



**Part 1 - Public
Minutes of the Bar Standards Board meeting**

Thursday 25 September 2025 (2.00 pm)

Hybrid Meeting, Rooms 1.4-1.7, BSB Offices & MS Teams

Present:

Professor Chris Bones (Chair)
Jeff Chapman KC
Tracey Markham
Andrew Mitchell KC
Ruth Pickering
Stephen Thornton CBE

By invitation:

Kirsty Brimelow KC (Vice Chair, Bar Council) – via Teams
Steve Haines (Consultant)
Barbara Mills KC (Chair, Bar Council)
Malcolm Cree (Chief Executive, Bar Council)
Lucinda Orr (Treasurer, Bar Council)
Andy Russell (Director, Council of the Inns of Court)

Press:

Neil Rose (Legal Futures)

BSB Executive:

Ahmet Arikan (Senior Policy Officer)
Reshma Bibi (Regulatory Officer)
Graham Black (Head of Communications)
Naznin Chowdhury (Governance & Risk Manager) – via Teams
Eloise Denchfield (Senior Lawyer) – via Teams
Mike Farmer (Head of Programmes and Planning)
Rebecca Forbes (Head of Governance)
Teresa Haskins (Director of People and Culture)
Saima Hirji (Director of Regulatory Enforcement)
Faisal Hussain (Regulation Policy Manager) – via Teams
Alex Kuczynski (Director of Legal & Information Management)
Ewen Macleod (Director of Strategy, Policy & Insights)
Rupika Madhura (Director of Regulatory Standards)
Natasha Mutch-Vidal (Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager)
Mark Neale (Director General)
Richard Parnham (Handbook Manager)
John Picken (Governance Officer)
Mark Platt (Head of Policy)
Debbie Stimpson (Director of Planning, Programmes & Engagement)
Adelita Thursby-Pelham (Head of Authorisations)
Kirsty Totimeh (Senior Policy Officer)

Resource Group: Richard Cullen (Director of Finance) – via Teams

Item 1 – Welcome / Announcements

1. Chris Bones welcomed those present to the meeting (also his first as Chair of the Board). He also welcomed first-time attendees, Faisal Hussain and Mahalia Davis (the latter attended for Part 2 of the meeting).
2. He also confirmed that Heidi Stonecliffe KC will be the new Vice Chair of the Bar Council as from 1 January 2026. She will be the first employed barrister to hold this post.

3. Item 2 – Apologies

- Gisela Abbam
- Emir Feisal JP (attended for Part 2)
- Ruby Hamid
- Irena Sobic KC
- Leslie Thomas KC

Item 3 – Members' interests and hospitality

4. None.

Item 4 – Approval of Part 1 (public) minutes (Annex A)

5. The Board **approved** the Part 1 (public) minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2025.

Item 5a – Matters arising & Action List

6. The Board **noted** the action list. In respect of min 13b (24/07/25), Mark Neale confirmed that, subsequent to the last meeting, he and Kirsty Brimelow KC had discussed the process for resolving reports generated from social media. That action is therefore now complete.

Item 5b – Forward agenda

7. The Board **noted** the forward agenda list.

Item 6 – Ratification of out of cycle Board decision re: Rule Change**Request – Inns' Conduct Committee**

BSB 045 (25)

8. The Board **ratified** its earlier out-of-cycle decision to approve a rule change at the request of the Inns' Conduct Committee.

Item 7 – Update and next steps – First-tier complaints consultation

BSB 046 (25)

9. Ahmet Arikan introduced the paper which followed the outcome of an earlier consultation on first-tier complaints. He also referred to the report's recommendations for changes in the Handbook (Annex A) and an associated data collection policy statement (Annex B). *Note: the proposed changes have been mandated by the Legal Services Board (LSB) using its powers under section 112 of the Legal Services Act.*

10. Andrew Mitchell KC commented that:

- there may be some guidance required so that in addressing the LSB's requirements, what is proposed is also reasonable and proportionate;
- for example, the proposal that barristers must notify a client of their right to make a complaint both at the point of instruction *and* on the conclusion of the matter. Since the relevant start and finish time can be

- quite short, this seems a potentially unnecessary duplication;
- what is termed a “complaint” is very broadly defined, to the point where even a mild disagreement could be classed in those terms and so trigger the complaint procedure. *Note: Jeff Chapman KC supported this point ie the definition provided in Part 6 (Annex A) is so wide as to encompass any degree of dissatisfaction, whereas, for reporting purposes, a proportionate approach is required;*
- the equivalent rules for solicitors are such that issues are managed informally as a first step, which does not require formal reporting.

