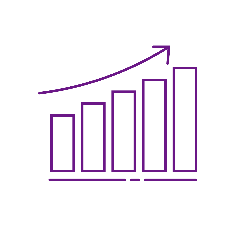
Due to some disappointing QA results for the 2023-2024 year, changes to the QA process have been implemented from April 2024 (2024-2025 year). The QA Team will no longer be involved in the QA checking process and the emphasis will now be placed on each operational area having more responsibility for their own results and continuous improvement by having a dedicated QA Manager within the team. In addition to conducting QA checks, QA managers will also attend feedback meetings, update Library of Lines, monthly results and also be present in a supportive capacity, which will encourage staff engagement. To ensure some independence, an independent sample will be quality checked on a monthly basis to validate the assurance approach.

The introduction of a Redress / Complaint Tracker in 2023 – 24 proved to be an overall success. Heads of Service and Senior Executive Officers have found it to be a useful tool when discussing QA with their staff / teams, as it highlights the possible financial implications when DBS do sometimes get it wrong.

The Tracker also highlights if additional training is required for an individual team member and therefore, is a supportive tool for managers.

Due to the Tracker being such a successful tool, the idea is something that we may consider in the 2024 – 25 reporting year, regarding Legal Claims that we receive, whereby DBS may not have strictly followed their own processes or procedures which, in turn, Government Legal Department (GLD) deem to be maladministration in a Court of Law. Consequently, there can be huge financial implications, not only for the maladministration but additionally, for legal and personal costs.

These can be avoided in the future if we can highlight in such cases that a slight amendment to the procedure would minimise or eliminate any potential risk going forward.



**Data breaches**There were 61 data breaches within Disclosure Operations during 2023-24. This represents a reduction of 20.78% when compared to 22/23 data breaches, where we received a total of 77. In summary:

* 23 related to Standard & Enhanced applications *(33 in 22/23)*
* 9 to Basic applications *(15 in 22/23)*
* 29 non-Police National Computer matching (PNC) errors *(29 in 22/23)*.

Of the 23 Standard and Enhanced data breaches, 4 consisted of procedural errors, 1 Registered Body/Fraud error and 18 agent errors.

Of the 9 Basic application data breaches, all were attributed to agent error. The agent errors were highlighted to the relevant team members and their managers. The non-PNC errors were all agent errors.

All agent errors were fed back to the identified staff and their managers to ensure learning is captured. DACT continued working with our Disclosure Production colleagues in Operational Services to re-check positive matches for possible incorrectly matched applications at the filtering stage. A system fix is currently being worked on by our IT partners, ‘CGI’, and once implemented, this will reduce data breaches further.

Throughout 23-24, DACT have continued to promote best practice to all Disclosure Operations matching staff in relation to data breach avoidance. We have promoted other investigation methods prior to matching and provided good feedback to managers and staff through our data breach matching investigations.

In Q4, a PowerPoint presentation was developed for DACT managers to present during each monthly team meeting. This presentation contains full details of all the checks completed during each month on the DACT Team including updates on our outsource supplier colleagues, ‘SPS’ quality assurance, Data Breaches, and Key Performance information, as well as ongoing and future projects. This has been well received by the team and provides a consistently presented message to ensure all staff remain fully up to date and engaged.



**Quality Steering Group and Quality Summit forum**The Quality Steering Group and Quality Summit forum continue to meet on a quarterly basis. All meetings have a set agenda with the various operational areas reporting on the previous quarter’s results, ongoing issues, and recommendations for improvements. Any themes, proposals to address quality concerns and introduced new approaches are agreed, trialled where necessary, implemented and reviewed for their effectiveness.

**Police Quality Assurance Framework**

An updated version of the Police/Law Enforcement Agencies (known as Disclosure Units) Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) regarding Enhanced checks is at the final stages of development. The objective of Police QAF is to deliver consistency, a standard process and audit trail across all Disclosure Units for individual Chief Officer responsibilities when considering information for disclosure.

It is agreed by the National Police Chiefs Council, for the processing, consideration, and disclosure of police information.

The Barring Quality Assurance Framework (BQAF) was also under review in 2023 - 24. This framework is used when DBS make a request to a Disclosure Unit for information it considers necessary to allow it to consider a barring decision for somebody who has, is currently or might in the future engage in regulated activity. The Chief Officer (or delegate) will then consider approving the sharing of information they reasonably believe to be relevant in relation to the regulated activity concerned and/or future harm which can be released in accordance with the BQAF.

Over 280 training/feedback sessions have been conducted in 2023/24 by our Standards & Compliance Team for existing and new Disclosure Units staff regarding compliance of the Quality Assurance Frameworks and this will further improve quality and consistency across the 52 Disclosure Units. A number of Disclosure Units were provided with Barring and Safeguarding awareness session. Virtual attendees learnt more about the barring decision making process and the contribution police information has in barring considerations.



**Police Model Changes & Improvements**

We have more changes planned in 2024/25 for the business rules that underpin the quality of the matching algorithm that is used to refer checks to Disclosure Units. These changes will further reduce unnecessary checks sent to Disclosure Units, thus improving customer turnaround times, and reducing costs and enhance the quality of matching.



**Conflict Improvements**

Work continues with Customer Services, Relationship Management, and the Police Performance & Standards Teams to improve our Conflicts process. The group resolved a number of concerns and delivered changes to practice, processes and procedures. This included the introduction of new and rationalisation of existing conflict codes, improving guidance notes to make them clearer and more prescriptive and re-introduction on an intervention process to help reduce customer delays. In 2024 -25, DBS will build on that work making further improvements to the process. The working group aims to provide customers with improved turnaround times by avoiding unnecessary conflicts; by enhancing the quality of application form information submitted by applicants / Registered Bodies and by continuous feedback to Disclosure Units and Customer Service staff.

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**Registered Body (RB) and Responsible Organisation (RO) Compliance and Quality Improvements**Registered Bodies (RBs) play a key role in the provision of DBS services, including ensuring applications for Standard and Enhanced DBS Checks are completed correctly and the applicant’s identity has been verified. DBS is responsible for ensuring RBs are compliant with

the DBS Code of Practice for Registered Persons (COP), issued under section 122 of the Police Act 1997 and the Conditions attached to Registration (COR) as set out in the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Registration) Regulations 2006).  RBs which submit checks electronically to DBS via an Ebulk system must comply with the Ebulk Interchange Agreement and ensure that EBulk systems are built in line with the EBulk Business Message Specification (BMS).

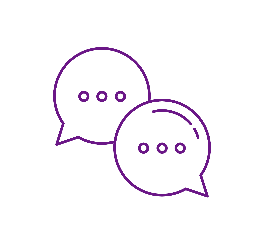
DBS enables organisations, referred to by DBS as Responsible Organisations (ROs), to make applications for Basic DBS Checks on behalf of applicants. DBS requires ROs to comply with the Basic DBS check Terms and Conditions, Processing Standards (BCPS) and Web Services Interchange Agreement.

DBS undertakes a compliance programme to ensure the RB and RO networks deliver their responsibilities, as failure to achieve this could compromise the integrity of the service. During this reporting year we:

* Continued to carry out compliance checks, with a focus on Registered Bodies that use paper application forms to submit applications to DBS.
* Increased the number of compliance inspections carried out without increasing staff resource levels by continuing with remote inspections.
* Provided support to RBs with non-compliant practices in place and achieved our target of 90% of non-compliant RBs being reassessed as compliant within 4-months, achieving 92.11% in Q4 and for the year.

As a result of the ongoing work to improve quality, the RB network reduced from 846 to 703 in 2023 - 24.

In 24/25 the compliance programme will focus on RBs that submit applications via Ebulk and Responsible Organisations.



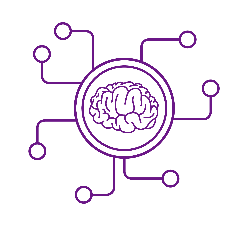
**Internal audit**DBS recognises the vital role internal audit plays in providing assurance that:

* documented processes, procedures and guidance are accurately written, understood, followed, and support the delivery of quality outcomes,
* the quality management system is operating effectively and efficiently,
* we continuously consider opportunities for improvement to ensure the needs of the business, our customers and stakeholders are being met.

