



CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE
Paper for the Cafcass Board meeting on 20 March 2019
Demand Levels and Resourcing

KEY POINTS

Cafcass' total new case demand, including all Public Law (care and non-care) and Private Law, has increased by **2%** year to date (April 2018 to January 2019), this includes:

- **11,414** new care applications between April 2018 to January 2019, this is a decrease of **3.2%** (375 applications) on the same period last year, and 6.1% (738 applications) lower than the same period in 2016-17.
- **3,447** new non-care public law cases were received between April to November 2018, this in an increase of **1%** (35 cases). When compared to the same period in 2016/17, it is an increase of 10.4% (327 cases).
- **36,402** new private law cases between April 2018 to January 2019; this is **3.4%** (1,195 cases) higher than in the same period in 2017 and 9.1% (3,030 cases) higher than the same period in 2016-17.

Current trend and forecast:

- The overall trend for **new care applications** has been fairly level for the last 24 months. The number of new applications received per day on average has reduced *marginally* during this period.
- Care and Supervision (s31) duration has increased to **33 weeks** in Q3 18/19, an increase on the previous 3 quarters which have been 32 weeks.
- **44.5%** of Care and Supervision (s31) applications were completed within 26 weeks in Q3 18/19; this is a decrease from 49.2% in the previous quarter.
- **63%** of care applications gave less than seven days' notice before the first hearing.
- **Private law demand** continues to increase. Recent demand has continued the upward trajectory, for example we received 3,636 new cases during January 2019, this was **3.6%** (127 cases) higher than January 2018 and the third highest January on record.
- **26%** of private law cases received in the last 12 months had less than the required four to six weeks to the first hearing from application.

In their latest quarterly forecast (end of Q3 2018/19), the MoJ projected a decrease of **1.8%** for new public law cases and a **5.4%** increase for new private law cases for the 2018/19 financial year. The latest forecast for 2019/20 is for a 0.9% decrease for public law and 5.9% increase for private law. These figures are reviewed and updated biannually.

Cafcass' own forecast based on historic data has been revised to an overall case demand increase of **2.8%** (+4.8% for private law and -1.6% for public law) 2018/19 and an overall increase of 3.4% (+4.7% for private law and -0.2% for public law) increase for 2019/20.

1 AIM AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 To share with the Board for information and assurance the steps being taken, both corporately and operationally, to manage demand and support the workforce.

2 ACTION FOR THE BOARD

- 2.1 To consider if the actions taken by Cafcass officers provide assurance in the Board's governance role.

3 KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR THE BOARD TO CONSIDER

- 3.1 The Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) continue to discuss the continuously rising demand with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The budget secured for 2018/19 continues to be challenging against the rising demand but manageable and we need to achieve the same position in 2019/20 and in subsequent years.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive (CMT) and senior Operational Management Team (OMT) are all fully engaged and contributing to achieve reforms in the Family Justice System. Every Assistant Director continues to work with District Family Judges (DFJs) and Local Family Justice Boards (LFJBs) to ensure local systems respond collaboratively and constructively to the increased demand. Cafcass managers now chair 14 LFJBs, one third of the total number in England. They seek to find and embed local solutions e.g. local protocols about court attendance by guardians to reduce time wasted in court, work with local authorities (LAs) on defining the urgency of care applications and ensuring First Hearings are effective.
- 3.3 High demand for our service is managed through the effective centralisation of key tasks through the high-performing National Business Centre, including initial screening, work allocation and PNC (Police National Computer) checks. A high volume single call centre that handles between 1,000-1,500 calls a day eliminates demand at the local level and provides a high quality and reliable service. Digitised central post and document management removes the need for high volume local administration. Work is underway to further streamline centralised processes including the ongoing digital C100 (private law applications) pilot with HMCTS and MoJ.
- 3.4 We continue to support innovation to try to influence reforms in the Family Justice System. The Cafcass Model Office supports several pilots, currently with a focus on private law reform in the following areas: **1) Low risk pathway:** The Support with Making Child Arrangements pilot ran in Manchester throughout 2018. The evaluation report is now being passed to the Minister to inform Cafcass and MoJ next steps on attempting to divert more low risk cases into alternative dispute resolution. **2) Digital intervention:** The Co-Parent Hub is being trialled as a digital option for parental education and online negotiation towards a Parenting Agreement. **3) Higher risk interventions:** Cafcass' Positive Co-Parenting Programme is being piloted as a structured programme for 16.4 cases with evaluation of this planned in March 2019. The National Commissioning Team are also testing a shorter version of the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme, for cases involving lower-threshold domestic abuse. **4) Process improvement:** A further pilot has also commenced to streamline the business services processes around allocation of FCAs in Section 7 cases, so the child can be seen at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.5 The use of IT innovation remains central to supporting the increase in workforce capacity and driving savings through the reduction in both travel and the need for face to face meetings where appropriate. It is now normal for a significant part of contact to be undertaken via Skype including meetings, training and contact with external organisations. In February 2019 we launched a bespoke electronic case plan tool in ECMS to further support staff productivity and standards.
- 3.6 The electronic system for Performance & Learning Reviews (PLRs) that launched in September 2017 is now fully embedded with staff. Compliance remains within target, with **90%** of eligible practitioners having had a PLR within the last three months. The system prompts a self-assessment to be completed by the Family Court Adviser ahead of every PLR. This helps to target support consistently to all employees, with a strong focus on well-being. The system aggregates all available data on performance, learning, quality assurance audits and self-evaluation and then pinpoints support required to maintain or improve well-being, quality and

productivity. Further enhancements have subsequently added with more improvements planned for April 2019.