11. In response, Ahmet Arikhan stated that:

- the high-level definitions included in the annex simply reflect those quoted by the Legal Services Board;
- we will further consider the specific point about client notification, and clarify that through guidance notes for the profession;
- likewise, in respect of definitions for a “complaint”, we will establish a Working Group involving the Legal Ombudsman and peer regulators, so as to gain common understanding of what this means in practice.

12. The Chair referred to the government’s growth agenda and the need for regulation to be fit for purpose in that context. He therefore agreed with the need for a proportionate approach as mentioned above.

13. Stephen Thornton noted that a cost estimate for data collection on first-tier complaints is not provided in the paper. It would be helpful to have this available by the next meeting. Mark Neale agreed to this request.

14. In response to a question from Tracey Markham, Ahmet Arikhan confirmed that there will be an evaluation of the effectiveness of the new rules within two years of the start date. The executive is already aware of the risks of negative impacts on smaller chambers as stated in the paper. In addition some areas of the Bar are more likely to be the focus of dispute than others given the nature of their practice. In consequence the review will include specific feedback from relevant Specialist Bar Associations.

15. At the end of the meeting, the Chair invited observations from the guests present. The following comments were made:

- clarification of points made earlier about the paper on first tier complaints (cf. min 10). *Note: in this respect, an assurance was given that these comments were drafting changes rather than any shift from the substance of the LSB policy.*
- the plan is for barristers to comply with the new rules for first-tier complaints within four months. This includes the Christmas and New Year period, however, which reduces down the actual time available so an extension may be necessary;
- there are occasions when what might be seen as complaints are received by barristers from clients who are mentally unwell. In these circumstances a different approach may be required that acknowledges this fact and should be incorporated into guidance for the profession.

16. The Chair welcomed these contributions. The following points were made:

- data collection based on the new rules will come into effect as from 1 April 2026 but that is the limit of any immediate impact. There will be no obligation to submit reports at that point;
- the point on dealings with mentally unwell individuals can be incorporated into discussions with the Working Group (cf. min 11).

17. **AGREED**

a) to note the responses to the consultation on First-tier Complaints and to approve the approach to implementation as set out in the paper.

b) to approve the draft BSB Handbook changes set out in Annex A of the report subject to additional drafting points and guidance that underscore the need for a proportionate approach to the management of first-tier complaints within chambers and how these are recorded for reporting purposes. AA

c) that, subject to (b) above, to approve the draft BSB first-tier complaints data collection policy statement at Annex B of the report. AA to note

d) to ensure that the point raised about complaints from mentally unwell individuals (cf. min 15). is considered by the Working Group on First-Tier Complaints. AA to note

e) to ensure a cost estimate is provided in respect of first-tier data collection by the BSB (cf. min 13). MN

Item 8 – Director General’s Report – Public Session

BSB 047 (25)

18. The Board **noted** the report.

Item 9 – Chair’s Report on Visits and External Meetings

BSB 048 (25)

19. The Board **noted** the report.

Item 10 – Any Other Business

20. None.

Item 11 – Date of next meeting

21. Thursday 27 November 2025 (5.00 pm)

Item 12 – Private Session

22. The Board resolved to consider the following items in private session:

- (1) Approval of Part 2 (private) minutes – 24 July 2025.
- (2) Matters arising and action points – Part 2.
- (3) Performance in 2025/26
- (4) BSB Corporate Risk update for the Board.
- (5) Business Plan & Budget for 2026/27.
- (6) Harman Report.
- (7) Compliance with LSB Statements of Policy.
- (8) Reform and reorganisation
- (9) Director General’s Report – Private Session.
- (10) Any other private business.
- (11) Board Member-only discussion

23. The meeting finished at 2.20 pm.