

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team
Overview

24 April 2024



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Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Cafcass Ofsted Inspection 2024

Judgement	Grade
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families	Outstanding
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families	Outstanding
The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

- 4 weeks of live inspection – 22 January - 16 February 2024
- Derived from inspection of 10 operational service areas and the National Business Centre
- the experiences of c680 children
- c314 colleagues who were interviewed or observed
- Partners interviewed from local authorities, Ministry of Justice, Department of Education, Judiciary, President of the family division



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Ofsted inspection 2024

Navigating complex work with great skill, respect and rigour.....

- ❑ **A new model of practice alongside new practice and management quality standards, are understood and valued by a highly skilled workforce.** Improvement priorities are intrinsically linked to the practice quality standards. There is a palpable change in the way practitioners are talking more about, and thinking about, children, placing them at the forefront of their work.
- ❑ **The quality of private law practice has continued to improve and this is making an exceptional difference to children's experiences.** Family court advisers (FCAs) navigate this hugely complex, emotive and challenging area of work with great skill, respect and appropriate rigor. FCAs are making a positive difference to the lives of children through their robust approach to assessing risk and with the high-quality advice they provide to the court.
- ❑ **Children and their families who are the subject of public law proceedings receive an outstanding service from skilled and compassionate children's guardians who bring skill and expertise to their work** with children during care proceedings, allowing them to quickly build trusting and meaningful relationships. Since the previous inspection, practice has continued to improve from an already strong base.
- ❑ The **National Business Centre** receives exceptionally high numbers of applications from courts across the country on a daily basis. **Confident and competent staff** in the central intake team process these promptly.
- ❑ **Leaders are consistently ambitious** in seeking out innovative ways, not only to sustain the highest quality services for children and families, but to **continually improve** them



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Ofsted inspection 2024

Knowing ourselves well, knowing we get things wrong and doing something serious about them

- Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted through the actions and recommendations of Cafcass
- The **Overall effectiveness judgement** from Ofsted is made by 'taking account of whether areas for improvement have been identified and the extent to which leaders and managers understand the issues and are working to resolve them'.
- Cafcass responds appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies and new demands, and is resilient when presented with new challenges. **The organisation's self-evaluation of practice is accurate**
- Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement in the quality of advice given to the family courts
- And so to our next steps.....