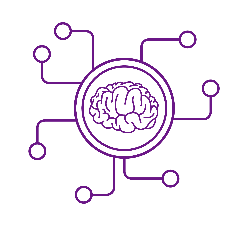
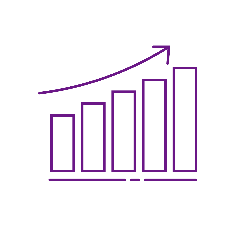
The Operations Assurance and Excellence (OAE) and Quality Support and Excellence (QSE) teams undertake a programme of scheduled audits across Operational Services. This encompasses Barring & Safeguarding, Disclosure and Fraud Detection and Investigation workstreams. During 2023-2024 a total of 65 audits from 71 scheduled were completed (91.54%). Two audits were carried forward to 2024-25 and four removed from the audit programme due to either the merger or removal of processes or because they were out of scope. A total of 19 non-conformities and 68 opportunities for improvement were identified with guidance being the main theme. It is vital guidance is accurate to reduce the risk of staff conducting processes incorrectly and potentially leading to errors, inefficiency, and impacts to customer service.

Where opportunities for improvement are identified, audit staff work closely with operational colleagues and change and improvement (CI) leads to identify, trial and implement changes in line with CI processes.

Once again, enhancements were made to the internal audit process throughout the performance year, including merging of the previously separate operational areas audit schedules into one, pooling resources and sharing best practice in approach.

During 2023-24, OAE undertook a thematic audit covering the approach to Casework Decision Making Authority (CDMA). In addition, the team continued to facilitate progress of the action plan developed following a Call Back Service thematic audit undertook in 2022-23, and conducted a post implementation review of the Information Gathering thematic audit which was commenced in 2021-22 and completed in 2022-23. The thematic approach to auditing is a valuable holistic end to end audit which rather than looking at individual processes in isolation, seeks to review a specific area of work which will have a number of inputs, outputs and processes.

**International Safeguarding**During 2023-24, our DBS Chairman, Chief Executive, and Executive Director from Strategy and Performance met with the Japanese Ministers and Embassy Officials to discuss the Disclosure and Barring Services we provide and operate – as they were developing a similar safeguarding regime in Japan. This was followed up by the DBS Chief Executive being interviewed by the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation NHK as part of a TV report.



**DBS Policy Team**The DBS Policy team work with all areas of the organisation to provide advice on and support everything DBS does.

**Policy Enquiry service**Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, the team received a total of 1,202 enquiries, 67% more than in the previous 12 months. Despite having some resource challenges, the team were able to response to 80.3% of the queries within the 24-hour internal service level agreement During the year, a Policy on Call service was developed and introduced which allows colleagues to raise a query via the MS Teams channel between 9am and 3pm to a named Policy staff member. The service has proved invaluable to staff with one colleague providing the following feedback:

*“I would like to thank the Policy on Call team, the new service set up has been invaluable in supporting answering more complex queries in the moment whilst engaging with stakeholders. A really valuable and appreciated service. Thank you.”*

**Workshops and Masterclasses**The Policy team have been running workshops in various formats since 2016. During 2023 – 24, the team delivered 24 workshops and had 235 attendees. The purpose of the workshops is to increase understanding of DBS products and the legislation that allows people to apply for them, so that customer-facing staff members can better respond to queries. The workshops are available to any member of staff who would like to know more about the subject.

There are currently 3 workshops delivered:

* **DBS checks: the how and the why** – an overview of the mechanics of DBS and how it operates. It helps staff to understand the Disclosure services and products, how this affects the Barring side of the business and why customers may find it difficult to understand eligibility for DBS checks.

It is now a requirement that all new staff to DBS attend this session within 6 months of joining to support induction into the business.

* **DBS checks – working with adults and the other workforce** – how to establish eligibility for the different DBS checks for roles working directly with adults, in roles that involve adults in any way and for people working in the roles that fall into the ‘Other workforce’ category. This is particularly useful if staff have contact with customers and need to understand what the difference is between roles that are working with adults and those that are in regulated activity with adults.

* **DBS checks – working with children** –how to establish eligibility for the different DBS checks for roles working directly with children or in roles that involve children in some way. This workshop is particularly useful if staff have contact with customers as part of their role and need to understand what the difference is between roles that are simply working with children and those that are in regulated activity with children.

The Policy Team also deliver topic-specific masterclasses. These sessions focus on emerging trends identified via analysis of the enquiries that are received and additional horizon scanning. Topics covered have included DBS checks for taxi drivers, hospital porters, and direct health payments.

Number of masterclasses completed: **28**

Total number of attendees since May: **245**

**Engagement**

**Changes to Rehabilitation rules** – the Policy team worked with the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to implement changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act rehabilitation rules. The changes came in to force on 28th October 2023 and the Policy team worked with teams across DBS to update the business rules for Basic DBS applications, review training packages, draft Frequently Asked Questions, and develop bespoke advice and guidance documents for operational teams.

**Digital ID** work – Continuing work started in the previous performance year, during 2023 – 24, the Policy Team engaged in significant discussions and development following the roll out and accreditation of IDSPs (Identity Service Providers).  A full internal review of DBS approach to ID validation will continue into 2024-25.

**Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA)** – The Policy team helped to create the FRA’s eligibility guidance on various roles within the fire service.  The team also assisted DBS Outreach and Partnerships Team with several webinar Q&A sessions for the regional services. 

**Overall summary  
Imperative: Safeguarding**

Safeguarding and quality are at the heart of everything we do at DBS. Ensuring we have well trained staff and committed stakeholders who understand the key role they play, and the importance of quality outputs and outcomes is vital to achieving our vision and purpose. The information provided in this quality account clearly articulates the investment we continue to make both internally with our staff and externally with our stakeholders.

We have continued to deliver a broad range of continuous developments sessions, particularly across the Operational Services directorate, such as casework decision making training, Police National Computer training, themed case conferences Unsure matching training. All of which have resulted in improved quality performance indicators.

Whilst it is disappointing to note the percentage of staff having completed their Level 1 safeguarding training in the year has fallen short of the target (73% v 85%), the attainment level remains relatively positive. It should also be considered in the context of additional pressures caused by increased work in progress, meaning that staff have been focused on our statutory functions, directly delivering quality safeguarding decisions within Operational Services or undertaking work which supports those decisions. Ensuring that staff are well trained and equipped with sound safeguarding knowledge to effectively carry out their roles remains a priority for DBS. Consequently, we will undertake further analysis to identify areas where training uptake needs enhancement and implement the necessary actions, targeting these areas to address this.

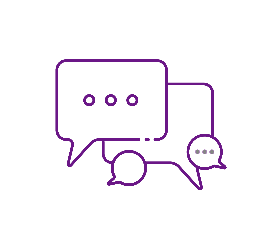
Learning from error is also recognised as a vital tool both in terms of individual and organisation wide learning. The embedded Root Cause Analysis methodology ensures we understand why errors are made, what lessons need to be learned and how to address the associated learning needs. Similarly, the introduction of team Quality Assurance (QA) Managers in response to some disappointing QA results, evidences our proactive approach to quality and safeguarding.

We have made good progress this year in updating the Police Quality Assurance Frameworks whilst also delivering a training programme across the local police force (LPF) disclosure units to ensure consistency and quality. Whilst more widely reviewing the end-to-end processes between DBS and LPFs, updating and developing as required to support the achievement of our shared safeguarding responsibilities and delivering improved customer service.

Finally, our internal, independent auditors have continued to assess the effectiveness of the overall Quality Management System, challenging nonconformities and highlighting opportunities for improving the ways we work within and across teams, once again providing evidence of the importance DBS plays on striving for excellence though the delivery of quality products and services by our colleagues and partners.

