Bold futures: Innovating regulation to improve care

Chris Badger, Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care and Integrated Care

Care Show Birmingham, 7 October 2026



Credit: Disabled and Here

Strengthening today, innovating for tomorrow

Returned to teams that specialise in adult social care	Strengthened oversight of information of concern	Building on the roll out of portfolio management across England	Developing dementia strategy guidance
Changed our approach to risk and prioritisation	Engaged, consultation on and started pilot our new assessment framework	Continuing to return to providers previously rated good	Revisiting LAs for next phase of assessments
Improved registration process for homecare providers of care	Published our LAA report and updated assessment approach	Evaluating ongoing pilots (eg using AI in reports)	Identifying and sharing innovation and good practice
Increased the number and frequency of inspections	Published learning from our IC(E)TRs report	Continuing to increase the number and frequency of inspections	Rolling out of new assessment framework and associated guidance

…and more to come

Registration



We heard your concerns about **registration**. We want providers to grow their services and support people locally.

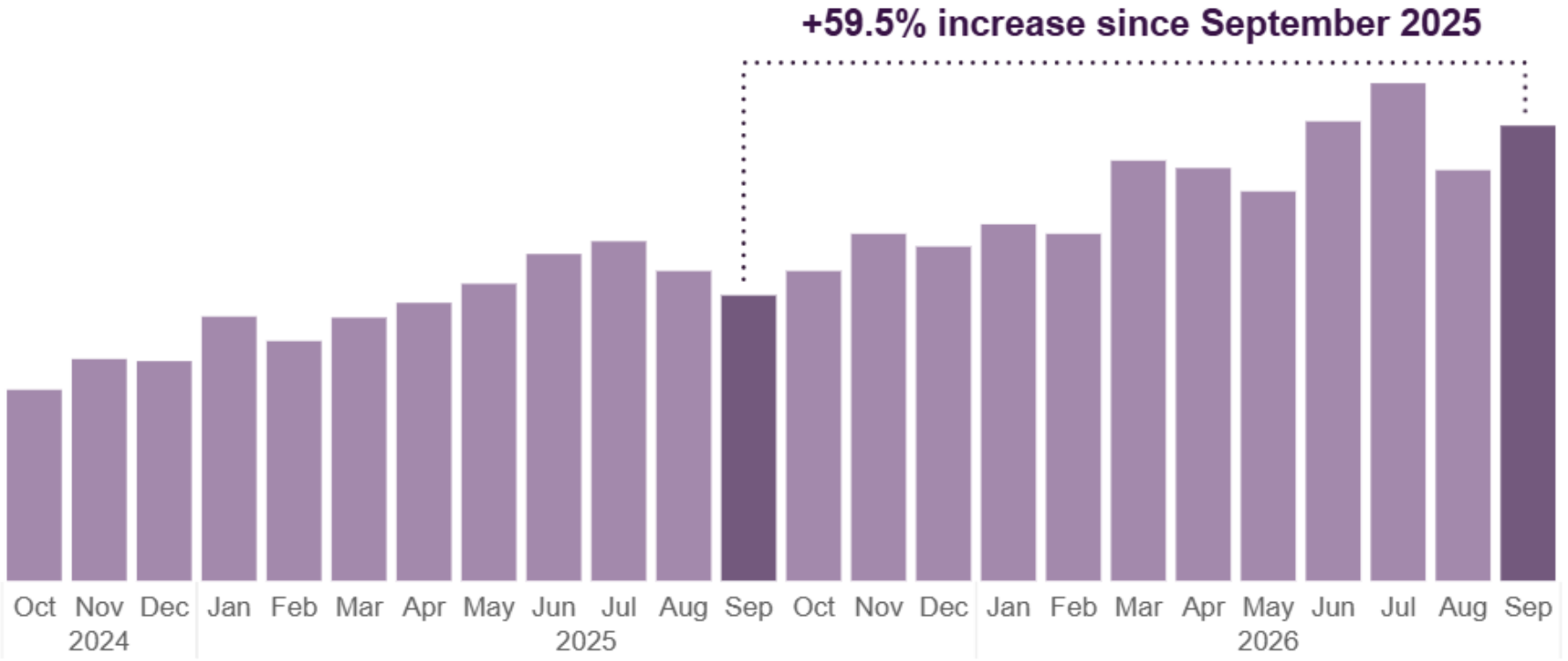
We have improved and streamlined our registration process.