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

Ofsted inspection 2024 – Next steps

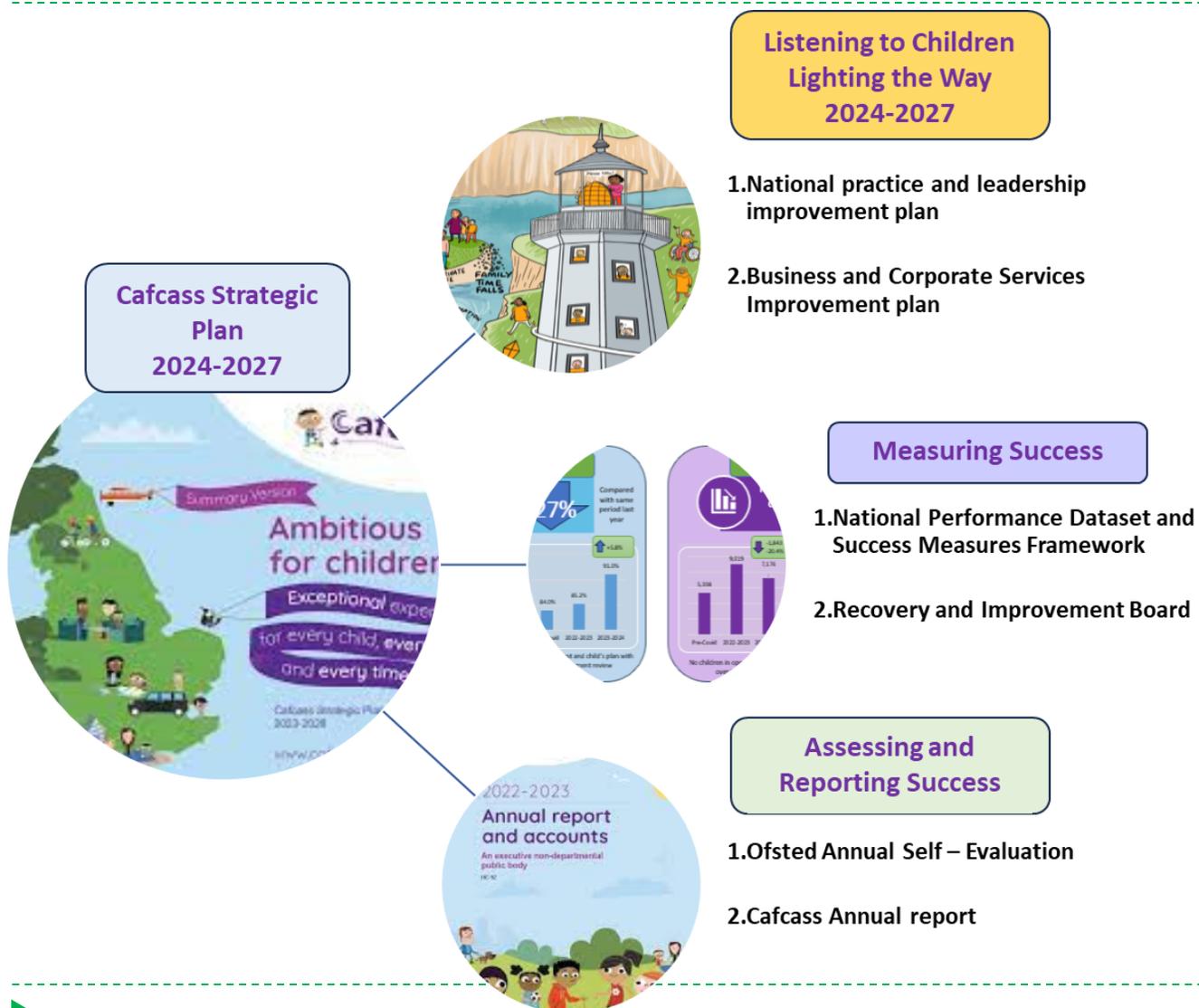


1. **Internal and external thanks and acknowledgement** – moments to pause and reflect with each other
2. **Continued internal discussions and reflection** – balance of achievements AND continued improvement
3. **Submission – week 1 May, formal improvement plan** to Ofsted as required by statutory framework
4. Alignment of strategic priorities, success measures, improvement priorities and recovery ambitions – **RESET**
5. **Development and sign off of two national improvement plans** – operational and corporate – agreement of governance and oversight – existing mechanisms
6. **Letters to colleagues setting out improvement priorities** and plans, second live event 22 April
7. Runway established into **adjusted priorities, mid – year reviews and practice week 2024**

RESET AND GO AGAIN!



Connecting up strategic priorities, improvement, performance and reporting



- One strategy: Practice, People, Partners
- For 2024-25: Two national improvement plans for practice and for business and corporate services
- One success framework, One national dataset
- One annual self – evaluation
- One annual report

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

Reset and Improvement 2024 – 2027: What a judgement of outstanding should mean to children and families