**Imperative: User Experience**

**Strategic outcomes: #3Trust and influence within the safeguarding landscape**

 **#5 Inclusive and Increased diversity**

**Outreach engagement/programme update**The DBS Outreach and Partnerships team had 3 clear aims for 2023-24: to continually grow and improve its regional, national, and sector-based offering, to enhance senior stakeholder engagement with partners, and to grow our external events programme in a meaningful way.

The Regional Outreach service has outreach advisers embedded in Northern Ireland, Wales and the 9 regions in England. Consequently, the team has directly reached over 13,990 individuals through a combination of events, workshops, and meetings. Collaborating with stakeholders at all levels, the team continues to improve awareness of DBS and the role it plays in safeguarding the vulnerable.

In terms of national and sector-based engagement, the team has collaborated with a variety of different organisations such as the NHS Employers, Local Authorities, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and faith groups, to develop and deliver bespoke events for their people. Some of these events are being delivered in a tiered approach both nationally and regionally.

The team continued to facilitate opportunities for organisations to work with DBS to improve safeguarding and explore improvements to the way in which DBS deliver our products and services. For example, the team collaborated with local authorities, facilitating engagement between them and relevant Barring colleagues, to overcome issues that were having a negative impact on information sharing (including some technical issues) between the 2 organisations.

The team delivered over 520 workshops during 2023 -24, each tailored to individual organisations or sectors, and whilst our focus remains on 2 main themes - DBS checks and barring referrals, the offering was expanded to build on awareness and understanding including more specific topics such as the Update Service and transferable harm.

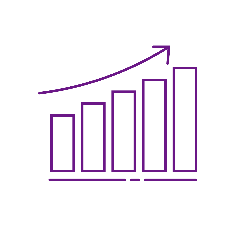
Our ‘open access’ duty to refer and disclosure workshops continue to run every month and were developed to help smaller organisations who do not have enough staff for an organisation specific workshop. This means we have been able to extend our regional outreach support to many more organisations.

Working with organisations to improve their understanding of the eligibility criteria for DBS checks helps them to understand how and where DBS checks fit into their recruitment and retention processes. By adopting a safe and fair recruitment message, we have encouraged organisations to consider how best to risk-assess and determine the suitability of potential and current employees.

The workshops the team run with stakeholders to help them understand when and how to make a quality barring referral to DBS and ensure that they are aware of their legal duty to make a referral when certain conditions are met. This helps those with safeguarding responsibilities to understand not only how and when to make a barring referral, but also the importance of providing good quality, relevant information as part of the referral process. In line with this, we expect to continue to see improvements in the quality of referrals received from organisations who have attended these workshops moving forward.

The Regional Outreach Advisers maintain strong working relationships with colleagues across DBS. They support colleagues in the Regional Barring Decision Making teams by engaging with organisations to remove barriers to providing information requested by DBS to support the decision-making process. This has had an incredibly positive effect on case progression, resulting in key information being received more quickly, allowing cases to be considered and either closed or moved to the next stage of the decision-making process. This reinforces the safeguarding benefits of regional teams working closely with outreach colleagues.

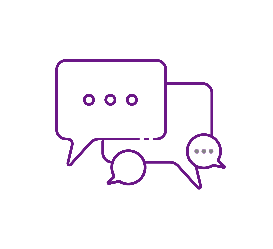
The Outreach and Partnerships team, Engagement, and Communications staff have continued to develop the suite of materials available to improve engagement and enhance the education of stakeholders. We have responded to feedback and collaborated closely with stakeholders, added additional subject matter and utilised alternative methods of delivery and platforms to ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose.

**Barring Referral Service (BRS)**

The Barring Referral Service (BRS) enables referring parties to complete an online referral form. The service was formally made accessible through the DBS website, as a minimum viable product in March 2023. The next iteration of the BRS was to provide upload functionality to enable referring parties to provide supporting evidence and documentation at the point of making a referral rather than having to provide those separately by post or email. Although delayed, upload functionality was successfully deployed in January 2024.

One of the target ambitions for the BRS is to transition up to 100% of referring parties to the BRS and reduce the volume of paper referrals to 0%, where the paper form is not required for equality, diversity, and inclusion reasons. With the benefits being an improved customer journey, reduced customer effort, improved quality of referrals and improved safeguarding. Since its launch we have made good progress towards those aims with an average of 55% of referrals received from referring parties being submitted through the BRS.

Further enhancements to the BRS will be considered throughout 2024-2025 based on a number of factors including customer feedback and operational needs.



**Social Media**Social media is an essential communication channel for DBS and enables the organisation to effectively communicate and engage with our customers, partners, and the public.

Over the past year, significant work has been undertaken to continue growing our existing social media channels. As of April 2024, our follower numbers were:

• 2.2k followers on Twitter   
• 1.4k followers on Facebook   
• 3.7k followers on LinkedIn

As a result of an independent review of our channels in 2023, we have worked to implement these changes during the 2023/ 24 financial year. Some of the significant changes include delivering live webinars on LinkedIn to share insights to support safeguarding professionals to make their recruitment and employment practices safer.



**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**2023-24 has been a developing year in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) delivery and has offered an opportunity to reflect on elements working well as well as progress areas for improvement to continue achieving our strategic aim of improving Diversity and Inclusion. This has culminated in a new approach being considered

and implemented in the latter part of 2024 which will further embed EDI into the heart of all activity in DBS.

The DBS EDI reshaped approach was approved by the DBS SLT in February 2024, following an extended period of consultation. This refreshed approach gives the EDI team the opportunity to introduce the 5 I’s of inclusion which look to Inspire, Influence, Improve, Inform, and Instinctively improve Inclusion across the business.

The reshape also outlines the below:

• Development of a new EDI Practitioners Forum to build consistency; co-ordination and collaborative EDI function across DBS; responsible for auditing our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) compliance

• Re-imagined EDI Network into an Internal EDI Advisory Group which is tasked by and influences the EDI Practitioners Forum

• Formalising the approach for the colleague support/peer led groups

• All SLT members become Inclusion Ambassadors

• Associate Directors (ADs) become specific issue-related Champions

To support us in achieving this, the EDI team is now operating at full capacity with a Head of Inclusion in place, alongside a newly appointed EDI Manager and EDI Adviser dedicated to delivering, guiding, advising, and shaping EDI ambitions within DBS.

Key activity throughout 2023-24 is detailed below.

**Engagement**

The EDI team have continued to strengthen their relationships with colleagues across the organisation, in both operational and support functions. Working closely with Wellbeing, the Academy, and the Communications team. The impact of this collaborative approach remains evident as the teams produce more awareness campaigns and events are published across the business with more staff engaging and sharing their personal stories and attending these events (International Women’s Day Round Table event/ EID).

The EDI area has seen significant development over the past few months that includes the creation of the 5 I’s of Inclusion and the following groups:

**The 5 I’s of Inclusion**



Encompass 5 key opportunities of involvement for DBS staff ensuring Inclusion is embraced throughout the organisation.

Each play a crucial role in creating environments that celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging and each member of staff has a pivotal role  
to play in the 5 Is of Inclusion both internally and externally. Anyone can move between the Is as they work in DBS; there is space for everyone.



**Inspiring Inclusion:** SLT and board lead inclusion, but all can and should inspire it. Leaders at any level should aim to be inspiring, encouraging authenticity and celebrating diversity, fostering a culture that inspires others to embrace their true identities and support EDI initiatives this has led to the creation of **Senior Leadership Team Inclusion Ambassadors.**

All SLT members are to become overarching Ambassadors for Inclusion rather than characteristic specific champions, this allows all SLT members to drive forward inclusivity in DBS, meaning a wider viewpoint of diversity through decision making. This approach does not stop a specific interest from members but ensure wider overview from all, it also avoids gaps in support; for example, reduction in SLT numbers has meant reduction in “champion” support. This new approach increases visibility of Inclusion across SLT and into the organisation.

