



Summary Version

Ambitious for children

Exceptional experiences,
for every child, everywhere
and every time

Cafcass Strategic Plan
2023-2026

www.cafcass.gov.uk



Contents

- 3 About Cafcass
- 4 Strategic priorities for 2023-2026
- 5 An overview of our new priorities
- 6 PRACTICE: Priority programmes
- 7 PRACTICE: What success looks like
- 8 PEOPLE: Priority programmes
- 9 PEOPLE: What success looks like
- 10 PARTNER: Priority programmes
- 11 PARTNER: What success looks like

About Cafcass

Cafcass is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. We work with more than 140,000 children each year, and independently advise the family courts in England about the welfare of children, what is safe for them and in their best interests.

Our vision

In our Strategy for Sustaining Excellence 2019-2023, we built firm foundations enabling us to be more ambitious for children.

This is set out in our revised vision:

“ For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family courts, we seek to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time. We prioritise their voices and their unique needs, taking full account of their families and those connected to them.”

Our values and our practice framework

‘Together with Children & Families’ is our unifying model of social work practice and also sets out the values that guide our work with children and families, with each other and with our partners:

- Holding children and families at the heart of our practice.
- Believing in respectful relationships.
- Decision-making is clear and reasoned.
- Always looking for strengths and risks.
- Wanting to know more about those with whom we work and what is important in their lives.



Strategic priorities for 2023-2026

Our ambitions for 2023-2026 build on our previous strategic priorities. Sustaining effectiveness has been an important priority over the pandemic years as we managed record levels of open work and backlogs in the family courts. We prioritised the safety and welfare of children in proceedings, protecting workloads and sustaining improvement.

Ofsted carried out two focused visits to Cafcass in April 2021 and January 2023. They reported that the quality of social work practice remained strong and continues to improve. Senior leaders were judged to have sustained and improved the focus on children's safety and welfare, developing creative and highly effective strategies to continue to deliver high-quality services to children, families and the family courts.

Our priorities for this next planning period are to:

Practice ambition

Our **Practice ambition** is to provide all children with an exceptional experience of their engagement with us, everywhere and every time, by providing their family court advisers or children's guardians with the management support, supervision and oversight they need to make effective and consistent use of our practice framework and associated practice aids.

People ambition

Our **People ambition** is to provide the leadership, professional development and working environment our people need. We will invest in career and learning pathways, maximise our reward, recognition and wellbeing offer and build capability to drive efficiency, further improvement and system reform.

Partner ambition

Our **Partner ambition** is to continue to collaborate and to work together on system recovery, specifically delay for children in proceedings. We will also seek the views and perspectives of partners on improving children's and families' experiences of proceedings and associated support services.

An overview of our new priorities

We have updated our nine priorities that are associated with the three practice, people and partner pillars of our strategy.

Our intention is that they now align with our revised ambitions and respond to the feedback we have received from children and families, our colleagues, and our partners.

PILLAR	PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION	REASONING	ILLUSTRATION
PRACTICE	1	Further improve the quality and impact of practice - narrow the gap	Because children everywhere should receive an exceptional service whether or not they have already met their family court advisor (FCA).	
	2	Seek out and learn from feedback	Because more of our work will be good or better if we ask for and act on feedback.	
	3	Enable Cafcass systems to support practice - targeted support	Because our practitioners need effective support so they can prioritise quality of practice and engagement with children.	
PEOPLE	4	Attract, engage and retain people	Because children and families are best served by diverse, motivated and skilled people.	
	5	Provide a modern child-focused working environment	Because modern offices and systems help us do better work with children and families.	
	6	Lead and govern well	Because good leaders and strong decision-making are safer for children and families.	
PARTNERS	7	Improve children's experience of private law proceedings	Because some children and families need more help more quickly.	
	8	Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes	Because children need to be safe to get on with their lives.	
	9	Work with others to improve family justice	Because the family justice system has to serve children better than it does now.	

PRACTICE: Priority programmes

Priority 1:

Further improve the quality and impact of practice

We intend to narrow the gap in the experience of children because all children have the right to a good or better experience when they are involved with Cafcass.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Increase the effectiveness of our **management oversight and supervision arrangements**.
- Embed the consistent use of our **Together practice framework** materials and aids.
- **Improve consistency** of our arrangements for the oversight of children who have yet to meet their family court adviser.
- Take action to review and **protect family court adviser caseloads** to support the progress of children's cases to conclusion and reduce delays for children.
- Further strengthen the quality of the practice with children in families where **domestic abuse** is known or alleged.