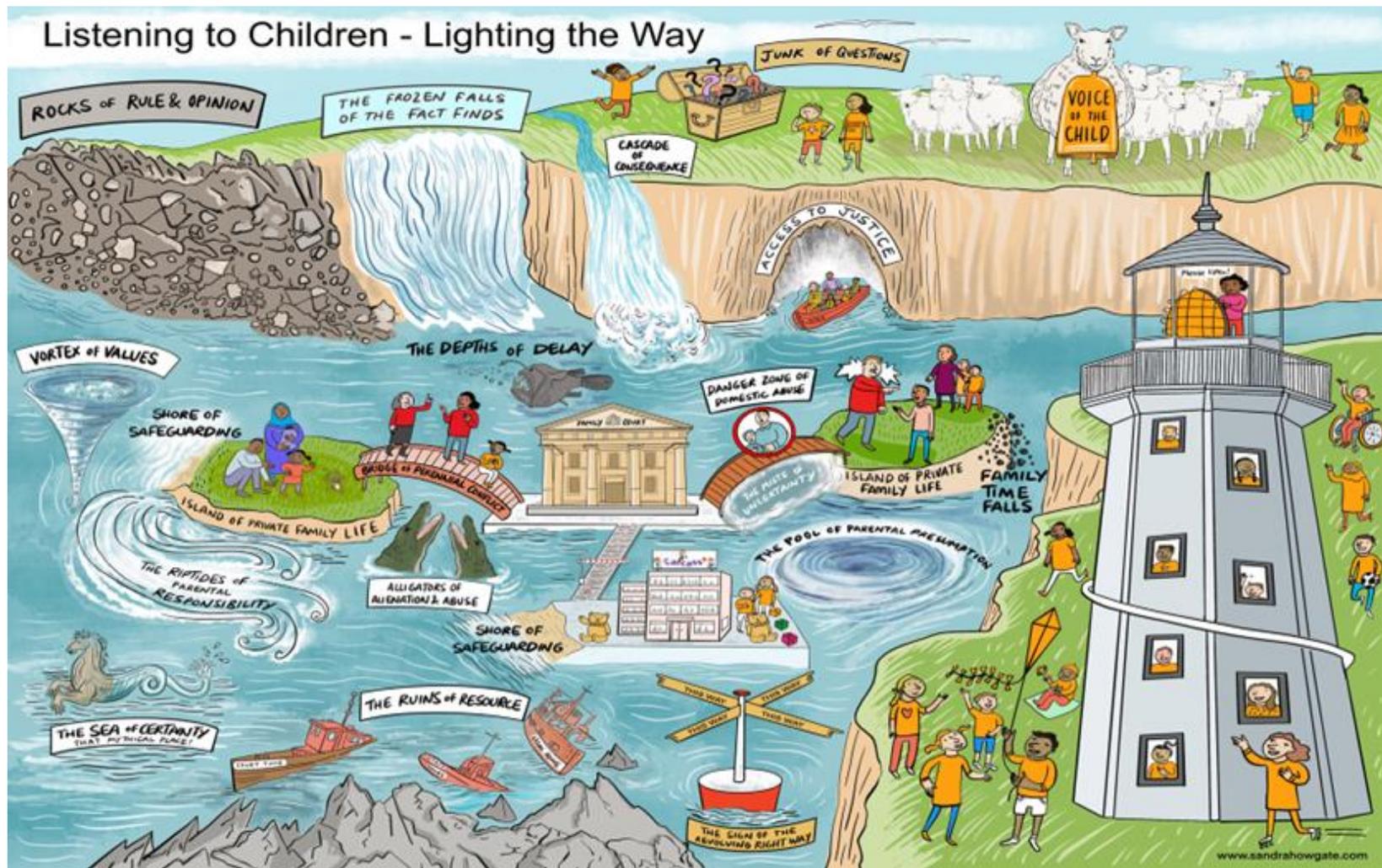


- **Greater confidence in the quality and effectiveness of their engagement** with their Family Court Advisor or Children’s Guardian – regardless of who they are or where they live (*consistency*)
- An expectation of us that **everyone at Cafcass now knows what outstanding looks like** – the professional behaviours and practice elements that make up an exceptional experience – and a hope that everyone is signed up and committed to emulating that standard
- An accurate understanding of **what to expect from us** – that we are all committed to living up to these standards – everywhere and every time – whatever our job at Cafcass
- A request that we will not ‘rest on our laurels’ – but rather that **everyone at Cafcass will learn from this inspection** (there is learning too!) and commit to getting even better at what we do
- A hope that we will continue to **listen and to learn from their feedback** about what works for them and could be even better – and the to act – to change and improve
- An acceptance – more than that – **an ambition to achieve the high bar of children families judging their engagement with us to be outstanding**



Listening to Children – Lighting the Way

Beyond inspection to exceptional experiences for children and their families, everywhere and every time – April 2024 – March 2027