**Influencing Inclusion**   
This is about empowering leaders and team members to advocate for inclusive practices and policies, driving positive change throughout the organisation for both staff and customers – particularly through **AD Inclusion Champions.** These are ADs who will act as EDI Inclusion Champions, this will ensure that our leaders and team members are empowered to use their influence positively, advocating both into SLT and the workforce for inclusive practices and policies that drive positive change throughout the organisation. Each leader, using their position and privilege to influence the actions and behaviours of their teams.

We have seen ADs come forward to volunteer to represent areas that they are passionate, about this including Pregnancy and Maternity, Disability and Age. The hope is that as AD’s advocate for an area that is personal to them this message will be authentically driven throughout the business.

**Improving Inclusion**  
A newly introduced **EDI Practitioners Forum** chaired and supported by the EDI team but with an Internal EDI Advisory Group and AD Champion representation alongside a formalised Governance structure in place through to board. The forum is responsible for auditing PSED compliance, the forum aims for continuous and improving delivery of EDI activities; actively incorporating feedback to evolve policies and practices for a diverse workforce and customer base.

The scope of the EDI team will reach across the business and all related activity; it will build on the solid foundations that have been laid in some directorates and learn lessons from those who have been developing and delivering initiatives in their own areas necessarily outside of any organisational drivers.

This would also mean that ownership and driving force of the EDI KPI measures would sit wholly with the EDI team but with opportunity for the EDI Practitioners Forum to consider them on a quarterly basis to develop and evaluate activity to improve the statistics.



**Informing Inclusion**

Expanding across the organisation, including through an EDI Advisory Group, this will enable DBS to cultivate transparency and open communication. This will promote inclusivity by sharing information about goals, decisions, and opportunities – learning from lived experiences to enhance our inclusive culture and ambition.

**EDI Advisory Group**The previous EDI Network has now ceased, and the EDI Advisory Group is due to be launched in April 2024. The Advisory Group will meet monthly and is tasked and influenced by the EDI Practitioners Forum; acting as a deliverer of specific activity as determined through the EDI Practitioners Forum, undertaking critical friend/advisory role for the business and a vehicle for lived experience to influence key decision making. In addition, they undertake recommendation setting with Chairs of all support/peer led groups represented such as the Just Ask Group, the Neurodiversity Group and Menopause plus any others which are developed through the year hoping to support a joined-up approach.



**Instinctive Inclusion**, instilling a natural grasp and appreciation of diversity, embedding inclusive behaviour across the organisation; from leadership to frontline staff, by learning from past and present practices and using a colleague led support structure to foster instinctive inclusion within DBS.

**EDI training**

As part of our membership with the ENEI network[Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion - The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)](https://www.enei.org.uk/) is open to all our staff to use any of their resources or attend any of the webinars/round tables that they deliver during our membership.

The EDI team has also created learning events, such as an International Women’s Day Round table that was open to all staff to attend and hear firsthand experiences from female leaders within DBS.

140 members of staff participated in awareness training on our Public Sector Equality Duty as well as completion of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs), this has really supported the understanding amongst staff of the importance and role of EqIAs and, with the creation of an EqIA resource hub, has improved the quality and timeliness of these important considerations.

We are also working closely with the Academy on our learning offer from Bailey and French, creating an EDI learning package for staff that will be rolled out across the organisation in 2024.



**Accessibility**Accessibility has continued to be a cornerstone of EDI activity within DBS; the introduction of the new Intranet has allowed the EDI team to develop meaningful, engaging, and accessible content for staff. The Accessibility review was completed in 2022 and this continues to support individuals with accessibility needs.

A communication campaign asking staff to check their Personal Information on METIS (HR platform) and ensure it is recorded accurately has led to an increase in declaration rates for the diversity of our employees across the areas from 3.37% in December 2023 to 4.10% in March 2024.

As part of our commitment in the 2023-24 Business Plan, supportive work was undertaken in considering customer feedback in relation to gender related issues with the application process in 2023 and this will continue into 2024 as the EDI team will lead a full review into accessibility considerations across its products and services.

**Embedding EDI in our strategy and planning**

As part of the DBS 2020-25 midpoint refresh exercise in 2023 -24, work was undertaken to incorporate equality, diversity, and inclusion into our vision and values, strategic priorities, and desired outcomes. DBS board approved these inclusions, along with the EDI–focussed milestones that were committed to in the 2023-24 business plan.

The completion of the milestones has continued to contribute to delivering greater accessibility and ease of use of our products and services, it has further embedded equality and inclusiveness across our organisation in the way we work and offered the opportunity for greater development of our EDI delivery model.

**Overall summary  
Imperative: User Experience**

The evidence provided under the User Experience imperative demonstrates the achievements made in strengthening our reputation and increasing the impact and reach of DBS through direct relationships and digital platforms as well and against our responsibilities under the equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) agenda.

Our Outreach and Partnerships team have engaged directly with more individuals during 2023 -24 when compared to 2022 – 23, delivering a wide range of opportunities for safeguarding professionals to increase their understanding of DBS products and services. The team have worked at national and regional level and across many different sectors, raising awareness of the duty to refer and what makes a good quality referral. This has reinforced our shared safeguarding responsibilities and contributing to protecting the most vulnerable in society, including children and vulnerable adults.

The team have also strengthened relationships with operational colleagues, using feedback to inform content of general and bespoke workshops in response to specific and thematic concerns thereby adding value from safeguarding and quality perspectives.

Once again, DBS has invested in exploiting technology to reinforce the safeguarding agenda. The growth of our presence on social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is further evidence that DBS is increasing its reputation as a trusted organisation with more people following our channels.

The deployment of Upload functionality on the Barring Referral Service (BRS) was significantly delayed due to some technical difficulties, which was disappointing both from an organisation and customer perspective. However, since its deployment it has contributed to improvements in the customer journey and the ability for referring parties to provide all information at the point of referral. It is anticipated this will improve the quality of referrals and support the timeliness of decision making. Our strategic intent is to continue to improve the customer journey across all our services, including the BRS and we have and will continue to seek and use customer feedback to inform future enhancements.

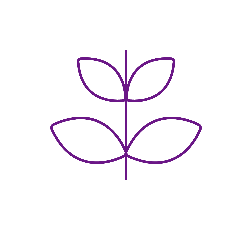
Finally, there is a wealth of evidence in terms of the strides the organisation has made in embedding EDI across the organisation and our services. We have refreshed and strengthened our approach and delivered effective training to a large cohort of our workforce, demonstrating our commitment to creating an environment to celebrate diversity and ensure EDI considerations are at the forefront of organisational decisions and our services as well as embedded in the DBS culture for our colleagues.

**Imperative: Efficiency and Effectiveness**

**Strategic outcomes: #4 Our people understand their contributions**

**#5 Inclusive and increased diversity**

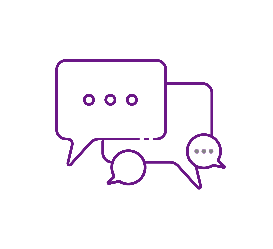
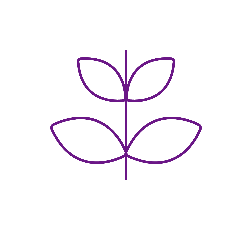
**#6 Pride in DBS**

******Innovation**Over the last 12 months, the Innovation function has continued to develop the culture of innovative thinking, especially within the operations teams, to drive  
improvements that impact positively on Quality.

Our Innovation Lab, powered by our staff, have been driving improvements and ideas that have delivered enrichment throughout DBS. At the start of 2023, we embarked on a journey to drive the automation of workloads. To remove the need for our teams to manually carry out tasks that would otherwise allow them to focus more on quality in areas of the organisation.

Through an initiative that looked at the work our customer services team did on a daily basis, interacting with communications that came into the department from customers, we developed and engineered a solution that has now been deployed which automatically categorises communications based on the type of request and saves the team significant time. The benefits include a quicker response time and also allow the team to focus on the quality of responses and resolution.

We hope to deploy this type of solution amongst the wider organisation and are working with our colleagues to deliver an organisation-wide deployment of an automation function that frees up our operational and back-office staff, giving staff the time to focus on quality and productivity by removing the labour-intensive tasks and replacing those with automated functions that assist us in our everyday tasks. Our focus as we head into 2024 and beyond is to innovate in everything we do, to help the organisation be leaner by design and continue to deliver and enhance safeguarding.