- 3.7 Quality of work remains consistently high despite the demand pressure. We are exceeding targets for case file audits graded as Requires Improvement and Outstanding in the last 3 months: the Requires Improvement target of 7% is currently **4%**; the Outstanding target of 10% is currently **12%**. Compliance also remains high with **89%** of eligible practitioners having had at least two case file audits in the last three months, just short of the 90% target. Intelligence still indicates that morale remains good for most staff, but some areas remain under significant pressure with the relentless volume of work and that this can have an impact on staff energy levels.
- 3.8 Detailed work to ensure that the high quality of work is being maintained continues through the work of the National Improvement Team. A rolling programme of audit has included a recent thematic audit of quality thresholds and an area quality review of our Manchester teams (A3).

4 CURRENT SOCIAL WORK RESOURCING

4.1 Supporting the strategy of Forward Recruitment, every service area works with HR and Finance to predict future leavers, and early recruitment to fill those posts is ongoing. An established online recruitment platform is one of the ways that we have made the application process more effective. This continues to achieve significant success, with the number of applicants continuing to rise and applicants being offered jobs and commencing their posts more quickly. Between February 2018 and January 2019, Cafcass employed **286** new staff.

- As at 31 January 2019 we had an employed¹ social work FTE of **1,375.3** in line with the overall recruitment plan. Agency social worker numbers reduced from 79 in March 2018 to **31** in January 2019. In the current financial year, we have converted **68** of the best agency talent to permanent positions.
- Cafcass Associates colleagues work across both public and private law and can be deployed to the service areas most in need, providing an experienced and flexible additional workforce. The overall pool of Cafcass Associates workforce is currently **117**.
- We also encourage retiring staff members to consider continuing to offer their experience and expertise as bank workers.

5 CURRENT SOCIAL WORK CAPACITY

5.1 Demand for services continues to increase with overall national open caseload (stock) levels increasing by **3.9%** in the last 12 months. Overall, the number of open Private Law cases has risen by 7.4% with the open Public Law cases reducing by 1.8%.

5.2 Average active caseloads have shown a *marginal increase* which can be attributed to the ongoing rises in private law demand. At the start of February 2019, the average active caseload for a Family Court Adviser was **21.4 cases** (compared to 21.2 in December 2018), although there is local variation.

5.3 Our electronic tools support managers with the allocation of new work and provide a detailed range of information to enable the effective workload management of individual staff. The Government Independent Audit Agency (GIAA) undertook an audit of Cafcass' workload management processes in December 2018 and the final report graded systems as 'substantial', which is the higher grade, with no recommendations.

¹ 'Employed' refers to staff with Cafcass contracts of employment and excludes all flexible workforce staff.

5.4 We continue to manage the pressures of demand by supporting staff to maintain attendance levels as high as possible. For the period November 2018 to January 2019, social work sickness levels were higher (**11.1** average working days lost) than for the same period in 2018 (9.8 average working days lost). This does represent some lost capacity in this period but most sickness remains related to physical illness.

5.5 Staff turnover for the 12-month period ending January 2019 remains low at **9.3%** for Cafcass' social work staff, compared to a national average of around 15% for local authority children's services social work staff.²

6 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The focus of organisational development continues to be on equipping staff to be productive, support wellbeing and develop our talent. This includes:

- Learning and Development: providing relevant learning resources at the point of need via a range of channels; including management and leadership development, coaching skills to enable individualised support, access to a range of eLearning and on-line resources and smarter working tips.
- Recently externally recognised with the REBA Wellbeing Award for Total Strategy, our approach to wellbeing continues to progress. Latest developments include research into the potential impact of flexible working on wellbeing, a set of 8 videos of staff sharing their experiences of mental health to raise awareness of Cafcass' support for staff, and development of new resources to manage stress.
- The Emerging Talent programme continues to support our high performing, high potential staff through a bespoke development plan. This has enabled the creation of a strong internal talent pool able to contribute to strategic projects and working groups and a pipeline for internal promotion opportunities.

² Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-work-workforce-2017>

7 BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN AND SERVICE USERS

7.1 All the actions taken are ensuring that children and families have continued to receive a timely and quality service.

8 FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

8.1 The organisation has received a budget settlement to sustain frontline staffing levels.

9 RISK ANALYSIS

9.1 The risk of not being able to allocate work remains if the applications continue to rise and recruitment/staff retention becomes more difficult.

Christine Banim
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Acronym	Definition
ALB	Arms Length Body
AWDL	Average Working Days Lost
CMT	Corporate Management Team
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DFJ	District Family Judge
ECMS	E-Case Management System
FCA	Family Court Adviser
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
H&W	Health & Wellbeing
HMCTS	HM Courts & Tribunals Service
IT	Information Technology
L&D	Learning & Development
LAs	Local Authorities
LFJB	Local Family Justice Board
LinkedIn	Worldwide professional network
MIS	Management Information Systems
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
OMT	Operational Management Team
PLR	Performance & Learning Review
PNC	Police National Computer
S31	Section 31
S7	Section 7 Report
SEC	Self-employed contractor (now Cafcass Associates)