

ECB Board Meeting – Wednesday 26 November 2025

Venue: Teams

Member attendance: Catherine Brown (Chair), Alan Cavill, Gerard Curran, Althea Efunshile, Caroline Wells, Chris Nichols (CEO) (from item 5)

Observing: Delroy Corinaldi (board member designate)

In attendance: Claire Evans (to item 7), Louise Rubin, David Parkin, Holly Perry (minutes), Hannah Semple, Elizabeth Thompson (to item 6)

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome, apologies and declarations

1. The Chair welcomed all present, including Delroy Corinaldi, who was observing the meeting ahead of joining the Board on 1 January 2026. The Chair also welcomed Hannah Semple, who would be returning to the ECB team in the new year, following maternity leave.
2. No apologies were received. There were no new declarations of interest.

Item 2: Minutes of the previous meeting

3. The minutes of the 15 October 2025 Board meeting were **agreed** as an accurate record of the meeting. The Board **agreed** a number of redactions in the minutes prior to publication.

Item 3: Matters arising

4. The Board **noted** the action tracker and Board forward agendas.

Item 4: Chief Executive's Report

5. The Chief Executive's Report was presented, and the following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. It was confirmed that the Memorandum of Understanding with the Public Service Ombudsman Wales had now been signed by all parties, and the Board thanked the Head of Complaints for her work in finalising it.
 - ii. A successful day of interviewing had been held on 24 November, with offers made to two individuals who would hopefully join the complaints team in coming weeks.
 - iii. The Board received an update from the executive on progress with statutory underpinning. It was proposed that a letter be sent to the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State, David Lammy to offer an update and seek his support with No 10 (**action**).
 - iv. A helpful meeting had been held on 19 November with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice in the Welsh Assembly Government, Jane Hutt CBE. At the meeting, the Minister had agreed to write to Minister Sackman in support of securing the legislation for statutory underpinning. The Minister also committed

- to encouraging the remaining local authorities' in-house enforcement teams in Wales to sign up to ECB accreditation.
- v. The first request for a judicial review of the ECB had been received, and this was now at permission stage. The substance of the complaint focused on the ECB's locus for handling complaints prior to January 2025.
- vi. The analysis of the responses to the consultation on the draft standards for Vulnerability and Ability to Pay was progressing well, and the consultation response paper and final draft standards would be presented to Board in January.

Complaints update

- vii. The Board congratulated the complaints team on their ongoing hard work, with interesting learning now starting to emerge. A more detailed paper on data trends since January 2025 was a separate item on the agenda.
- viii. The Board welcomed the introduction of the demographic questionnaire, and looked forward to receiving the first cut of the data at a future meeting.
- 6. The Board **noted** the Chief Executive's report and **approved** the resolution attached as an annex to the report to appoint Delroy Corinaldi to the Board from 1 January 2026 (to effect an update for Companies House).

Item 5: Business plan 2026/27 Scoping paper

- 7. The Chief Executive presented the paper, which provided the Board with initial scoping thoughts on the budget and business plan for 2026/27 ahead of presentation of the fully worked up plan and budget to the January Board. In particular, the Board was invited to comment on: the structure of the workplan, the potential for additional workstreams and research, and the impact on the levy, reserves and contingency.
- 8. The following points were raised in discussion:

Feedback on the draft workplan

- i. There was little coverage in the paper on the work related to governance, financial planning, and corporate services. It would be important to ensure there was a good explanation of this work – and the costs associated with it – in the worked-up business plan (**action**).
- ii. There was also a wish to improve arrangements for monitoring risk at Board level, and this would be fed into the workplan (**action**).
- iii. In response to the question about whether further research should be planned for next year the Board remained keen to further advance understanding of the demographics of those experiencing enforcement action, to better understand who the ECB was working to protect. It was agreed that the team would scope a piece of research into this for consideration at the next Board meeting (this may be an academic review or qualitative research rather than primary statistical research, for reasons of cost) (**action**).
- iv. The plans in relation to influencing creditors were intended to relay a degree of flexibility – i.e. that the work would be scaled up if there were delays with statutory underpinning, or slowed down if the primary legislation progressed

more quickly. Notwithstanding this practical need for flexibility, the Board agreed that it was important to make tangible progress in 2026/27 on influencing creditors. The team would work up a plan that set out the minimum that would be achieved in this area in the 2026/27 business year (**action**).

Feedback on the draft budget

- v. The costs of demographic research would need to be added to the figures set out in the paper.
- vi. There was a degree of contingency built into the resourcing of the complaints team, however given the experience in 2025/26 where volumes were underestimated, it was agreed that further contingency may need to be reflected – across the board rather than just in relation to complaints specifically.
- vii. The need to shore up the complaints team in 2025/26 had meant that the ECB had had to dip into reserves to the tune of some £80,000, and these would need replenishing. The Board agreed that it was not acceptable to run reserves below three months' full operating costs.
- viii. The effect of all of this would be a significant proposed increase in the levy for 2026/27 which the draft business plan consultation would explain. This was felt to be necessary given the context was a clearly evidenced upturn in the amount of work that the ECB was undertaking in response to the needs of the sector, particularly on oversight and complaints handling. The ECB was now in a more informed position than in previous years in terms of understanding the costs of operating the oversight regime.
- ix. It was acknowledged that the ongoing lack of implementation of the TCOG fee rise that had been announced was putting pressure on firms, however implementation of the increase was now understood to be imminent.
- x. The 'polluter pays' model could be on the table in future years, however it would take some time to work through the recharging framework. Reference might be made to this to explore the sector's openness to the model in the consultation.