We have successfully **cleared our registration application backlog**, ensuring providers get services up and running more quickly for the people who need them.

Inspections



- An 59.5% increase in inspection activity since Sept 2025
- We refreshed our approach to prioritisation enabling us to quickly prioritise adult social care settings
- 30% responsive inspections to address emerging risk
- 70% planned inspections to maintain oversight and support improvement



Named Inspector



You told us that having a **consistent point of contact** matters.

Someone you can speak to, build a relationship with, and who understands your service beyond a single inspection. That's why we introduced **portfolio management**.

Following its success in London, we're now rolling it out across England, giving providers a named inspector who can build a richer understanding of their service and support a more constructive, ongoing relationship.

Return to Good

The Return to Good approach is helping us work more efficiently, so we can spend more time where it matters most.

Almost half the time required

Return to Good assessments used 47.7% fewer staff hours than standard assessments, saving an average of 36 hours per assessment.

Faster outcomes for providers

Return to Good assessments reached draft stage of the report 19 working days sooner and were published 23 working days sooner, giving providers greater certainty and quicker feedback.

Creating capacity for what matters most

Across 159 assessments, over 5,700 staff hours were released. This time can be reinvested in:

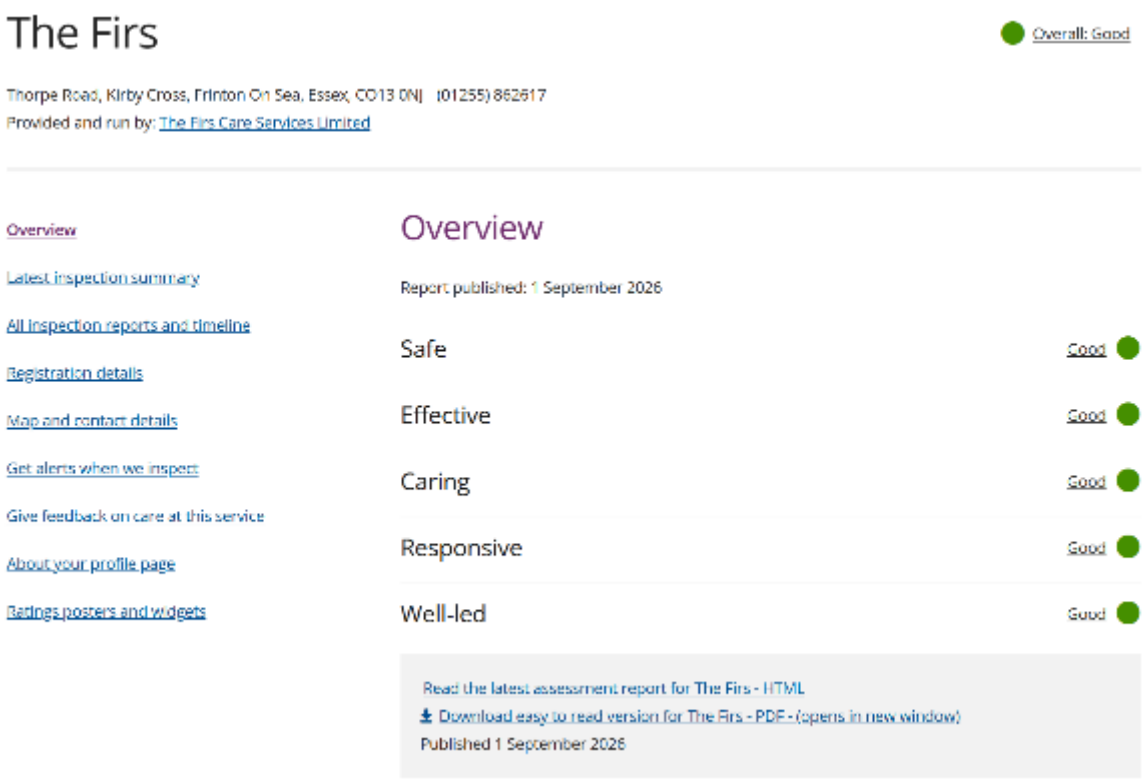
- More assessment activity across the sector.
- Stronger portfolio management and provider relationships.
- Earlier support and engagement where improvement is needed.
- Greater regulatory responsiveness.