Priority 2:

Seek out and learn from feedback

We are confident that more of our practice will be rated good or better if we ask for, learn from and act on feedback.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Implement and evaluate our strategy for learning from **feedback**.
- **Act on learning** from complaints, compliments, significant incidents.



Priority 3:

Enable Cafcass systems to support practice

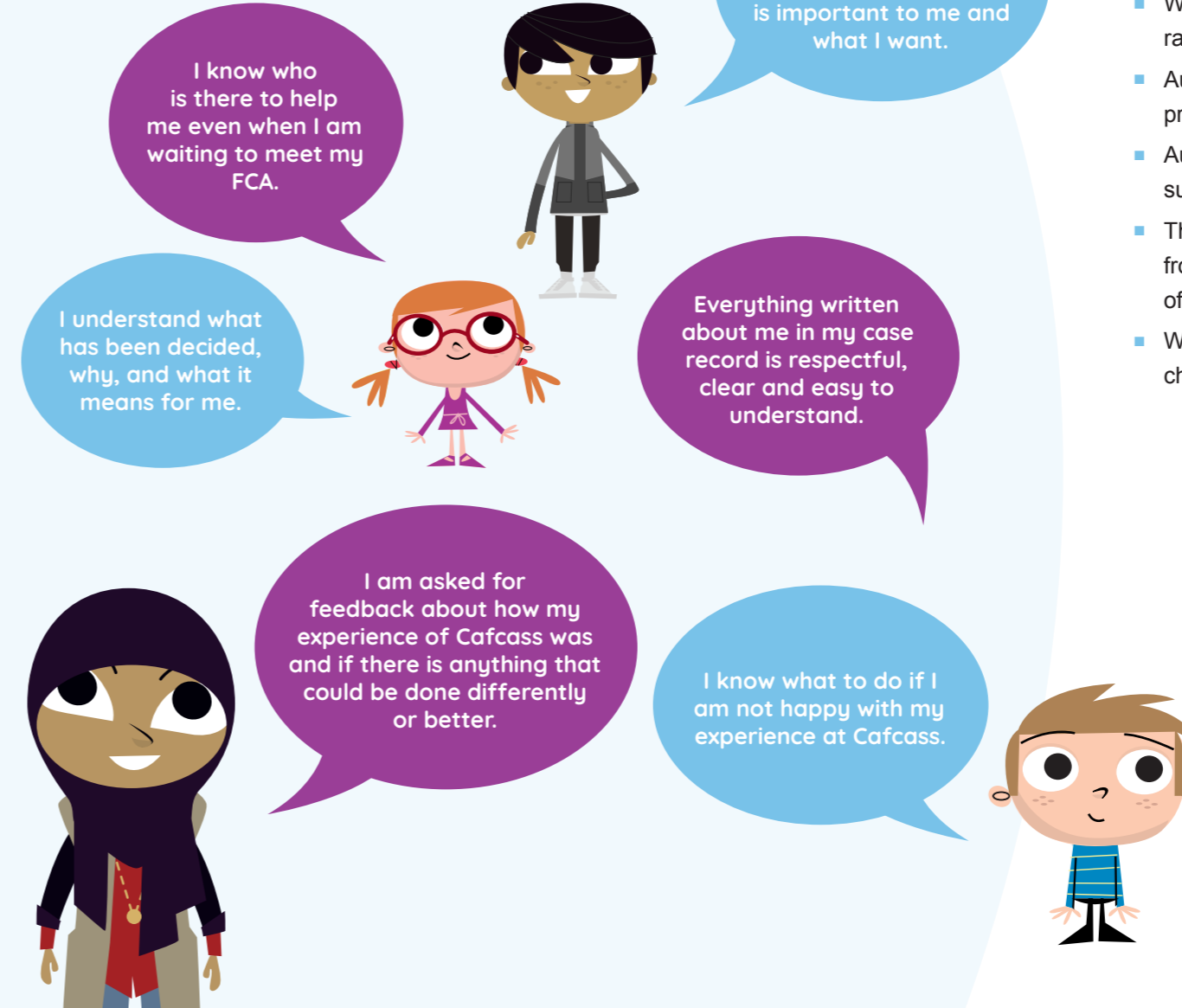
While overall the quality of practice and performance continues to improve, we are focused on variations with the intention to narrow the gap.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Develop and implement **Operational Service Area improvement plans**, including targeted support plans for service areas struggling to make the intended progress.
- **Improve processes** for opening and closing children's cases.
- Embed the **performance, accountability, and quality assurance** cycles.