**Operational Services Continuous Improvement**The Bi-monthly Continuous Improvement (CI) Forum for Disclosure was refreshed during 2023, resulting in 14 initiatives being developed and supported by the team.

Members from around the business also attend the forum such as Innovation, Fraud, and Barring and Safeguarding colleagues. The sessions provide an opportunity to update the CI leads about change and business improvement activity that is taking place across the disclosure business areas. A new written procedure was created in collaboration with Barring and Safeguarding colleagues to support the new process for business improvement ideas, which allows colleagues to better understand resources requirements, responsibilities, risks, and benefits.

There are currently 5 Digital Champions in the Business Improvement Team who attend regular Home Office led Digital Champions meetings and forums. This enables Business Improvement colleagues to be part of and exposed to the ‘evergreen’ approach to Microsoft 365 Home Office approved applications.

As a result of this engagement, we now consider all continuous improvement ideas raised against the Microsoft 365 suite of applications and products, as these products sit within DBS estate and have no reliance on external suppliers or additional costs and are a valuable option to explore when continuous improvement ideas are raised. Being a digital champion can ensure that we maximise the capabilities of technology available to DBS staff. The creation of a M365 support forum began in June 2023 which has grown in membership and has improved the M365 skills of colleagues across Disclosure and Barring.

Our Disclosure colleagues are also working closely with the Business Improvement team to explore opportunities to improve operational processes. For example, using the M365 technology platform, they have introduced a more effective way of dealing with Fingerprints requests by improving the Fingerprint Referral Form.

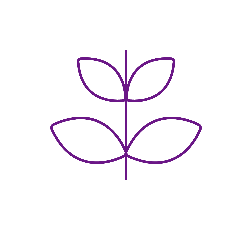
Our Barring and Safeguarding operational colleagues carried forward 22 CI initiatives from 2022-23 and, during the 2023-24 reporting year, and closed 35. Suggestions for improvements came from 8 different teams which, again, is consistent with previous years and evidences the CI process is well embedded. The majority of change initiatives are instigated from our core decision making area and administrative support function.

The importance of effective change management is recognised by our senior leaders who attend a quarterly CI forum to discuss initiatives, potential solutions and make formal decisions on proposed options, trial data, staff communications and specific actions required.

Throughout the year we have continued to develop CI efficiencies recording, to track both potential increased impact on costs and resource, as well as reductions in required resource and costs. In addition, we can articulate the benefits to customers and to safeguarding.

The CI process is also closely aligned to both our standard audit programme and thematic audit programme to ensure any identified improvements and changes are effectively managed, impacted, assessed, and communicated.

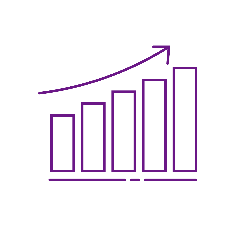
One example of a change which was successfully implemented during 2023-24 was in relation to our approach to supporting Police colleagues in investigating potential offences where barred individuals are seeking to engage in regulated activity roles from which they are barred. The process was streamlined, and elements of double handling removed, which led to more efficient processing times and released resource to focus on other operational priorities.



**Operational Assurance and Excellence (OAE) Bulletin**The OAE Bulletin is a written monthly briefing provided to Barring and Safeguarding operational staff. It provides key updates on continuous improvement and change initiatives, guidance changes, internal and external audit, data sharing agreements, letter template changes and any other general information which caseworkers and support staff required in order to effectively carry out their role.

Each month, the bulletin includes a ’Spotlight On’ feature which focuses on a specific workstream so that as well as the key message, additional background and context is provided to increase knowledge and understanding. During the year the bulletins have also encouraged colleagues to take part in change impact assessments to ensure their views are considered account when developing solutions to change initiatives. In addition, the bulletin provides timetables for audits and guidance reviews to enable staff to plan accordingly.

**Knowledge Management**

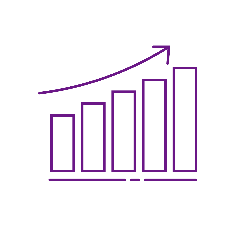


**Knowledge Harvest**

DBS colleagues hold vast quantities of high-quality tacit knowledge, with the majority of this existing solely in the minds of individuals, shared only when asked or through coincidence. A knowledge harvest process is now actively used where new starters, movers, and leavers (prior to departure) can share what they know more easily with others in DBS.

During the 2023-24 performance year, colleagues have completed 55 knowledge harvest documents. The explicit knowledge created and shared by colleagues who complete this process is stored centrally and at a local team level as a knowledge asset. As an organisation, this reduces lost knowledge and increases our ability to understand the capabilities of our people and any gaps that exist.

The current reach of the completed knowledge harvests is limited to a team level where we have been able to gauge value before widening the availability of these documents to others in DBS. Our process has been to action feedback where necessary and improve the process so that when knowledge assets become available in a self-serve wider organisational environment, the value they hold is highly regarded by colleagues. We will look to action this throughout 2024, with a general release expected later in the year.



**Policies and Procedures**

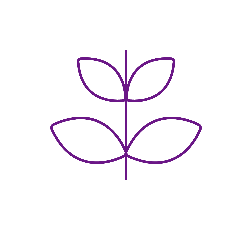
Improving our organisational policies and procedures for accessibility, consistent language, and style have provided our people with quality documentation, easily accessed via SharePoint. Creating a singular space where documents were maintained and monitored for accuracy resulted in time efficiencies for colleagues when benchmarked against our old process.

During the 23/24 financial year, we have:

* Published and reviewed by our Policy and Procedure Review Group: 32 versions of policies, procedures, and guidance documents  
  + In total, the review group made 993 recommendations.
  + Authors accepted 682 of these recommendations and implemented changes before publication.

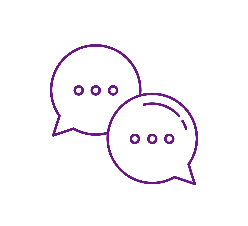
Within the reviews, we identified 5 common themes, the review group supported authors to publish high-quality documents. These include:

* Adherence to DBS Style Guide
* Formatting (page numbers/footers, alignment of paragraphs, table of contents)
* Grammar and Punctuation
* Clarity/Jargon
* Requests for Flowcharts/Infographics

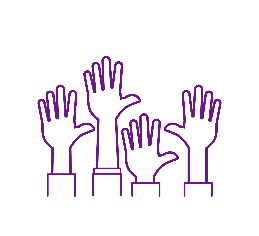
Since launching our policies and procedures SharePoint page, further improvements to design, access, and content availability have been made available to colleagues. Most of DBS has undergone a content consolidation exercise during 23/24, reducing the overall number of policies and procedures and allowing us to create more accessible versions of the information on SharePoint. It now means colleagues can access heavily used information more quickly, which we are confident will result in greater time-saved efficiencies when looking for relevant guidance.

**Information Organised**Information Organised (IO) is a repository of information Barring and Safeguarding colleagues can access relating to the delivery of casework and associated functions. Effectively, everything they need to be able to carry out their job in one place. Examples of the information stored include, guidance documents, performance information, training resources, lesson learned documentation, contact details and Legislation.

The team responsible for maintaining the IO Portal, Operations Assurance and Excellence (OAE) spent a significant amount of time designing and delivering a refined, easy to use platform during 2023-24. OAE, working with colleagues from across the directorate sought feedback along the journey from concept to delivery to ensure an intuitive platform which met the needs of all users whatever their role. The team will continue to respond to feedback and enhance IO as required.



**Intranet**In June 2023 we launched our DBS Intranet, to provide news, information and easier access to policies and documents which are needed by all staff. This makes it faster and more efficient for colleagues to find the information they need, and is now available from the Homepage, the first page when you open a browser from your POISE device, without the need to save a link and log in to access this.