The reasons we will continue to get better at what we do

1. Every child is **entitled** to an exceptional experience, every time and everywhere from everyone who works at Cafcass, every family court adviser and every children's guardian
2. It is not acceptable for any child to have a lesser experience, to be left at risk, or to be harmed by the uncertainty of unresolved family conflict and delay
3. Children have a **right** to expect their FCA and guardian to Listen, to Act (do something) and to Make a Difference to their lives
4. Children also have a **right** to expect us collectively to Listen, to Act and to Change in response to their feedback
5. Children are **entitled** to have access to their records which are written respectfully and kept up to date

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice Reset and Improvement 2024 – 2027: How.....



- We are going to **build on the progress** we have made – our success – consolidate – make ‘exceptional’ the new normal for children and families – and narrow the gap
- There will be 3 dimensions to our post-inspection plan: practice, management, and leadership – **setting out clearly our culture and mission – spelling out the requirements – and what ‘even better’ looks like**
- We will bring **an even sharper focus** on those aspects of practice and corporate services that we have identified and were highlighted in the inspection where we can and must do better – those that are most important and impactful for children
- We will adjust our **improvement plans to incorporate the learning from the inspection** – not just what inspectors found but also what we found for ourselves during the inspection and in our self – evaluation
- We will be even **more forensic in monitoring progress and improvement** in these aspects of practice – target support to individuals and teams that are struggling
- The **corporate services improvement plan** will prioritise the enablers of an exceptional practice environment



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

Reset and Improvement 2024 – 2027: Where next?

We haven't come this far only to come this far.....



- Our message to children and families and partners is no one at Cafcass will rest on their laurels! **Working at Cafcass means a commitment to keep learning and getting better at what we do.**
- We know **what inspectors see as ‘outstanding’** in practice with children and families – and everyone at Cafcass is committed to emulating the best of what inspectors saw, **aligning this with our own strategic ambitions and priorities**
- We know **what children and families see as an exceptional experience** in their engagement with us – and everyone at Cafcass must be committed to keep listening and learning and improving what they do – even if that means changing what they have always done.
- **We will not rest until children and families judge us outstanding.**



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

End of 2023-24 demand overview



- 137,347 children in open work to Cafcass this year, a decrease of 4.3% (6,122 fewer children than last year) – approximately 1/3rd in public law proceedings and 2/3^{rds} in private law
- 36% of the total number of children were under the age of five years of whom 1 in 10 were aged under 1 at the point of application
- **55,830 new children’s cases featuring 86,419 children** - 0.7% compared to 2022/23
 - 16,057 new **public law** children's cases involving 25,816 children (-1.2% compared to 2022/23) of which 11,436 **new Care Applications** featuring 18,891 children (- 4.3% compared to 2022/23) – 69% lead application for section 31 care
 - 1,234 applications to **deprive children of their liberty** made in 23-24, a 28.5% increase* (274 more applications) compared to 2022/23
 - 39,773 new **private law** children's cases involving 60,603 children (-0.4% compared to 2022/23) – 81% lead application relates to who the child lives or spends time with
- On average, we received **223 new children’s cases per working day**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

End of 2023-24 – open children’s cases overview (2)



- **30,254 open children's cases (48,741 children)** at the end of Mar 2024 - **8.1% fewer children's cases than the same point last year** (by law type, this represents, 9% less open public law and 7.4% less open private law)
- **In public law** there are 5,145 children’s cases (**9,828 children**) in **proceedings lasting over 26 weeks**
- Of these children, **3,801 have been in proceedings lasting over 52 weeks** (c25% fewer cases than the same period last year). **These children represent c16% of the total number of open public law children’s cases. 612 children have been in proceedings for over 100 weeks** (c23% fewer cases than the same period last year) . **These children represent c2.4% of the total number of open public law children's cases.**
- **In private law** there are 8,039 children’s cases (**12,462 children**) in **proceedings lasting over 26 weeks**
- Of these children, **7,109 have been in proceedings lasting over 52 weeks** (c20% fewer cases than the same period last year). **These children represent c25% of the total number of open private law children's cases. 2,772 children have been in proceedings for over 100 weeks** (c20% fewer cases than the same period last year) . **These children represent c10% of the total number of open private law children's cases**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

