



## Press Release

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### **CAFCASS: INVESTING IN SERVICES, DELIVERING IMPROVEMENTS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children's interests in the family courts, today publishes its annual report for 2008-09, which shows our progress in delivering improved outcomes for children and families.**

Anthony Douglas CBE, Cafcass Chief Executive explains, "This year we have achieved many of the objectives that were set and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) at the beginning of 2008-09. We have successfully implemented our new structure, which has resulted in smaller and more manageable local teams, and has allowed us to provide more intensive supervision and support to our frontline practitioners, in conjunction with the introduction of a robust performance management framework, Quality for Children.

Our three-year grant from the DCSF has helped us to invest in our practice improvement agenda that will continue to be the focus of our efforts in the coming year.

These developments have come at a time when there is heightened public and media interest in the vital role that our staff play in safeguarding children. In the last four months of the year, we witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of these applications to court, culminating in the highest monthly figure ever recorded for such cases in March 2009. This has put many of our teams under extreme pressure, including some where we have never experienced delays in allocating cases to our practitioners. We will be working hard in the coming year to ensure that we control rising backlogs of work and continue to be able to provide a safe and timely service to some of the most vulnerable children in our society, within the finite resources available to us. In particular, we will, as a priority, develop new early intervention services where they are needed.

Neither has the situation stood still in private law, where we have continued to work with the senior judiciary to create a new and sustainable, inter-disciplinary model for moving cases forward swiftly. In December 2008 the final provisions of the Children and Adoption Act 2006 were implemented to promote safe and effective contact between children and their families and we have worked closely with our partner agencies up and down the country to ensure smooth implementation. All of these developments have represented major changes to our working models and I pay tribute to the commitment of our staff and to the positive and dedicated way in which they have responded to these challenges.

Our enduring aspiration is to provide a first rate service to all of the children and families we work with and to contribute to the well-being of children throughout England. I am confident that our stronger infrastructure and the foundations for practice improvement, which have already been laid, will provide the basis from which rapid enhancement of our service can now be made. There is still much work to be done but, as this Report demonstrates, each year we move closer to a service of which we can be justifiably proud. ”

Baroness Valerie Howarth OBE, Chair of Cafcass adds, “This has been a year of consolidation – of embedding a new structure which has brought more resources to the frontline; of strengthening our practice with children and families and of laying the foundations for future excellence. It has also been the first year of our new three-year settlement from our Sponsorship Department, DCSF, which has allowed us to invest more heavily in our frontline services.

My very special thanks go to my predecessor Baroness Jill Pitkeathley, whose term of office as Chair of the Cafcass Board ended in December 2008. Jill served for an unprecedented five years and steered Cafcass through a key stage in its still short history with dedication, energy and wisdom.”

### **Trends – Public Law**

Overall, throughout the year total public law demand has remained at the same levels as in 2007-08 with 10,451 cases. However, the influx of care cases we have witnessed since December 2008 has put frontline practice under significant pressure, with all service areas showing an increase in care cases from December to March this year compared to last year. Even small increases in such cases can have a big impact on resources as they will take, on average, nearly two-and-a-half times more resources than a non-care case. In particular, the Doncaster team’s care demand for the same time period was 14 in 2007-08 and 67 in 2008-09, resulting in a 379% increase. We will be working with the judiciary in the coming year to develop a model of work which will allow us to provide the best possible service based on our finite resources. Most service areas have implemented duty systems and early intervention services to help us minimise backlogs and to ensure that we are adequately safeguarding children. The duty systems are vital in ensuring that information is not wrongly downgraded in importance; in preventing a gap appearing in our service at any point when we have responsibility and accountability; and in providing a safety net for children and families.