A team of between 40 – 50 content editors manage the site’s content and pages. They are granted edit and publishing rights after being given basic Intranet training, provided by the Communications team, who are also the site’s administrators. A 6-month review of all the content was carried out between December 2023 to April 2024 to ensure content was still relevant, up to date and accessible and further engagement with the Employee Forum has taken place to improve how ‘user friendly’ the site is.

**Operations Solutions**

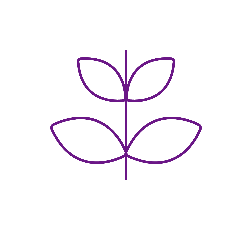
During 2023-24, the Operational Solutions team have driven a number of projects which have had a material impact on DBS safeguarding activities.

Most notably the development and design of the new Disclosure Data Screens (DDS), to enable system filtering of caution and conviction data has heralded an end to the interim manual certificate solution, providing a safer more efficient service to the customer and restoring access to the Update Service.

In addition to designing and testing, activity to ensure proposed functionality met operational requirements and impacts, risk, resource etc. were identified. The team was heavily involved in training colleagues and supporting the incorporation of Rehabilitation of Offenders Act rules on our Standard and Enhanced products.

As part of another project, the Operational Solutions team identified that, unlike the CGI supported platform, the Basic Digital Service online certificate result did not reflect the outcome of disputes and was providing a clean certificate view where missing Police National Computer information, for example, had been identified. The team subsequently designed, delivered, and wrote the procedures for a new process to mitigate this risk.

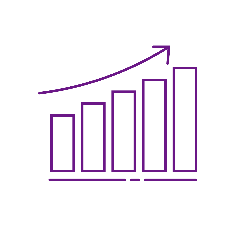
Following successful feedback of the manual disclosure information transfer (DIT) process designed by the team during the interim filtering solution, the team were asked to explore the possibility of taking responsibility undertaking PNC checks onto support barring case decision making. During the information gathering stage of the transition, the team identified opportunities for improvement which led to process efficiencies as well as enabling casework staff to focus on decision making.



**Shadowing programme**The Business Improvement team supported the development of a shadowing programme for Disclosure Operations staff. 35 colleagues within the directorate completed a survey in January 2024 and expressed an interest in understanding more about different roles and teams within the Disclosure business area, which will support development opportunities. The shadowing programme enables staff to develop knowledge of other roles, and how teams work closely together, which can improve collaboration and partnership opportunities for the seven teams within the Disclosure business areas.

An SEO Group was established during 2023 who meet on a quarterly basis. The aim of the group is to support the Disclosure Management Team​, enhance engagement​, work in collaboration​, problem-solve together​, knowledge share​, provide peer support to each other and idea generation leading to service improvement​, and reduce silo working​.

The SEO group has been tasked by the Disclosure Management team to develop a video to provide an overview of the disclosure services and products which will support new staff during induction and will support existing staff to know more about the other teams in the disclosure service areas.



**Staff Rotation Programme**   
In 2023 -24, the Barring and Safeguarding leadership team continued to ensure the directorate had an opportunity to continue its staff development and talent management directorate delivery plan milestone. A cross grade directorate working group, with associate director sponsorship, launched a staff rotation programme. The programme offered a variety of opportunities for staff at AO to SEO grade to experience other roles in the directorate, building resilience alongside developing staff. Working with line managers, staff were offered the opportunity of permanent, interim, and short-term rotation into equivalent roles across the directorate. Staff welcomed the rotation programme and saw it as an opportunity to develop additional skills and insight into other workstreams.

In achieving staff rotation, the role of importing and exporting line managers was also key. Cross directorate managers met with each other and the staff members to ensure, during rotation, that they were supported and had a development plan that was appropriate to the role. Managers utilised the DBS Academy resources, such as ‘Development Conversations – Leading and Managing’ and used the ‘Deputy Pool’ SharePoint site to post rotation opportunities.

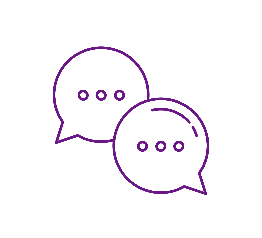
Using these resources continued to embed the Academy and consolidate staff development and talent management within the directorate for both staff and line managers. As a directorate, where staff had developed new skills, it allowed the directorate to flex resource to meet demand for its varied business workstreams. The success of this scheme has also seen the directorate, where appropriate, highlight staff rotation during recruitment campaigns. The impact on staff rotation and recruitment and retention will be analysed to further understand its benefits to the DBS.

**Organisational Change**

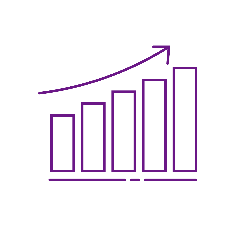
Our Directors within DBS are responsible for continually reflecting upon and reviewing their services and capabilities in line with the organisational design principles. Over the course of the year, this has resulted in the realignment of certain roles and responsibilities in some teams.

A range of initiatives and strategic projects have continued to progress that are designed to support DBS on its journey through the life of the DBS Strategy. The continued development of the innovation agenda, the launch of the DBS Academy learning portal, the Wellbeing Delivery plan, improved engagement with the reward and recognition scheme, and our employee engagement agenda are all key examples at a corporate level of good work underway to improve the experience of employees and to therefore affect organisational effectiveness.

Similar positive activities are happening at a directorate level including open door sessions, wellbeing clubs, social eventing, deputy pools, process reviews and more.

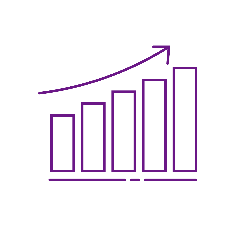
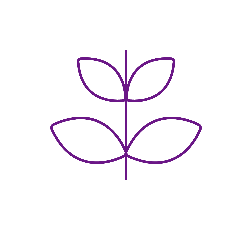


**Reward & Recognition**

Following the launch of the new scheme in July 2021, the scheme continues to be monitored and reviewed, and during 2023 - 24 has seen a full audit of the scheme, with further improvements set to be implemented during 24/25. During the 23/24 financial year, there was further significant increase in engagement with the scheme; a 32% increase in the use of the R&R platform to recognise colleagues, with 1833 thank you messages posted to the wall, and 1453 vouchers issued. A total of 66 exceptional performance awards were made. 

**Colleague Wellbeing**Work has continued to continuously evolve our wellbeing offer, following the launch of the strategic plan in 2021. Year 3 of the plan saw the launch of a menopause policy and menopause community, a core focus on mental health, including a refreshed stress management policy and toolkits, which were reviewed by Mental Health UK, together with the introduction of accredited mental health first aiders and further mental health champion training.

DBS also became a member of the Employers for Carers with Carers UK and launched a Carers toolkit and carers community. The wellbeing newsletter has evolved to become a key resource for colleagues and compliments the wellbeing page on the intranet, acting as a hub for all wellbeing information. Alongside this, we have increased the number of wellbeing advocates with a total of 45 now in place across the organisation, ensuring that we continue to provide insight and feedback as we continue to evolve the offer.



**Academy Developments**

The DBS Academy continued its development in 23/24, building on the foundations set in the previous year. Visits to the interim portal continued to grow, with over 1,185 employees (83%) engaging with the Academy's resources more than 72,000 times.

The Academy team continued to grow the learning and development offer with a range of opportunities including:

* the launch of our Annual Learning Festival which included innovative experiential learning/coaching opportunities like ‘escape the van’, strategy focused roundtable conversations with SLT, and impactful workshops on topics like suicide and failure. The festival proved learning is a key organisational priority.
* the facilitation of 12 learning programmes (primarily cohorts of a mindset and behaviour-based People Management programme, and a development of potential programme Catalyst)
* the launch of an innovative ‘gift of learning’ campaign which allowed colleagues to gift others a book from our short library, curated based on our skills needs analysis. This engaged our hardest to reach colleagues the most, and our data shows some have even become our most engaged people.

The year culminated in the launch of a new digital learning portal for all colleagues in DBS, providing a central location for all learning & development resources, and a range of digital learning technologies to enable us to continue growing the offer.