PRACTICE: What success looks like

What we hope children will be able to say...



What success looks like to us...

- We will see an increase in the proportion of practice that is rated good or better at national and local level.
- Audits will show more consistent application of the Together practice framework materials.
- Audits will show evidence of effective management support, supervision and oversight.
- The volume of feedback received will increase, especially from children, and the proportion that is positive in respect of experiences with Cafcass will improve.
- We will see improved consistency in the progression of children's cases from application to closure.



PEOPLE: Priority programmes

Priority 4:

Attract, retain and engage people

We want children and families to be served by diverse, motivated and skilled people in every part of our organisation.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Prioritise our business case to government for Cafcass to have **flexibility to set an attractive and competitive pay offer**, recognising the social work profession as distinct from the civil service.
- Align our pay and grading structures with our new **Career and Learning Pathways** for social work and for corporate and business services professionals, which will attract and retain diverse talent, and equip our people to meet our enhanced expectations in delivering excellence for children.
- Revise our operating model in line with practice developments and to drive **efficiency, improvement and system reform**.

Priority 5:

Provide a modern child-focused work environment

We need modern offices and systems to enable our best work with children and families.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Prioritise **revisions to our ChildFirst case management system, supporting performance and management information and working practices** to enable exceptional work with families and children.
- Revise and implement an **estates strategy** that offers children, families and colleagues sufficient **in-person engagement and support and which promotes relationship-led work** alongside modern and efficient online connectivity.
- **Prioritise wellbeing, safety and productivity** in all our ways of working, policies and guidance, and ensure they are supported by modern technology and records management.

Priority 6:

Lead and govern well

Strong leadership and decision-making will help us to make the improvements we have identified that prioritise the safety and best interests of all children and families with whom we work.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Embed and evaluate our **leadership and management quality standards** to support and achieve our strategic and improvement priorities.
- Review and revise our **equality, diversity and inclusion strategy** following an evaluation of the first year so that we can demonstrate meaningful progress.
- Plan succession arrangements for our senior leaders with structures to support our **updated operating model** and to develop leaders who drive excellence for children and families.

PEOPLE: What success looks like

What we hope children will be able to say...



What success looks like to us...

- We will reduce staff turnover.
- We will attract, retain and develop diverse and talented people.
- We will optimise safe caseloads.
- We will create improved opportunities for career progression.
- We will see improved employee feedback on Cafcass culture and environment, including their engagement in the staff survey.

PARTNER: Priority programmes

Priority 7:

Improve children's experiences of private law proceedings

Working with partners – including children and families - we are committed to a review of our private law arrangements so that they provide more timely and tailored assessment that is proportionate to the assessed risk of harm to children, reduces duplication, delay and conflict and achieves safe and sustainable arrangements for children.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Evaluate our learning from the Ministry of Justice **Private Law Pathfinder** in Dorset so that we can identify implications for our revised private law working arrangements.
- Develop and test a **revised model for effective information gathering and risk assessment** in work to first hearing in private law, with greater referral to the Planning Together for Children programme where this is safe.
- Delivery of our **Private Law Improvement Programme** to reduce delay and improve outcomes for children. This programme includes a focus on strengthened practice with children and families who are experiencing domestic abuse, and a more structured assessment and intervention model for children's cases where a r16.4 appointment is made.

Priority 8:

Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes

By working with partners to collate better information and insights about delay and children's outcomes at local as well as national level we can take better collective action to reduce delay so that children can get on with their lives.

We will lead workstreams to:

- Work to improve our ability to **record and report on outcomes for children** at the end of proceedings and use this to assess our own progress against our improvement plan and to stimulate joint action with partners.
- Use our enhanced recovery data – developed to support our recovery from the pandemic at national level and now complemented by local dashboards – to **support service managers in pinpointing the drivers of delay**, to identify consistency in practice and to develop solutions with partners where required.
- Evaluate the **impact of the Cafcass Recovery Board** in improving outcomes for children and organisational effectiveness.