What have we found?

Of the 159 Return to Good assessments completed

- 146 services remained Good
- 11 moved to Requires Improvement
- 2 improved to Outstanding

Over 93% of services either maintained Good or improved to Outstanding following their Return to Good assessment.



Remained Good!

What we've heard. What we're doing.

You've told us the frameworks;

- support clearer understanding of expectations and make more transparent judgements
- cover key aspects of care, but gaps remain (inequalities, nutrition and hydration)
- are clear, but still too long; piloting has demonstrated duplication
- have appropriate content relevant to the sector, but more needed to reflect what this means in practice

We are going to;

- make the frameworks shorter, addressing duplication and improve clarity
- give clarity on expectations across key areas, such as nutrition and hydration
- develop guidance to support the understanding of the framework in more detail
- improve links to the regulations
- make the distinction between Good and Outstanding clearer



Next steps

Join our **next engagement session on the 21 October**. Sign up by 9 October.

Feedback on our provider bulletins

We use the bulletin to share important updates, guidance and insights with providers.

When we asked for feedback, respondents said:

- ✓ They found them **useful, informative** and an important way of keeping up to date.
- ✓ They valued **regulatory guidance updates, policy updates, sector-specific information and examples of good practice**.
- ✓ There was support for retaining the current **monthly** frequency.

However, respondents also told us:

- ➢ They want the bulletin to be **more practical**, more provider-focused and easier to use.
- ➢ They want **guidance, case studies, inspection insights, examples of good practice, and clearer explanations of what actions providers should take**.
- ➢ Bullet-point summaries, clearer signposting, stronger headlines and more visual content would also help.