**Apprenticeships**   
During 23/24, we launched our new Apprenticeship Framework, which sets out in a clearer way the DBS approach to supporting apprenticeships and prepares us with the foundations to grow the number of apprentices across DBS.

Numbers are increasingly incrementally, with new apprentices in Data Engineering joining existing apprentices studying Accountancy and Business Analysis.



**Sustainability**   
Our ambition at DBS is to move towards becoming a more sustainable and greener organisation. This ambition is supported by the board approved DBS Strategy 2020-2025, one of the strategic objectives being **Sustainability and Wellbeing - “We will look towards increased sustainability in the improvement of our products and services, and enhanced focus on the wellbeing of our people and customers."** It is also supported by our Green Policy.​

Progress to the end of the 2023 – 24 performance year includes reducing our footprint through such measures as our move to more remote working, reduced printing, business travel, and a move towards electronic scanning of barring records.

We have also worked with our landlords to reduce our energy consumption by installing energy efficient solar panels, increased cooling capacity, and intelligent lighting. We also worked closely with our partners ensuring their commitment to improve our sustainability and have built in sustainability requirements into our procurement activities with new partners.

Our performance has improved against a number of Greening Government Commitments (GGC) targets since last year. In 2023 – 24, we achieved a 67% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, meaning we are on track for the 2025 GGC target of 44%. During 2023-4, water consumption reduced by 51% and paper usage reduced by 78% compared to the baseline year. The proportion of waste recycled also met the 70% recycling GGC target and we sent zero waste to landfill.

DBS is committed to creating social value and promoted initiatives that benefit our local communities through the use of staff volunteer days.

We continue to explore the options available for the most appropriate, effective, and efficient working environments for our business and our people. We will identify new ways to increase our sustainability, reduce our carbon footprint and better contribute towards supporting the communities where we live and work.

**Overall summary  
Imperative: Efficiency and effectiveness**

The DBS Quality Assurance Framework acknowledges that organisations that take quality seriously will almost always be on an improving trajectory and that continuous improvement (CI) is key to quality improvement.

Once again throughout this performance year DBS has been focused on identify and exploring opportunities to change and improve with the aim of increasing our effectiveness and efficiency, which ultimately leads to better outcomes for our customers and those we seek to protect. The evidence under this imperative highlight the wide range of mechanisms we deploy to do just that. Whether it be our Innovation colleagues testing and deploying automation techniques, Operations Solutions colleagues influencing the design and development of data screens, or Business Improvement and local CI leads working with operational colleagues to improve standard process and procedures, it is our staff who are championing and leading the way.

At DBS we recognise the value of our colleagues and have used the reward and recognition scheme to acknowledge exceptional performance and thank staff for a job well done. Equally, we acknowledge the importance and value of their knowledge. Developing our approach to knowledge management provides a foundation for effective learning, continuous improvement, and decision making based on experience and sound intelligence.

Increasing staff knowledge and the opportunity to develop skills and career pathways speaks to the Our People and Organisation strategic objectives and there is a wealth of evidence under this imperative of DBS investing in staff via Academy offerings, staff rotation, and shadowing programmes and the Apprenticeship Scheme. In terms of supporting delivery of their roles, staff are supported by effective policies and procedures available via accessible platforms and regular information updates such as the OAE bulletin. All of which contribute to efficient, effective and quality safeguarding services.

Finally, it is encouraging to note the progress made by DBS in our ambition to become a greener more sustainable organisation. We take our social responsibilities seriously and are proud of the improvements we have made during 2023-24.

**What our External Assessors say about DBS**

DBS understands and values the importance of an impartial view of the effectiveness of our systems and services. External review serves to strengthen the organisations approach to reflecting on our practice and outcomes as well as our ability to identify and deliver opportunities to improve our ability to safeguard.

**ISO 9001:2015**ISO 9001:2015 is an international standard which establishes the criteria for a ‘quality management system’ (QMS). Organisations like DBS use the standard to demonstrate the ability to consistently provide products and services which meet customer and regulatory requirements. The standard specifies requirements for the establishment, maintenance, and continuous improvement of a QMS, covering a range of principles including but not limited to:

* Context of the organisation: determining external and internal factors that affect ability to achieve the intended results of the QMS
* Customer focus: The primary focus of quality management is to meet customer requirements and to strive to exceed customer expectations
* Leadership: leaders at all levels establish unity of purpose and direction and create conditions in which people are engaged in achieving the quality objectives of the organisation
* Process Approach: Understanding how results are produced by the system, including all its processes, resources, controls and interactions, allowing the organisation to optimise its performance
* Improvement: Successful organisations have an ongoing focus on improvement
* Compliance against the standard results in formal certification. The DBS is currently assessed by the British Standards Institute (BSI) and the auditor looks for positive evidence to verify that elements of the scope of certification are effectively being addressed by the DBS’ QMS.

Historically, DBS has operated a QMS and maintained ISO 9001 (2015) certification for each of our operational areas, i.e. Barring and Safeguarding and Disclosure Service Delivery. During 2023-24, a programme of work was completed to merge the 2 systems and certificates into one single QMS. In November 2024, an external auditor from BSI conducted a verification assessment to determine the 2 areas were compliant with ISO 900 (2015) and operating as a single QMS. Following the audit, DBS was recommended for single certification, achieving our strategic objective of delivering a centrally managed ISO system.

Throughout this reporting year, in line with requirements placed on BSI by UCAS, DBS was audited by an independent BSI auditor on 2 occasions. Following visits by both the routine and independent auditors, the continuous surveillance visits resulted in ongoing certification recommendation.

The following comments were included in the audit reports:

“Senior Management continue to utilise the quality management system as an effective process for managing the business and fulfilling its strategic objectives, in alignment with its strategic directive which continues to be the safeguarding of vulnerable groups through supporting employers making safer recruitment and employment decisions.

The management system has demonstrated that it continues to support the organisation in continual improvement activities and their alignment with the strategic objectives of the organisation. Activities associated with management system development etc support with performance evaluation activities was found to be well implemented.”

“Strengths have been identified throughout the assessment, particularly relating to organisational knowledge and operational control. Business processes have been demonstrated to have been determined and understood relating to the audit sample and individuals interviewed. The management system has been demonstrated to be adding value to the business as a whole.”

**Government Internal Audit Agency**The Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) is an executive agency of HM Treasury, established in 2015. The GIAA is the government’s primary provider of internal audit services, providing objective, independent insight, and assurance, enabling organisations to achieve better outcomes with public money. The GIAA assess DBS business areas and the level of assurance provided is assigned to one of 4 categories. These categories and their meanings can be found in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | |
|  | The framework of governance, risk management and control is adequate and effective. |
|  | Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control. |
|  | There are significant weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it could be or could become inadequate and ineffective. |
|  | There are fundamental weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it is inadequate and ineffective or is likely to fail. |

During 2023-24, GIAA have undertaken 9 audits of DBS activity, assessing the overall adequacy and effectiveness of DBS’ governance, risk management, and control framework. The audits were conducted in the areas of Wellbeing (including remote working), Innovation, Reward & Recognition, DBS Quality Assurance, Compliance with Service Standards (Police Forces), Stakeholder Engagement, Safeguarding Delivery, DBS Transformation Programme and Key Financial Controls (expenses including travel and subsistence).

The audits for Wellbeing, Innovation, and Compliance with Service Standards all received a final outcome of ‘moderate’, and the audit of Safeguarding Delivery received a final outcome of ‘substantial’. Any actions agreed to meet GIAA recommendations following audits are tracked by DBS’ SLT and reported to the Audit and Risk Committee. At the time of writing this report, we are awaiting the final reports for the remaining assessments.

**Government Functional Standards**   
Government Functional Standards (GovS) exist to create a coherent, effective, and mutually understood way of doing business within government organisations and across organisational boundaries, and to provide a stable basis for assurance, risk management and capability improvement.