Priority 9:

Work with others to improve family justice

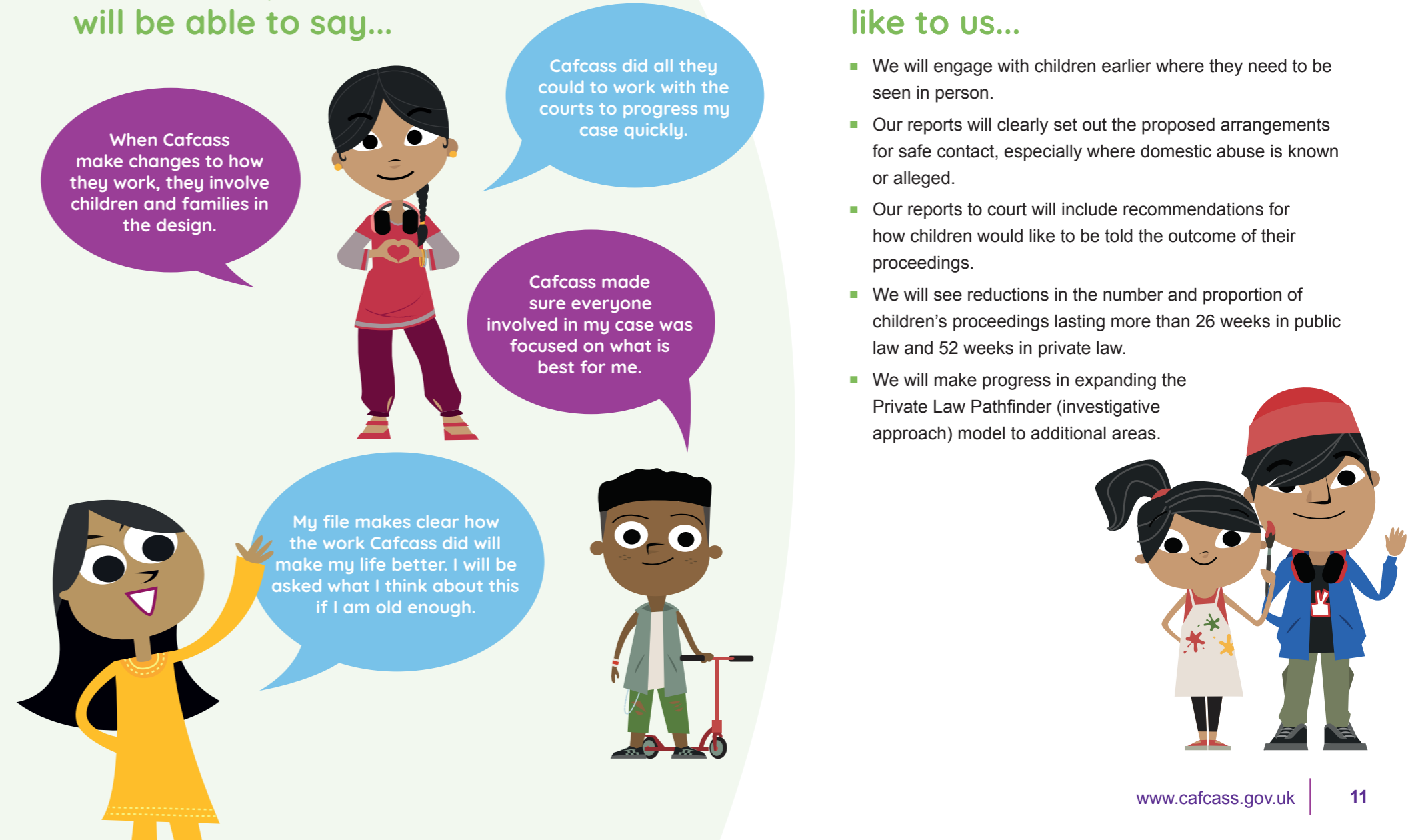
The family justice system needs to work together to serve children better than it does now. We will keep our partner priorities under review so they align with and support the priorities of the national Family Justice Board (FJB).

We will lead workstreams to:

- Develop and implement a **new partners' strategy** to ensure our local and national partnership work delivers agreed improvement and change priorities as set out in the FJB priorities and in our strategic plan.
- Take action with partners to **enable children to understand and participate in their proceedings**, in accordance with their age and stage of development.
- Collaborate with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service on **improving information sharing with the courts**, including through the implementation of the new public law, private law and adoption portals.

PARTNER: What success looks like

What we hope children will be able to say...



What success looks like to us...

- We will engage with children earlier where they need to be seen in person.
- Our reports will clearly set out the proposed arrangements for safe contact, especially where domestic abuse is known or alleged.
- Our reports to court will include recommendations for how children would like to be told the outcome of their proceedings.
- We will see reductions in the number and proportion of children's proceedings lasting more than 26 weeks in public law and 52 weeks in private law.
- We will make progress in expanding the Private Law Pathfinder (investigative approach) model to additional areas.

We welcome your feedback

CafcassComms@Cafcass.gov.uk

