



Blind Justice

PUBLIC REPORT

‘WE DID NOT SEEK FURTHER EVIDENCE’ TAKING THEIR WORD FOR IT: INSIDE THE SRA PROCESS THAT CLOSES MOST REPORTS BEFORE INVESTIGATION

Fewer than one in six reports about solicitors are referred for investigation. For four years the SRA said the stage that closes most of the rest ‘allows us to obtain, gather and verify information’. That sentence has gone from its latest report. Asked what it verified before closing one, the SRA told Blind Justice: ‘we did not seek further evidence.’

Blind Justice UK

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Lead researcher: Edward Romain, ACILEX
Founder & CEO, Blind Justice UK

WHAT THIS REPORT REVEALS

For four years the Solicitors Regulation Authority told the profession that the process used to dispose of most reports against solicitors ‘allows us to obtain, gather and verify information’. That claim disappeared from its latest annual report. Blind Justice has examined the SRA’s own published examples, five recent assessment decisions and the whole of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal corpus published since 2015, 833 cases screened and the 271 matching judgments read in full. The evidence shows a sharp divide: when the SRA checks what it is told, it catches false information. At the assessment stage, where most reports end, no equivalent requirement for independent evidence appears in its published performance targets, and none is recorded in the decisions examined. In one recent case, after Blind Justice challenged the absence of verification, the SRA asked the solicitor, accepted the reply and closed the matter. Its Complaints Manager later confirmed: ‘we did not seek further evidence.’

833 Tribunal cases screened	67 cases of false or misleading information given to the SRA	43 exposed by an SRA officer checking documents	0 independent checks recorded in five recent assessment decisions	564 complaints in one year about decisions not to investigate
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Executive summary

More than 11,000 concerns about solicitors are dealt with by the SRA each year. They go first to its Assessment and Early Resolution Team. In 2023/24 that team dealt with 11,421 concerns, closed 8,317 of them with no further action and referred 1,763, fewer than one in six, for investigation. A Law Unto Themselves, published by Blind Justice on the 1st of September 2026, showed that none of those decisions can be reviewed on its merits by anyone. This report asks what happens before the door closes. [S1]

The answer is in the SRA’s own words. Its case studies tell the public that ‘we will ask the solicitor to provide us with information’ and that if the solicitor ‘shows’ a rational process ‘we are unlikely to investigate’. Its page for reporters, updated on the 11th of September 2026, says it may not investigate where it ‘wouldn’t be able to contradict a likely reasonable explanation by the firm or solicitor’. Its Board was told in July 2024 that an officer had ‘repeated the solicitor’s explanation in the closure letter without being clear it was the solicitor’s explanation’. The firms that defend solicitors describe the same process from the other side: one records a report closed ‘within four days’ of the solicitor’s representations. [S2 to S5]

Blind Justice holds five SRA decision letters from 2025 and 2026, issued by three officers across three matters. In none of them does the officer record a single check of what the solicitor said against anything outside the solicitor’s own account. In one, the officer relies on a document he records as ‘not the original letter, as it appears to have been amended at a later date’. In another, a report closed on the officer’s guess at what ‘likely’ happened was challenged on the absence of verification, reopened, and closed again on the solicitor’s explanation. Asked what had been verified, the SRA’s complaints manager replied: ‘we did not seek further evidence.’ [S6]

This is the method the independent reviews found in the failures surrounding Axiom Ince, SSB and PM Law, three major law-firm collapses; the LSB puts the client money lost at Axiom Ince and PM Law alone at approximately £100 million. Each review found the SRA taking the firm’s account ‘at face value’. The officer in the PM Law case told the reviewers why: ‘it seemed unlikely that they would be telling you something that everyone knows is wrong’. The Legal Services Board censured the SRA in March 2026 for ‘over-reliance on information provided by SSB itself, rather than independent verification’. Six months later the letters in this report show the same method at the desk where reports are closed. [S7 to S10]

When the SRA checks, it catches false explanations. Blind Justice screened every judgment the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal has published since 2015, 833 cases, read in full the 271 that matched its search terms,

and found 67 in which a solicitor was proved to have given the SRA false or misleading information. In 43 of them the falsehood was exposed because an SRA officer checked documents. Almost all of those were in formal investigations, where independent evidence is expressly required. At assessment, independent checking is not expressly required, and in the five decisions examined here none was recorded. Of the eleven false statements in the corpus made at assessment or early enquiry, eight came to light from outside the regulator. [S11, S18]

Blind Justice asks the Legal Services Board to direct that no report may be closed at assessment on the regulated person's account alone; the SRA to record and publish the reason for every closure; and the Justice Committee to ask the SRA in public when it stopped describing assessment as verification, and why.