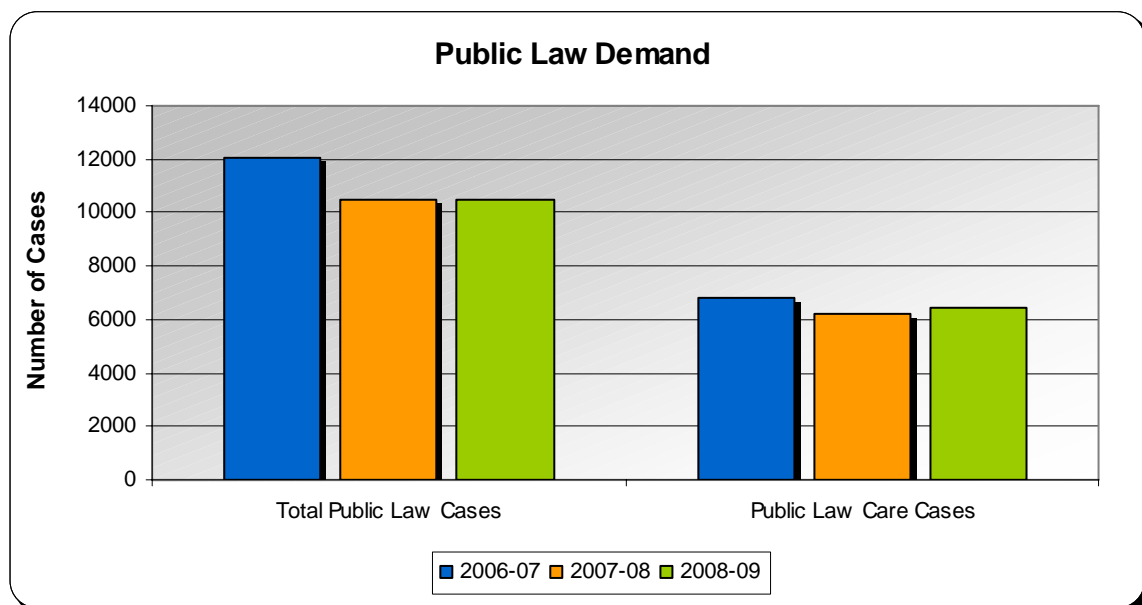
An example of one such scheme is in N6 (South Yorkshire), where the duty scheme operates across the service area. Duty FCAs screen cases as they come in; risk assess the local authority’s application within the first days of receipt of the application; attend the first hearing where they advise the court on the direction of the case; organise assessments and maintain the case file until the case management conference (CMC), where the aim is to assign the case to a named Cafcass practitioner. The system works well in ensuring effective completion of early work and risk assessment on all cases. The challenge, however, of then allocating to an FCA who can work the case to completion has been increased by the unprecedented volume of incoming work and some cases have subsequently had to be moved on to a waiting list. As a result we are looking at expanding early intervention services in many service areas, and deciding how best to prioritise long-term work on complex cases.

In Lincolnshire (C2), the team has developed strong working relationships with the local authority. In particular, the Service Manager Anya Phillips, has forged ties with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager and the local authority legal team.

**Case study**

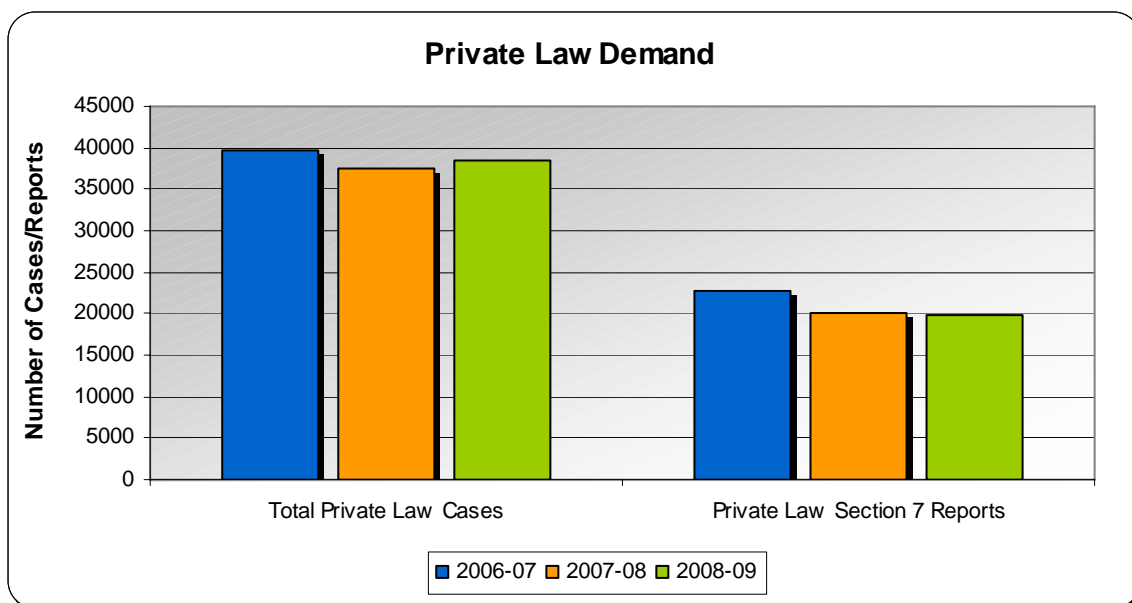
*“We meet up with the IRO manager four times a year to formally look at cases that have closed and to review active cases. This gives us an opportunity to discuss cases, ensure that all the correct information has been sent over to the local authority and to go over any instances where the recommendations of the local authority social worker, the Cafcass practitioner and the IRO may have differed. Where it’s been really helpful and has led to successful outcomes is where care plans have been changed at the final hearing – in these instances we’ve been much more pro-active in ensuring a smooth handover of all the relevant information to the IRO so that they can continue to work effectively and safeguard the child once our involvement has ceased.*

*We’re also in close contact with the local authority legal team, which has really helped me in planning the caseload of our team. In our monthly calls, they are able to tell me how many public law applications to expect and provide me with a brief overview of each case that helps me in my allocations. Cases are not merely allocated in terms of caseload but also in terms of the type of case which I factor into my planning.”*



**Trends – Private Law**

During 2008-09 we received 38,449 private law case requests compared to 37,552 in 2007-08. Many of these disputes concern, although not exclusively, disagreements over contact and residence. Exposure to domestic violence is now recognised as harmful to children and research shows that post-separation parental conflict is damaging to children. Our goal in private law cases is to work with families at an early stage and, where safe to do so, enable them to reach agreements that are in the best interests of their children.