End of 2023-24 durations, caseloads and seeing children overview (3)



- In the latest reportable quarter (Q3 Oct-Dec 2023), **S31 Care & Supervision proceedings lasted on average 43 weeks** (-4 weeks compared to March 2020), Private law, **work to first hearing 12 weeks** (no change) and **work after first hearing, 59 weeks** (-2 weeks) compared to March 2020
- **9.3 weeks (ave) to file in public law cases** - 0.4 of a week higher compared to the same period last year
- **3.9 weeks (ave) to file safeguarding letters** – 0.5 of a week less compared to the same period last year
- **14.5 weeks (ave) to file Section 7 reports** - 0.6 of a week less compared to the same period last year
- **36% of S7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date**
- At the end of March 2024, **6,726 private law children's cases / 10,410 children are 'court ready'** where Cafcass work has been completed with a future dated hearing. This constitutes **37% of the total open children's cases**.
- **Average social work caseloads** for long-term teams have reduced further. As of the end of March 2024, the average is 18.8 (adjusted for FTE) compared to 20.3 in March-23. For work to first hearing teams in private law, caseload averages are 37.7; compared to the 37.4 in March 2023
- At the end of March 2024, on applicable children's cases, **98% of children on open cases have a completed child engagement record, with 93% seen in person**. This is yet further improvement compared to the same period last year

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

Year-end performance headlines - what we know from Practice Quality Audits conducted by the National Improvement Service



- **Three themed national Practice Quality Audits (PQA) every year (600 children's cases). Public Law in delayed proceedings (May 2023), Public and Private Law Practice (December 2023) and Domestic Abuse practice in Private Law (April 2024) (*this audit has not yet reported*)**
- In addition, 8 Performance Board Quality & Impact Audits are undertaken (c320 additional children's cases) and one national Management Quality Audit annually - **75% of practice judged to be good or better and 5% to be inadequate**

Overview of findings

- **Seeing and engaging with children** is still an improving trend
- Where **domestic abuse** is known or alleged, practice is improving with less minimisation of the abuse and improved detail in the assessment of harm, risk of future harm
- **Management oversight is seen** in 83% of cases where it would be expected and a **record of supervision** seen in 79% of audits
- **Causes and impact of delay** on children and taking appropriate action seen in 90% of audits
- **Inadequate work** typically characterised by concerns about the safety of children in the wider family network not being well considered, recording of rationales for 'spending time with' arrangements being safe for children, the safety of children unified or reunified with parents where there has been previous harm and the rigour of safeguarding checks in some cases for special guardians



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

Year-end performance headlines - what we know from Local quality and impact audits



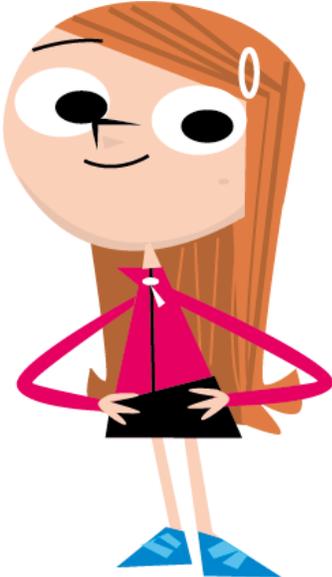
- Between April 2023 - April 2024, the total number audits conducted by NIS and operational managers, including and observations of practice was **6890 of which 3006** were undertaken collaboratively with the Family Court Adviser. **1,983 included feedback** from children and families and 10% were subject to a Head of Practice moderation

Overview of findings:

- **FCAs engaging well with children**, including observations of babies. 63% of audits had **letters to children**
- In 93% of audits, no evidence of **conflation or minimisation of domestic abuse** as a risk factor for children, evidencing the impact of domestic abuse pathway training and increasing use of practice aids for assessment and analysis
- 94% of audits demonstrated **risk analysis that supports well-reasoned decisions** being made. When risks are not fully considered, action is taken to safeguard children, including connected children and referrals are made to local authority children's social care
- When **shortfalls in practice** are identified, actions are set immediately to safeguard children and to support **improvement for the child and learning for the FCA**
- **Regional variation** in performance continues and remains a high priority for internal improvement planning and review



Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news: Planning Together for Children update

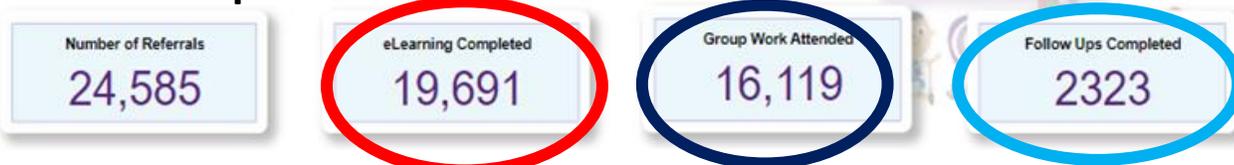


- **Planning Together for Children** replaced the Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) in April 2023
- Parents complete eight e-learning modules before attending a facilitated group workshop.
- Parents are encouraged to complete a child-focused parenting plan once they completed the course.

After completing this section, you should have:

1. A greater appreciation of the importance of seeing your child's point of view
2. A deeper understanding of the kinds of stresses and experiences that can affect your ability to do this
3. A greater ability to keep sight of your child's perspective, even when you are under strain to do this

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:



649 Parenting Plans completed

Participants report having a clearer understanding of the impact of family conflict on children at the end of the facilitated group session

89.0%

Participants report that they will take action to place the child at the centre of all communications and agreements

97.2%

Participants state 'high satisfaction' with the programme and support offered at the end of the facilitated group session

86.0%

Participants are able to give examples of what they have done differently as a result of completing the programme

78.0%



Part 2: And in other news

Planning Together for Children update (2)



Impact

- 5,538 of the 24,585 referrals (22.5%) made by FCAs, meaning parents could access the course earlier, without having to wait for a court order
- 11,643 (89%) parents providing course feedback said they have a clearer understanding of the impact of conflict on their children
- 12,714 (97.2%) parents providing course feedback said they will take action to place the child's needs and feelings at the centre of all agreements
- 522 of the 2323 parents (22.4%) followed up 6-8 weeks after completing the Planning Together for Children course said they had reached a parenting agreement

We put our differences aside and speak solely about the children, and it works!



It was good to refresh and listen to others ; I do try. It was good to have help with English. Thank you.



I feel more relaxed and no longer afraid.



I am more thoughtful about what I say before I say things in front of my children, and this has made the children feel happier I believe.



Part 2: And in other news:

Improving practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is known or alleged



- *In work to first hearing teams, “FCAs are attuned to the nuances of risks children face from a range of adult-based issues, such as parental conflict, **domestic abuse** and misuse of substances”. Ofsted 2024*
- *“Skilled FCAs complete highly effective assessment work when completing section 7 reports. They use a range of well-researched and evidence-based practice aids to help them, for example in relation to **domestic abuse**”. Ofsted 2024*

To honour the experiences of children and families who have not had this experience with Cafcass and to further sharpen our focus on improvement – we are prioritising:

- Introducing a **Domestic Abuse Practice Policy**- the must do’s, derived from Learning Reviews and feedback
- **Extending the secondment of our secondees from Safe Lives** for a further year – to July 2025
- Continuing to listen and learn from the perspectives of our experts by experience **Practice Reference Group**
- Strengthening the programme to apply our training and guidance consistently in practice via the Domestic Abuse Practice Champions network, including **new assessment questions at the outset of proceedings**
- Domestic Abuse remains as **one of our 5 practice priorities with** leadership through Operational Service Area Plans reflecting our policies
- The **4th annual Domestic Audit** is about to be reported with associated improvement priorities



Part 3: People & Workforce



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce overview and update: Quarter 4, 2024