1. What the SRA said assessment does

The SRA introduced Assessment and Early Resolution part way through 2018/19. For four consecutive annual reports it described the process in one sentence. [S12]

'This involves us talking further, as necessary, with the person who raised the concern with us, the firm or the solicitor involved and/or contacting a third party. This allows us to obtain, gather and verify information, which often provides the opportunity to resolve the matter at an early stage without the need for further investigation.'

SRA, Upholding Professional Standards 2019/20, published 22 July 2021; repeated word for word in 2020/21 and 2021/22, and in shortened form in 2022/23

Each of those reports credits the process with the fall in investigations: 'almost a 37% decrease' in the first year, 'a steady decrease' after that. Referrals fell from 3,602 in 2018/19 to 1,763 in 2023/24, and the SRA now says 15 per cent of reports are investigated. [S12, S13]

The report for 2023/24 was published on the 2nd of February 2026, a month before the LSB's censure. It does not contain the word 'verify'. It does not contain the word 'gather'. Assessment is described in one line: 'We introduced AERT and an accompanying new process partway through 2018/19.' Nothing published explains the change. [S14]

2. What assessment does

The SRA's own illustrations show the method plainly. Blind Justice coded twenty-five worked examples identified across five SRA pages on reporting a solicitor and deciding whether to investigate, with the categories fixed before reading. A further process example from the SRA's on-site investigations guidance is included separately in the published dataset. Eleven end in no further action or a stated 'unlikely to investigate' outcome. None of the eleven records independent corroboration of the solicitor's account. Of the fourteen that end in investigation or other action, eleven record an independent source. Three of the no-action examples rest on the regulated person's account alone. In the SRA's competence guide a report is closed because 'the firm has confirmed it has checked all other matters held by Solicitor A and no other concerns have been identified'. In its case study on a will made by a person who may have lacked capacity: [S15]

'In considering whether we should investigate this, we will ask the solicitor to provide us with information as to how they reached the decision on capacity. If a solicitor shows that they thought about the issue, made any appropriate enquiries and reached a rational decision, we are unlikely to investigate.'

SRA, Case studies about reporting a solicitor, Example 3, published 23 May 2024

The SRA's own Board has seen it. Its corporate complaints paper of the 9th of July 2024 records an upheld complaint in these words: 'we repeated the solicitor's explanation in the closure letter without being clear it was the solicitor's explanation. Feedback was provided for learning.' Two years earlier its Independent

Reviewer had recommended that closure letters say whether the information relied on ‘had come from the individual concerned or from a representative of his/her firm’. [S4, S16]

The regulated side confirms it. Saunders Law, a firm that defends solicitors, wrote on the 4th of August 2026 that ‘within four days of receiving those representations, the SRA decided not to investigate the matter further’. Another tells clients the SRA ‘may take no action having been satisfied with the explanations it has received’. Since May 2026 the SRA has confirmed that assessment is partly outsourced to three panel law firms. [S5, S17]

THE SRA’S OWN EXAMPLES

No-action outcomes: 11. Independent corroboration recorded: 0. Action or investigation outcomes: 14. Independent source recorded: 11.

3. The letters

Blind Justice holds five SRA decision letters from the assessment stage, two from 2025 and three from 2026, written by three different investigation officers across three matters. Between them they dispose of fourteen concerns. In none of the fourteen does the officer record checking what the solicitor or firm said against anything outside the solicitor’s or firm’s own account. Seven close on those words alone: ‘the firm has confirmed’, ‘the firm confirms’, ‘states that he has not’, ‘given the explanation provided’. Names, firms and identifying detail have been removed, and nothing here is a finding about any solicitor. The letters are set out in full, concern by concern, in the evidence file. [S6]

One sequence shows the method end to end. A report was closed without the solicitor being asked, on the officer’s own view of what was ‘likely’. The charity challenged the closure on one ground: the SRA had accepted a position without saying what it had verified. The officer wrote to the solicitor, and closed the file on the reply.

‘Given the explanation provided by [the solicitor], we are satisfied that no further investigation is required on this occasion.’

SRA decision, 2026

Blind Justice asked what had been verified. The SRA’s Complaints Manager answered.