9. The Board **noted** the scoping paper, providing the executive with a clear steer to increase the budget for 2026/27 to provide more contingency and resilience, ahead of receiving the next drafts at its January meeting. Following the Board discussion in January, there would be a public consultation. The final business plan for 2026/27 would be presented to the March Board for approval and adoption.

Item 6: Thematic Review – progress update

- 10. The Director of Policy and Oversight and the Risk and Compliance Principal presented a paper updating the Board on the progress of the ECB's Thematic Review of fee charging in the industry.
- 11. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. There had been no issues to date with acceptance by firms of the requirement for visits, or any questions about the timetable. This was to be welcomed.

- ii. While a key focus of the visits was about fees, observations were being made about firms' overall culture – for example, aspects such as how individual agents were monitored, how complaints were handled, general levels of accessibility etc. The ECB was keen to establish a firm's openness, and the extent to which they were operating within the spirit - as well as the law - of the regulations. There was a brief discussion about the importance of "culture" and the Board asked the team to consider over time how culture could be described and measured.
- iii. It was noted that the review would continue over the next six to eight weeks. Once all reviews had been completed, each firm would receive a short individual report, probably in February 2026, containing any findings or recommended actions.
- iv. In February 2026, the Board would receive a report – to be published - bringing together the findings of the thematic review in an anonymised summary report covering the whole industry. Then in early Spring, the ECB proposed to publish further guidance on fee-charging.
- v. The Board thanked the Risk and Compliance Principal in particular for her hard work and efforts in her first six months at the ECB.

12. The Board **noted** the paper and confirmed that it was content with the adjustment to the reporting timetable.

Item 7: ECB Complaints

13. The Head of Complaints presented the paper, which provided the Board with the complaints trends and analysis up to 30 September 2025, together with an update on the complaints process, the challenges faced to date, and plans for the future.

14. The following points were noted in discussion:

- i. The large number of complaints received before they had completed the first stage process of complaining to the relevant firm was noted, and the impact this was having on resourcing was also noted. While complainants were invited to attach a copy of their correspondence with the firm to show that they had exhausted the firm's complaints process, this was not currently mandatory – and indeed for accessibility reasons, it was not recommended to make this mandatory at this stage. As part of the planned efficiency review, the whole area of premature complaints would be looked at (**action**).
- ii. In relation to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the Board considered that these should be set at the level the organisation wished to deliver. Missing them did not mean that they had been set too high – rather, that resource pressures were ongoing and that volumes continued to be higher than initially modelled. The aspiration – when resourcing issues had been resolved – was to meet the KPIs as set. Again, reflections on the KPIs – where they had been set and how the ECB was progressing in achieving them – would be considered as part of the efficiency review (**action**).
- iii. During the current period, while performance was behind where the ECB wished it to be, it was agreed that communication with complainants to keep them informed of the progress of their complaint was important.
- iv. The intelligence that the ECB was gleaning from complaints continued to be considerable. Firstly, they were important in shining a light on how industry dealt with first tier complaints. Secondly, they provided helpful examples

which the ECB would use in the insight report – and in helping firms to learn lessons from where things had gone wrong in the past. Thirdly, in the more egregious cases, referrals were being made to the oversight team for compliance follow up - these examples would be important for the annual report.

- v. The oversight team was not in a position to follow up to the extent that they would like given resource constraints, however the ECB would be looking to reinforce resourcing in this area in 2026/27. The ECB's ability to act on the egregious cases was key, and went to the heart of challenging unacceptable behaviour in the industry, and working to protect the public.
- vi. The Board considered the level at which remedies had been set. It was acknowledged that these were not currently at the hard end of the spectrum. The workplan for next year includes developing a Guide to Remedy, which would consider the levels of remedies that the ECB should be applying for different types of breaches.

15. The Board **noted** (i) the trends and analysis, (ii) the performance against KPIs, (iii) the plans for increasing resources in the complaints team in 2026/27 and, (iv) the plans for conducting a process and efficiency review in 2026. The Board passed on its gratitude to the whole team for their hard work over recent months.

Item 8: Insight Report – oral update

- 16. The Director of External Affairs provided an oral update on progress with the Insight Report. It would be important for the Insight Report to be a factual presentation of the data contained within the data returns and complaints data, with limited commentary, allowing the numbers to speak for themselves. The ECB would provide analysis and commentary in other products alongside this, as appropriate. For example, briefings may be produced to share with stakeholders and Parliamentarians. A Board member was invited to work with the team and Chair to finalise the reports, and Caroline Wells agreed to volunteer.
- 17. An event in Parliament was scheduled to take place on 27 January 2026, to be hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Debt and Financial Inclusion. The ECB Chair and CEO would speak, and Board members were welcome to attend if available. Board members would be invited to the launch (**actioned**).
- 18. The Board **noted** the update.

Item 9: ECB policy review: Health and Safety policy

- 19. The Director of Corporate Services presented some limited drafting changes to the policy. The policy was approved as drafted, with the addition of some wording to accommodate occasions when colleagues were working from firms' premises (e.g. during oversight visits) (**actioned**).

Item 10: AOB

- 20. There was no other business.

Private session

21. The Board met for a private session, and among other business, discussed matters relating to insurance and staffing.