### Early intervention work

Cafcass has set up a number of innovative schemes across the country to help parents reach agreements about their children. These include parenting classes in Uxbridge (S3), dispute resolution work in Birmingham (C5), collaboration with mediation providers, as outlined above, and Family Group Conferences (FGCs) which we have continued to embed across England. The latter received positive feedback from our inspectors, Ofsted, which, in a recent inspection of Cafcass service area S1 (Avon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire) found that the service was providing, “*excellent early intervention and resolution work with children and families in a significant number of private law cases.*” At present, there are 40 trained and accredited FGC co-ordinators employed by Cafcass to deliver and promote FGCs in private law cases. Over 200 families have now gone through the FGC process and we have received the following comments from service users who have been involved in an FGC:

*“I had a really good experience with family group conferencing. Everyone in the family unit was able to get together and give their views. The decisions made were based on the best interests of the children and there was a really positive family atmosphere. I would definitely recommend it to a friend going through the same situation as I did.”* Service user, C5 (Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull).

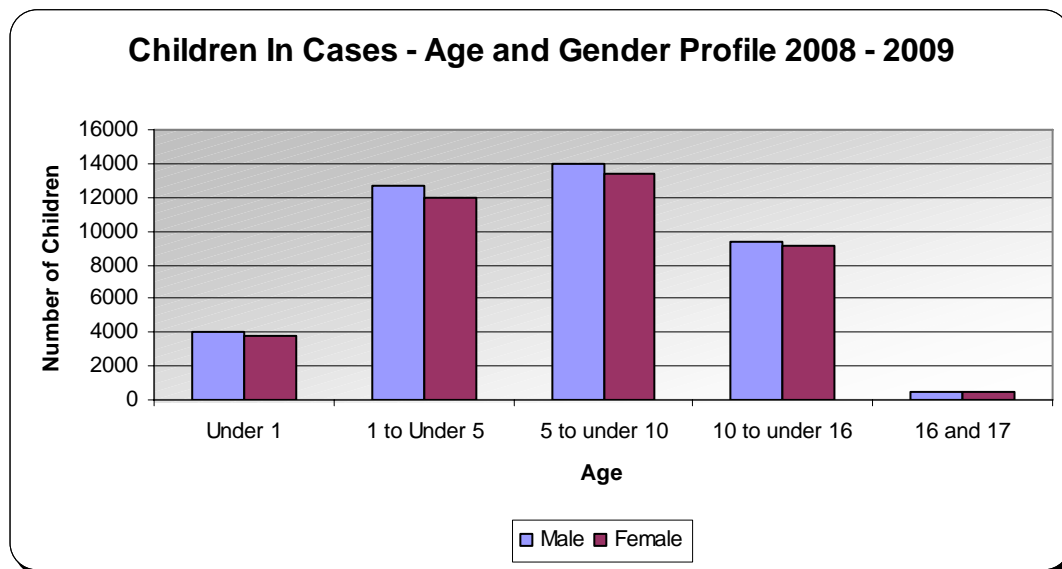
*“I had my doubts to begin with but found the conference worked itself through without much heated arguments.”* Grandfather

*A 14 year old who attended an FGC with her family said, “Thank you for helping my parents to listen to what I really wanted for a change.” The case had been in court on and off since she was three years old.*

### Children in cases

In 2008-09 we worked with a total of 79,096 children and young people across England as part of new cases received in the year. This comprised 40,366 males (51%) and 38,730 females (49%) as shown below. The majority of the children we work with are under ten years old.

However, if we take into consideration the children whose cases were referred to us prior to 2008-09 and on which we continue to work, and those whose cases were closed during the year, the total number of children we worked with is approximately 150,000. Additionally, we support many more children and families through the work we commission from contact centres around the country.



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### Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was formed as a new service for England and Wales on 1 April 2001 as part of the Government's commitment to supporting families and children. It brought together the services previously provided by the Family Court Welfare Service, the Guardian ad Litem Services and the Children's divisions of the Official Solicitor's Office.
- Cafcass has a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people are put first in family proceedings, that their voices are heard, the decisions made about them by courts are in their best interests and that they and their families are supported throughout the process. We operate within the law set by Parliament and under the rules and directions of the family courts.
- Cafcass' role is to work with Children and Families in the family courts. The following list provides some examples of the types of cases we work with:-
  - Adoption (public law)
  - Care Orders (public law)
  - Emergency Protection Orders (public law)
  - Residency and contact following divorce and separation (private law)
- Cafcass is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is a non-departmental public body.
- For the year 2008-2009 CAF/CASS promoted the interests of 79,096 children in new cases. This does not factor in existing cases, the work we do with

children and their families in dispute resolution and our support of contact centres.

- Cafcass recently established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.
- Cafcass' new National Standards are available for download at our new website [www.cafcass.gov.uk](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk)
- For 2009-11 Cafcass is implementing a major practice improvement programme to improve the quality and consistency of frontline practice.

**For further information:**

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