



# Cafcass Open Board Meeting Report



**22 January 2020**

# Background

---

The purpose of Cafcass Open Board meetings is to allow board members, stakeholders, members of staff, and members of the public to discuss issues of significance to the children, their families, and the professionals we work with. Cafcass holds two of its Board meetings in an open forum annually.

This first Open Board meeting of 2020 focused on how Cafcass will deliver its new Strategic Plan – this was presented by Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy. The meeting then looked at Cafcass' private law demand reduction plan, a presentation delivered by Anji Owens, Director of Operational Performance and Rebecca Anderson, Model Office Programme Manager. Stephanie Brivio, Deputy Director for Safeguarding and Child Protection at the Department of Education then spoke about the work of the Child Safeguarding Review Panel.

## Delivering our new strategy

---

### Introduction

Sally Cheshire, Deputy Chair and Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive

Sally started by thanking former Chair Edward Timpson for his contribution to Cafcass, on behalf of the Board, and noted that she that has agreed to take on the chair's responsibilities for an interim period.

Jacky then explained the context for the presentations that were to follow and spoke of the work that organisations can do to sustain their effectiveness. She suggested anyone reading the strategic plan can expect to see important themes around becoming informed by the feedback received from families and children, and using the expertise of a strong professional workforce to drive improvements to practice over the next few years. She talked briefly about each pillar of the strategy, the relentless demand and growth particularly in private law work, making it clear that Cafcass would need to put in place some changes from April this year. This would help the system and staff to manage their challenging workloads (where every child and family is important).

### Strategic Priorities in Delivery

Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy

In her introduction to this presentation, Teresa noted that since the new strategy was published in September 2019, the organisation has been working with its staff to agree what needs to be done to put the strategy into practice. She outlined the three main areas, explaining that Practice looks at delivering the best quality social work and support services in each case, to improve children's lives wherever they live; the People pillar looks at giving our staff the support, resources and working environment to sustain excellence in challenging times; and Partners looks at sharing our knowledge, learning from others and using our influence to improve the family justice system and family policy.

Teresa then explained that under each of the pillars of Practice, People, and Partners sit three strategic delivery priorities, each with their own work programmes and projects. Under Practice she emphasised the need to use rich insights into Cafcass' practice and the principles within the Children Act as part of changes we make to our Operating Framework. She discussed the need for good quality feedback from children and families to be included within our practice framework, touching on an example from the Family Justice Young People's Board which has suggested we look at how we check in with children after their case has finished. The final priority mentioned under Practice looks at how Cafcass learns and improves for its own practice, not just Ofsted's assessment.

For the People pillar, Teresa questioned what it would mean if Cafcass was the best employer of social workers, and how strengthening the wellbeing programme can help non-social workers too. She talked about providing people with the most effective working environment, and creating clear lines of sight for leadership, by working on a Success and Impact Framework.

For the Partners pillar, Teresa briefly discussed managing demand through our relationship with HMCTS and a demand reduction plan. She emphasised the need to get more from Cafcass' data to create meaningful change, and to innovate by learning from international partners across other sectors. Finally, she explained that Cafcass is involved in judicial working groups to design reforms to the family justice system, and that leaders are looking at long-term options for legislative change.

Teresa concluded by providing an update on the development of the Cafcass Family Forum and the work that has been done together with partners to develop the scope. She outlined the plan to start by working restoratively with a small number of families for whom Cafcass hadn't got it right or where there was significant learning for the organisation. Over time, members of these families might then help Cafcass work similarly with a wider range of families and provide input into reviews of policy or practice, as part of a wider panel that would make up the Family Forum. Cafcass would continue to work with partner organisations, the FJYPB and families themselves in the development of the model.

## Managing Private Law Demand Plan

Anji Owens, Director of Operational Performance and Rebecca Anderson, Model Office Programme Manager

Anji introduced this presentation by outlining the challenges in private law work, mentioning the continued rise in demand (8% in the last 12 months and over 34% in the last 5 years) and that there are more complex cases, posing a risk to children and needing more time from Family Court Advisers (FCA). She explained the work FCAs need to do, such as writing a safeguarding letter and a Section 7 report, commenting on the overall number of hours needed for this work between December 2018 and November 2019. She then explained that because caseloads are continuing to increase (5% in the last year), staff sickness and turnover is increasing while staff morale is becoming less positive. She emphasised that resourcing alone is not the right solution, but that family justice changes must be evidence-based. She highlighted fundamental reform with partners as a long-term solution, and the importance of looking at new ways to manage cases coming in now as immediate action.

Rebecca then spoke about the plan to manage demand, and the initiatives in place to reduce work within cases, such as shorter safeguarding letters and protocols for closer case management. She explained how Cafcass could attempt to reduce Rule 16.4 appointments and commented on a local innovation experiment on gatekeeping led by the Watford Court. She discussed the potential risks and next steps for each option, before moving on to discuss medium and longer-term options being considered with family justice partners including reviewing the current Child Arrangements Programme legal framework. Attendees provided helpful feedback on our proposals and plan to implement these proposed changes from April 2020 if demand continues to rise.

## Child Safeguarding Review Panel

Stephanie Brivio, Deputy Director for Safeguarding and Child Protection at the Department of Education

Stephanie explained that this is an independent panel that receives all the Serious Incident Notifications referred by the local authorities. The panel meets fortnightly because of the high volume of cases and carries out rapid reviews. These are then shared with all senior leaders – including those in the NHS, police and children's services – and with the relevant local authority.

Stephanie went on to explain that the panel challenges local authorities who don't publish learning reviews from the rapid reviews, asking them how they share the learning with social workers and why this is important. She explained that the panel can commission a national review of serious cases, during which independent reviewers talk to children and families involved in the cases where possible. In response to a question, Stephanie confirmed that local partners are used to talk to children and families.