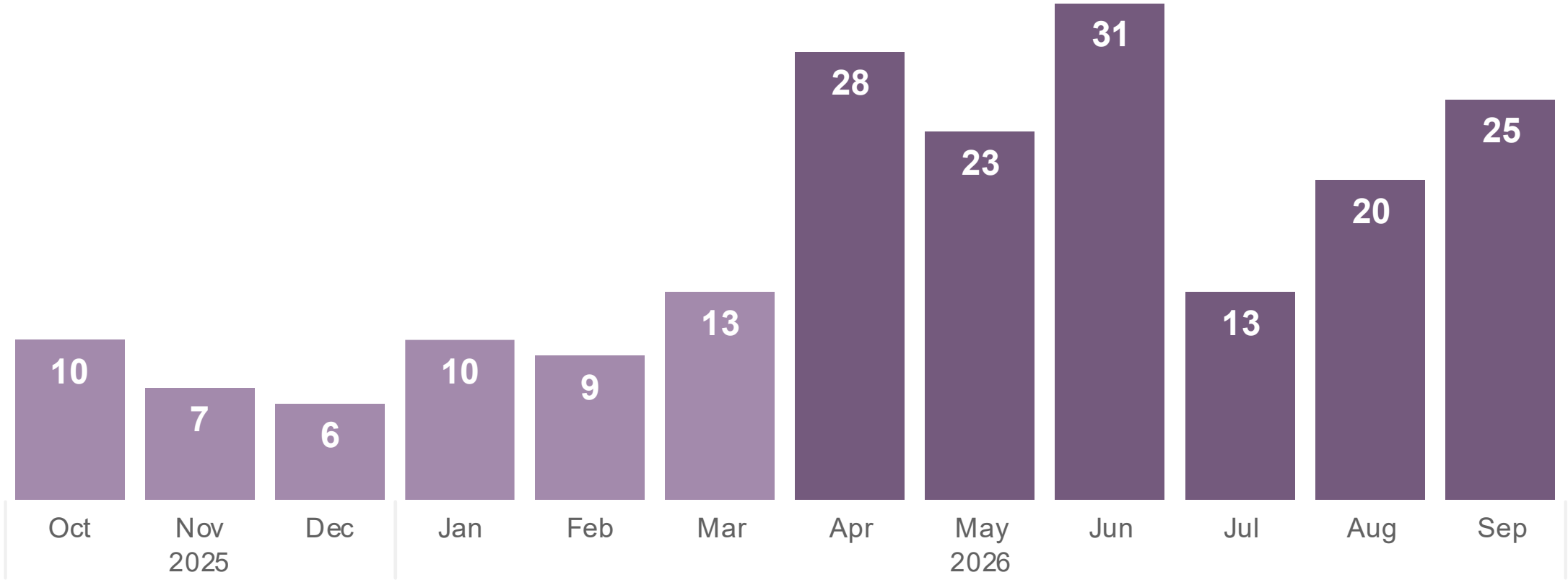
Question – do you receive our bulletin?

- ***Coming soon:*** We're developing new website resources, including practical examples and shared learning informed by feedback and insight, to help support quality improvement.
- Watch this space…

What we're seeing in the sector?

By sharing our findings, recognising great practice and highlighting where improvement is needed, we help drive change across the system and improve people's experiences of care.

Outstanding over the last 12 months

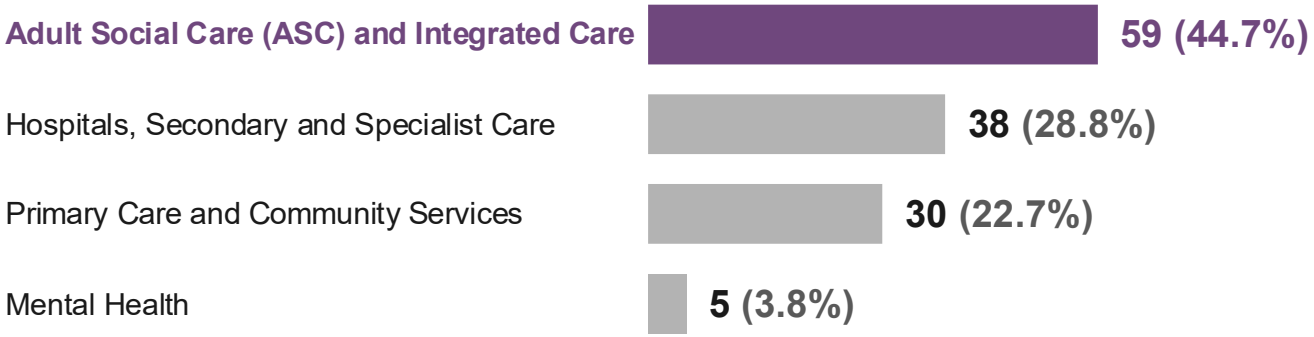


Key themes from Outstanding reports

- Services that are **caring and followed Well Led** key questions most likely to be Outstanding.
- **Clear impact on people's lives** - evidence of improved wellbeing, health, independence or quality of life.
- **Highly person-centred care** based on people's individual strengths, preferences and aspirations.
- **Meaningful choice and control** - enabling people to overcome barriers and achieve personal goals.
- **Compassionate, relational care** - supported by staff's deep knowledge of the people they support.
- **Strong and values-led leadership** that creates an inclusive, positive and empowering culture.
- **Creative and innovative approaches** - go beyond expected standards.
- **People's voices shape services** - feedback and involvement influencing decisions/improvements.
- **Equity and inclusion** - tailored action to remove barriers to services and opportunities.
- **Effective partnership working with communities**.
- **Continuous learning and improvement** - reflective practice leading to better outcomes.
- Specific, current and corroborated **examples clearly linking exceptional practice to measurable impact**.