There are 13 GovS applicable to DBS and we have appointed a Standard Manager to each. The standards are:

Government Functions Security Counter Fraud

Project Delivery Commercial Finance

Human Resource Internal Audit Debt

Property Analysis Digital

Communication

Significant progress was made across DBS in regard to compliance with Government functional standards with DBS complying with all but one mandatory (shall) elements across all functional standards. This is due to system limitations, but we have, however, developed a manual workaround to achieve compliance. Work is ongoing across DBS regarding compliance with advisory elements of the functional standards.

**Customer Service Excellence**The Customer Service Excellence standard is designed to test, in great depth, the areas that research has confirmed are a priority for customers: delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. DBS were re-accredited against the Customer Service Excellence in December 2021. Centre for Assessment, an external assessment body, also completed a surveillance review in December 2023. The purpose of the review was to ensure that DBS continues to meet all 57 elements of the standard. The review was conducted remotely and involved answering the assessor’s questions as well as providing evidence of improvements made to the customer experience in the last 12 months, such as the progress made by the DBS staff development academy and the outreach and partnership work delivered by DBS staff.

The assessor spoke to a number of members of staff from across the organisation to discuss the work being undertaken in their area. The Centre for Assessment concluded that DBS remains fully compliant with the standard and continues to demonstrate that they are ‘compliant plus’ against the 16 criteria ratings previously awarded. DBS were also deemed to achieve the “compliant plus” rating against 4 further elements, bringing the total to 20 – the highest number DBS has ever achieved.

**UK Customer Satisfaction Index**DBS continued to participate in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) as part of the public service (national) sector. The UKCSI is based on 26 measures which are categorised in 5 dimensions of customer service - experience, complaint handling, customer ethos, emotional connection, and ethics. Participation in the UKCSI enables DBS to benchmark against other public sector organisations. The public services (national) sector average score for overall satisfaction was 73.6 (out of 100) in the UKCSI published in January 2024. DBS scored 76.2 in the same index.

**What our customers say about DBS**

**Complaints**DBS received 4287 complaints during 2023-24, which represents an increase of 951 when compared to an intake of 3336 in 2022-23. The primary reason for complaint was in relation to Police delay.

99.59% of the complaints resolved in 2023/24 were handled at the initial stage, and a further 0.41% at the second stage. Our target was to respond to 98% of all complaints within 6 working days and this target was met with an attainment of 99.43%.

**Feedback from Outreach work**We continue to use pre and post workshop surveys which continue to demonstrate an increase in confidence and understanding for delegates. An average of 96% of respondents said that they felt able to apply their learning within their organisation and the number of respondents who expressed that they were ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ confident in understanding who DBS are and what they do rose from 35% before the event to 90% after the event.

**Barring Referral Service (BRS)**As stated earlier in this account, the BRS service was launched in March 2023 with the enhanced upload functionality subsequently deployed in January 2024. Throughout the design and deployment of the service we have sought to obtain customer feedback to enable to deliver an improved customer journey, which meets the needs of customers and the business, and which can be used to inform future enhancements.

We gather this data by using methods such as direct engagement and Google Analytics. During 2023-2024, we have not seen a consistent rate of satisfaction with the figure varying from 0% - 75% and the average being around 55%. It is important to note that this satisfaction rate is dependent on customers agreeing to the various analytics and where we have low rates it can be attributed in part to customers rejecting the analytics.

Users have reported:

*“This is the first time I had used the service. The majority of it was easy to navigate, and straightforward to use. I think it would have been useful for me to know in advance what information I would be expected to provide, so that I could accumulate it all beforehand and be ready to enter it.”*

*“The online tool is so much better than the old forms. Good work!”*

*“Really easy process, much better than the paper form”*

*“Uploading documents file names had to be changed as it contained full stops which the system would not allow.”*

**What our staff say about quality**

**Quality Walkrounds (QWRs)**QWR remained one of the tools senior leaders used to engage with staff throughout 2023 -2024 with many colleagues from both operational and non-operational area having the opportunity to speak to members of their Directorate Management Team or the DBS Senior Leadership Team.

**What does good quality look like to our staff:**

*“Ensuring our suppliers are performing in line with requirements”*

*“ Applying what I have been taught and trained”*

*“Following guidance, talking to other people, seeking opinions”*

*“Making thorough defensible decisions with all available information and evidence properly evaluated”*

*“Working proactively and collaboratively with the business, meeting regularly with colleagues to ensure the support we provide remains relevant and adds value”*

*“Taking onboard feedback for the provision of future services”*

*“Being active and valuable partners to our internal stakeholders”*

*“Communication and sharing information”*

**Conclusion**

In the 2022-23 Annual Quality Account we committed to develop an Outcomes Framework, support delivery of actions from the Home Office independent review of Violence Against Women and Girls as well as working with them in response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. DBS has engaged with Home Office throughout the 2023-24 performance year and will continue to make progress during 2024-25. Development of an ‘Outcomes Framework will also be progressed alongside other strategic developments planned for 2024-25.

In terms of our day-to-day activities, we remain committed to continue to put the most vulnerable in society, those who we strive to protect, at the centre of all our actions. Whether that be directly though our operational areas or indirectly through our support services. In addition, we said we would develop and improve our services to enhance our contribution to the national safeguarding agenda. The information included in this 2023-24 Quality Account evidence activities and approaches which have contributed to those aims. It is clear the focus from organisation, team, and individual perspectives, is on delivering quality outcomes. The passion for safeguarding is embedded and drives us to succeed. Strategic objectives included following our co-created strategy refresh, underpin our continued commitment to making tangible improvements to our products and services.

In 2023-24 we have:

**Delivered high performance and quality standards across Operational Services:** We processed almost 7.4 million DBS checks, considered 59,048 barring referrals, and achieved 99.97% quality rate of closures in barring and 99.99% accuracy rate of information placed on certificates. DBS has also met or exceeded its timeliness targets for barring cases and improved its customer satisfaction rate to 76.2 in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index.

**Achieved 78% of our business plan milestones:** We completed 32 out of 41 active and relevant milestones, while 3 were removed and 7 were deferred to 2024-25. The milestones were aligned with the DBS strategic objectives and aimed to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of DBS products and services.

**Met or exceeded most of our published service standards in 2023-24:** We achieved 7 out of 11 of our published service standards and improved our performance in some areas compared to the previous year, such as the percentage of automatic barring cases closed within 6 months and the percentage of complaints responded to within 6 working days.

**Engaged our customers, partners, and stakeholders to enhance its role in the safeguarding landscape:** We have delivered over 520 workshops, reaching over 13,990 individuals, and increased our social media followers across different platforms. In addition, we updated the Police Quality Assurance Frameworks and worked with local police forces to improve the end-to-end processes for disclosure and barring information.

**Invested in our people, technology, and innovation to support its vision and purpose:** This year we have launched of the DBS Academy learning portal, the reward and recognition scheme, the wellbeing delivery plan, the innovation lab, the Barring Referral Service, and the Disclosure Data Screens. We continued to work towards increased sustainability and social value, reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, paper usage, and waste to landfill.

**Look Forward to 2024-25**

As highlighted earlier in this account, the DBS undertook a review of our DBS 2020-25 strategy during 2023-24. As 2024-25 is the final year of our strategy we will look ahead to the development and design of a post 2025 strategy. We will once again engage with our employees to co-create the strategy and will work with them, our customers, and partners to achieve our vision and purpose.

We will continue to modernise our products and services, enabling us to maximise the use of technology, including exploring automation and AI tools, to progress towards becoming a digital- by- default organisation, whilst continuing to place high quality services, value for money and sustainability at the heart of everything we do.

Additionally, we will begin work on the replacement and decommissioning of our legacy technology estate, to improve experiences for both our staff and customers.

We will continue to develop our strategic relationships across the safeguarding and rehabilitation of offenders ‘spheres and develop an implementation plan to ensure organisation understand and act on their legal duty to refer individuals to us for barring consideration in line with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse recommendations.

Finally, we will further develop the Operational Services directorate and commence a Business Optimisation Programme to maximise opportunities to increase our ability to deliver all services across the organisation, whether internal or external facing, efficiently, in the pursuit of the highest standards of quality safeguarding.