- 12 month turnover for social workers has increased to 15.1% from 14.8% in December 2023 and remains high, though down on peak of 15.7% and below Local Authority averages at 16%
- Corporate & Business Services turnover 7.9%
- Challenges to recruit and retain people remain in specific parts of the country
- Social Work vacancy rate is 7.5% (the latest comparable national Local Authority figure is 18.9%)
- Locum social worker numbers remain low at 2.5% of the national workforce - significantly lower when compared to most local authorities (17.4%)
- In the 12 months to March 2024, sickness absence for social workers is 5.8%, which is an increase from December 2023 when it was 5.4%. 78.1% of sickness absence for social workers is due to long term absence.
- Leadership Conference planned for 26th June for 300 Leaders/Managers with the theme: Ambitious leadership – exceptional experiences for children and families.
- Annual Recognition/ Awards event 13th May



Part 3: People & Workforce:

Health and Safety strategic priority – next steps



- Recent events involving threats and actual acts of violence towards professionals in the Family Justice System act as a reminder that the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff is paramount
- Staff also told us through the 2023 Staff Survey that they witnessed and experienced bullying and harassment and threatening behaviour in their work with families
- We have implemented some immediate changes to our guidance and processes to improve our response and to support colleagues who experience unacceptable treatment with the families with whom they work. We are stepping up our responses to and our oversight of bullying and harassment – a new policy and new guidance for managers is in development – including an intention to speak directly with the judiciary about action in cases where Cafcass staff have been threatened.
- We have also set in train short term improvements to the current reporting system to be in place from May 2024, pending the acquisition of a new or retendered reporting system later in year
- We will be carrying out a full review of Health and Safety and related policies as a new strategic priority in 2024/25 and it will form a part of year 2 of our strategic priorities programme
- We are working through a reset of facilities management arrangements in each office planned as part of our wider Estates Strategy
- We are engaging with senior partners to work together to improve and prioritise the safety of colleagues working in family justice



Part 3: People & Workforce: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



- The **revised Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy** has been approved through the Corporate Management Team (CMT) for presentation to the next People Committee and follows consultation with the chairs of the staff networks
- **LGBT+ History month** - focussed on the intersectionality of our identities with a joint leadership live event focused on the medical contributions and experiences of LGBT+ medical staff during the
- **Evaluation of the Talent Pathway Pilot** has been completed. Three different programmes to support the development and progression of colleagues from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. The evaluation indicated a range of benefits including increased confidence and motivation, strengthened networking skills and helpful advice and support from senior sponsors. Work is underway to re-commission the programmes for 2024-25.
- **Strategic Lead continues to meet with staff network leads on a bi-monthly basis.** At the most recent meeting (11 April) discussion focused on updating the terms of reference for staff networks.



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Priorities in the next period: Improving children's experiences in private law



A pilot for improving children's experiences in private law is launching on 27th May in Birmingham/Solihull, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, HMCTS, Judiciary and local authorities

This builds on 'Pathfinders' currently in **Dorset** and with Cafcass Cymru (currently in **North Wales. Cardiff** due to launch in 2024).

Before 'launch' in Birmingham/Solihull we will be...

Continuing to redesign how children and families experience private law

Training our Family Court Advisers on new ways of working

Improving our communication materials for children & families in private law

Drafting new protocols with the local authority and domestic abuse services

Redesigning parts of our IT and data systems

A Birmingham launch event is being held on 16th May

More information will be included on our website



Part 4: Priorities in the period:

Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 – project timeline



- Content identified and commissioned in order to fulfil the reporting requirements of the government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM)
- Exceptionally for 2023-24 the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) will incorporate content in lieu of a separate annual Self- Assessment for Ofsted
- We will share a first draft with the Board at their meeting 11 July 2024
- The draft ARA will be released for audit on the 16 September 2024
- Final version presented to the Board for approval 17 October 2024. If the audit has not yet concluded, this approval will be in principle, authorising the Chair and Chief Executive to sign when the audit is concluded and the certificate released by the National Audit Office (NAO)
- We anticipate laying the ARA in Parliament prior to the December recess.
- ARA presented to the Open Board meeting 30 January 2025