Criminal investigation themes

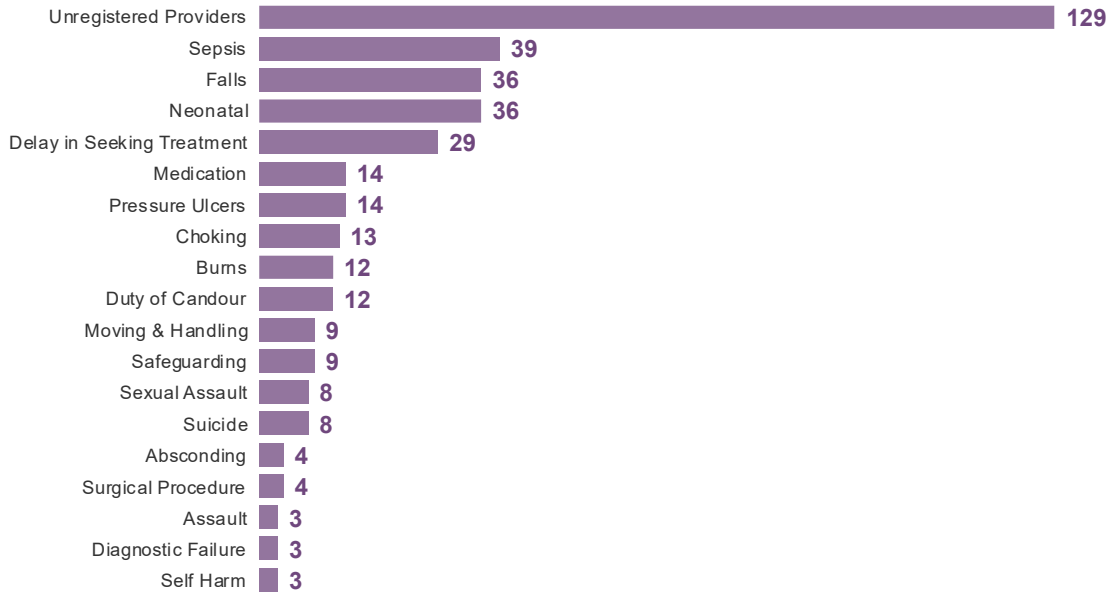
ASC remains the largest area of criminal enforcement activity by volume, with 59 of the 132 investigations (44.7%) relating to ASC



Of the 59 ASC investigations:

- 39 investigations (66%) relate to registered providers, predominantly concerning suspected breaches of Regulation 12 (Safe Care and Treatment).
  - Falls is the most common investigation theme accounting for 16 of the 39 registered provider investigations (41%).
- 20 investigations (34%) relate to unregistered providers and concerns regarding the provision of regulated activities without the required CQC registration.

Our criminal enforcement activity has seen a rise in unregistered provider investigations representing 30.4% of our overall investigations.



Source: CQC - NET criminal enforcement data – Jan 2024 – Sept 2026

Our independent voice report in Local Authorities

Commissioning



Safeguarding



The evolving social care landscape



addressing the sector's challenges and big changes on the horizon

Good dementia care

Developing guidance on what good dementia care looks like across health and social care services.

- Part of our wider Dementia Strategy.
- Aims to improve experiences and outcomes for people living with dementia, their families and carers.
- Share your views via our GoVocal platform. The survey takes just a few minutes and includes four questions.
- **Responses close at 5pm on 30 October.**



Any questions?



Register by 9 October for our adult social care assessment framework online event on 21 October – here:

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Join us for a chat on stand K55