‘Aside from the information provided by our [internal] team, we did not seek further evidence. [The officer] was satisfied that the response received from [the solicitor] were sufficient and further investigation was not required.’

SRA Complaints Manager to Blind Justice, 2026

The SRA’s own review of that closure found it had ‘reached a reasonable outcome decision’ with ‘no material flaws’.

In another letter, an officer closes an allegation that a case was conducted without a solicitor’s supervision on a single document supplied by the firm.

‘It is noted that this is not the original letter, as it appears to have been amended at a later date. However, its contents confirm that the case was being handled by solicitor, [name].’

SRA decision, 2026

The officer records that the document has been altered and relies on it in the next sentence. The letter records no request for the original.

Across fourteen concerns in five letters, the number of times an officer records checking the solicitor’s account against anything outside it is nil.

4. What it cost

The same failure to verify independently appears in the reviews of three major law-firm collapses. The Axiom Ince review found the SRA 'placed its trust in law firms' to supply bank evidence it should have obtained itself: 'Documentary evidence provided by the firm supported this explanation. This was accepted and the matter was therefore closed.' More than £60 million of client money was missing. The SSB review found the SRA 'placed the onus on complainants to provide it with evidence' and took the firm's account of its own solvency 'at face value'; the LSB censured the SRA on the 5th of March 2026 for 'over-reliance on information provided by SSB itself, rather than independent verification'. The PM Law review, published on the 3rd of September 2026, found reports closed on 'the SRA taking the PM Law Group's explanations at face value and opting not to investigate further', and a forensic investigation that 'accepted at face value information provided by PM Law Limited and did not independently verify it'. The officer told the reviewers why: 'it seemed unlikely that they would be telling you something that everyone knows is wrong'. [S7 to S10]

That sentence is the whole method in one line. The SRA's new performance targets, set in March 2026 under the censure, now require investigations to 'seek independent evidence'. They require nothing equivalent at assessment, where 85 per cent of reports end. The measure of quality at assessment is whether two officers agree. [S18]

5. When the SRA checks, it catches false explanations

The SRA can find a false explanation. Blind Justice screened every judgment published by the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal from 2015 to September 2026, 833 cases and 832 judgment documents, using twenty-one search terms, and read the 271 matching judgments in full. Sixty-seven of them contain a proved or admitted finding that a solicitor gave the SRA false, inaccurate or misleading information during an enquiry; dishonesty was found in 59. In 43 of the 67 the falsehood was exposed by an SRA officer cross-checking documents: bank records, the Land Registry, Companies House, the firm's own files. [S11]

Forty of the 67 statements were made in forensic investigations alone, and thirty of those were caught by the forensic officer's own work. Eleven were made at the assessment stage. Of those, eight were caught by someone outside the SRA: a counterparty, an employer, an opposing firm. The numbers at assessment are small. Their shape is the point. Verification catches lies. At assessment, independent checking is not expressly required by the SRA's published targets, and in the five decisions examined here none was recorded. In Heer, the SRA's note records the solicitor confirming 'he has done no legal work on these files at all'; two months later the other side in a conveyance wrote to ask why his firm was still acting. In Clapton, the explanation for a delay was contradicted by her employer's record that she was in the office; the employer, not the SRA, reported it.

The courts have said it too. On the 2nd of December 2024, fourteen days after a firm reported itself, the SRA declined to investigate on the firm's account and a legal analysis the Court of Appeal later called 'wrong in law' and the SRA itself reversed. [S19]

6. Nobody can count it

How often the SRA closes a report on the solicitor's word cannot be counted, and the reason is itself a finding. In 2017 the SRA told a requester: 'Where we close a file after assessment we don't record a reason electronically.' In 2019 it said 'overturned' is not a recorded decision type. On the 1st of July 2026 it said statistics on why reports are closed would need 'manual review of individual case files'. [S20]

The one thing the SRA does count is complaints about its closures: 564 in the year to October 2024, which is 86.7 per cent of complaints about its investigation work on its own figure, and more than half of the

1,069 service complaints it answered. Its Board paper explains this as complainants not getting ‘the resolution they personally want’. [S16]

The regulator that has been censured for taking firms at their word cannot say, from the data it records, how often it does so.

7. What must happen

Blind Justice asks for three things, each addressed to the body that can do it.