## Themes from our open discussion

---

### Voice and interests of the child

Attendees were interested to know how the voice of the child will be involved in Cafcass' strategic planning. Teresa mentioned that each of the programmes of work under our three pillars has already been assigned two people to scope and lead, and that they would all be presenting their plans to the FJYPB and asking for feedback. Teresa emphasised that all projects would benefit from the FJYPB's input.

Discussion also centred on how Cafcass would make sure the interests of the children would remain paramount to the work of the Family Forum. Teresa acknowledged this point, reassured attendees that Cafcass wants better dialogue with families without removing focus from children and suggested that these interests should not necessarily compete. The Board remarked that the FJYPB should be integral to the work of the Family Forum, suggesting a need to see them as part of one system to avoid excessive campaigning by families. Others agreed, and Teresa and Jacky suggested members of the FJYPB can attend some Family Forum workshops to provide feedback on how Cafcass can ask families for feedback on cases that have gone wrong.

It was also noted that while the Ofsted rating is important to Cafcass, it is only one lens through which these delivery priorities are viewed.

### Managing demand and family dispute

There was a lot of discussion on family dispute and how Cafcass and the wider family justice system can manage rising private law demand. One attendee suggested the need for better triaging of cases by magistrates to avoid sending unnecessary cases to Cafcass as a risk-avoidance measure. They also suggested that the Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) should be introduced as an option before the case is taken to court. Rebecca noted this and commented on a pilot in a Sheffield local authority that is offering the programme to parents at an earlier stage. Cafcass is also working with Watford court on a trial which looks at changing how cases are triaged through the court process, according to their level of need.

Another attendee suggested Cafcass could work with the local authorities to find out whether there are other community services that can be used in family dispute. In response, the Board commented on the vast difference between the best and worst local authorities and the need to re-establish an effective process with those that are struggling.

Jacky commented that even though Cafcass doesn't know why demand for private law cases is rising, the data suggests this won't change. She emphasised the need to start questioning in which circumstances the state needs to get involved in family dispute.

# Next steps

---

## Delivering the strategic plan

These nine delivery priorities are currently being developed into a series of projects with clear deliverables over the three year period from April 2020 to March 2023. This will be published in the first quarter of 2020/1.

## Demand reduction plan

Key short-term options have been identified that we can begin implementing in the new financial year, following consultation with stakeholders. Medium and longer-term options are being developed with the Ministry of Justice and President's Private Law Working Group, including scoping potential pilots.

We'll continue to discuss these important themes at our next board meetings; 8 March (closed) and 1 July (Open).

# Attendees

---

Name	Organisation
Jacky Tiotto,	Chief Executive Officer, Cafcass
Julie Brown	Director of Resources, Cafcass
Teresa Williams	Director of Strategy, Cafcass
Christine Banim	National Service Director, Cafcass
Anji Owens	Director of Operational Performance, Cafcass
Kevin Gibbs	Director for Operational Service Delivery, Cafcass
Melanie Carew	Head of Legal Services, Cafcass
Merryn Hockaday	Head of Communications, Cafcass
Nicola Blakebrough	Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services), Cafcass
Helen Johnston	Assistant Director (Policy) Cafcass
Julia Dark	Senior Business Services Manager, Cafcass
Jessica Davies	Internal Communications Manager, Cafcass
Rebecca John	Model Office Programme Manager, Cafcass
Richard Morris	Assistant Director, Cafcass
Stephanie Brivio	Deputy Director for Safeguarding and Child Protection at the Department of Education
Sally Cheshire CBE	Deputy Chair of the Cafcass Board
Francis Plowden	Chair of Cafcass' Annual Report and Accounts Committee
Stuart Smith	Chair of the Cafcass' P&Q Committee
Fay Selvan	Board member
Joanna Nicolas	Board member
Catherine Doran	Board member
Mandy Jones	Board member
Sophie Humphreys OBE	Board member
Paul Grant	Board member
Abigail Plenty/Laura Beaumont (job share)	Deputy Director Vulnerability Policy, Ministry of Justice
Arran Poyser	Ex-Chief Inspector Cafcass

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Alison Wedge	Head of the MoJ ALB Centre of Expertise, Ministry of Justice
Clare Laxton	Director of Communications and Influencing, Pause
Graham Porter	Trustee, Association for Shared Parenting
Heather Ransom	Public Affairs and Insight Manager, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Harriet Ward	Honorary Research Fellow, Rees Centre, Department of Education, University of Oxford
Ifeyinwa Okoye	Department for Education
Jackie Draper	Redington Consultancy
Jeremy Todd	Chief Executive Officer, Family Lives
Jeremy Gleaden	Senior Social Care Her Majesty Inspector, Ofsted
Kevin Glasspool	ACRO Criminal Records Office
Louise Majnusz	ACRO Criminal Records Office
Lall Singh	Trustee, Association for Shared Parenting
Lisa Harker	Director, Family Justice Observatory ,The Nuffield Foundation
Maria Kavanagh	Private Secretary to the President of the Family Division, President's Office
Mavis Maclean, CBE	Research Associate, University of Oxford
Raj Chibber	Head of Family Safeguarding (East), Hertfordshire Children's Services
Rosalind Barton	MatchMothers
Rachel Ozanne	Senior Practice Advisor, Safe Lives
Sukchandani Pal Kaur	Chair, Nagalro
Tristan Tutt	Operations Manager, Dads Unlimited
Benjamin McCormick	Family Justice Young People's Board
Andrew Willcox	Family Justice Young People's Board