- 1. The Legal Services Board** should direct, under section 32 of the Legal Services Act 2007, that no report may be closed at the assessment stage on the account of the regulated person alone, and that every closure letter must state what was verified and against what.
- 2. The SRA** should record, for every decision not to investigate, the reason for closure and the source of the information relied on, and publish the figures annually. It should also say when and why it stopped describing assessment as a process that verifies information.
- 3. The Justice Committee** should put both questions to the SRA in public. The Committee took evidence from the SRA and the LSB on the 14th of April 2026. This report is the evidence for the next session.

Fourteen questions for the SRA are set out in the evidence file published with this report and were put to the SRA on the day of publication. Any reply will be published in full.

Evidence and method

Every quotation in this report is taken from a document Blind Justice opened and read in full. The evidence file published with this report, *Taking Their Word For It: The Evidence*, sets out every source, the coding of the five letters concern by concern, the 833-case Tribunal corpus with its screening terms and exclusions, and the coding of the SRA’s published examples, with the categories fixed before reading. The 67-case dataset and the example coding are published as spreadsheets. Blind Justice holds more than twenty items of SRA decisions and correspondence from 2025 and 2026, including the five decision letters coded in this report and the SRA’s own responses to the charity. The five decision letters are held in full and will be shared in confidence, with the agreement of the people who made the reports, with journalists, the Legal Services Board and any parliamentary committee that asks. Where a quotation from a private document contains identifying information, square brackets mark a redaction or a neutral descriptor; no meaning has been changed. Requests to info@blindjustice.org.uk.

This report makes no allegation against any solicitor. The letters may be right about the people they concern. The finding is about the method, and the method is the one the SRA’s own reports, its own Board, its oversight regulator, the courts and its own prosecutions before the Tribunal each describe.

SEND US YOUR SRA LETTER

If the SRA told you it would not investigate your report about a solicitor or a law firm, Blind Justice would like to see the letter. Every name is removed, you approve the wording before anything is used, and nothing is forwarded to anyone. Send it to info@blindjustice.org.uk with LETTER in the subject line.

Sources

[S1] SRA, Investigations and enforcement annual report 2023/24 (2 February 2026); Blind Justice, *A Law Unto Themselves* (1 September 2026)

[S2] SRA, Case studies about reporting a solicitor (23 May 2024)

[S3] SRA, Reporting a solicitor or firm to us, as updated 11 September 2026

[S4] SRA Board, SRA Corporate Complaints November 2022 to October 2023, paper of 9 July 2024, paragraph 27

[S5] Saunders Law, client note, 4 August 2026; Brett Wilson LLP; Legal Futures, 18 May 2026

[S6] Five SRA assessment-stage decisions, 2025 and 2026, and the SRA service complaint response and covering email, 2026, held by Blind Justice

[S7] Carson McDowell, Independent review of the regulatory events leading up to the SRA's intervention into Axiom Ince (LSB, 29 October 2024)

[S8] Carson McDowell, Independent review of the SRA's regulation of SSB Group (LSB, 16 October 2025)

[S9] LSB, news release 'Solicitors' regulator censured over failures to protect SSB Law consumers', 5 March 2026, and Decision Notice under sections 31 and 35 of the Legal Services Act 2007

[S10] Jenner & Block, Serious Event Review: PM Law (SRA, 3 September 2026), paragraphs 5.5, 5.10, 5.11, 7.62.3

[S11] Blind Justice, SDT corpus dataset: 833 cases screened, 271 read in full, 67 included, methods and exclusions published

[S12] SRA, Upholding Professional Standards 2019/20 (22 July 2021), 2020/21 (23 June 2022), 2021/22 (10 July 2023), 2022/23 (20 December 2024)

[S13] SRA Board, performance reports of 27 January 2026 and 21 April 2026

[S14] SRA, Investigations and enforcement annual report 2023/24, published 2 February 2026

[S15] Blind Justice coding of 25 SRA worked examples across six pages, September 2026; SRA topic guide, Competence and standard of service

[S16] SRA Board, SRA Corporate Complaints November 2023 to October 2024, paper of 30 June 2025, paragraphs 6, 11 and 13; Independent Reviewer's report for the year to October 2022

[S17] Legal Futures, 18 May 2026

[S18] SRA, Performance targets to meet the SSB conditions, 12 March 2026, conditions 3.3 and 3.5

[S19] Mazur v Charles Russell Speechlys [2025] EWHC 2341 (KB) at [63] to [64]; Mazur v CILEX [2026] EWCA Civ 369 at [74], [75], [196]

[S20] SRA responses published on WhatDoTheyKnow, 24 February 2017, 14 August 2019, 1 July 2026

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