



Sustaining ambition for children

working together, building

resilience, inspiring change

2026-2029

Cafcass Strategic Plan
2026-2029

www.cafcass.gov.uk

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About Cafcass



Cafcass is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. We work with approximately 133,000 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. We provide a service to children that prioritises their safety, understands their experiences, listens to their voices and their needs, and takes into full account their families and those who are connected to them.

Our vision and all our associated ambitions are that children receive an exceptional service, wherever in the country they engage with us and every time they do so. We use feedback and data to assess how well we are doing. We spend time learning how to understand what children say is important to them and what needs to change in response to their feedback. Ultimately, we try to find a balance between our statutory responsibility for their safety and welfare, what they tell us during proceedings and in their feedback. The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) are instrumental in helping us to achieve this balance and we will continue during the three years of this plan to ask whether we are getting it right.



Our role and responsibilities

We operate in accordance with the law set by Parliament (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) and under the rules and directions of the family courts.

Our role is to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- give advice to the family courts;
- make provision for children to be represented; and
- provide information, advice and support to children and their families.

We are asked by the family court to work with families in:

Public law proceedings, including care applications where a local authority has serious concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a children's guardian. Their job is to work alongside the local authority to make sure that the plan for that child is in their best interests and will secure a safe outcome for them.

Private law proceedings, including arrangements for children after parents have divorced or separated. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a Family Court Adviser (FCA). Their role is to provide the court with the information it needs to make a safe decision about who the child should live with, who they should spend time with, and what is safe and in their best interests.

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), accountable to the Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice. As Accounting Officer, our Chief Executive is responsible for advising on appropriate objectives and targets agreed with our sponsor department, making regular assessments on risks and progress, intervening where necessary, undertaking an annual self-evaluation as required by the Ofsted inspection framework, and making an annual report to Parliament. The Chief Executive is responsible to the Cafcass Board, reporting on the effective discharge of our responsibilities, giving them assurances about performance, effectiveness, the wellbeing of colleagues and the management of public money. Cafcass also has a responsibility to contribute to wider government objectives relating to children and families, working especially closely with the Department for Education (DfE) and the MoJ.

Why our work with and feedback from children matters

We are a diverse workforce made up of over 2,300 people and Cafcass is the largest children's social work employer in England. The majority of our people are social workers, working alongside colleagues in many corporate and business services roles, who keep the organisation running to support the discharge of our statutory responsibilities.

What unites us is our singular focus. Children, for whom the family court orders Cafcass involvement, come to us in very difficult circumstances - many have and are currently experiencing abuse and harm in their lives, and many are suffering from exposure to prolonged and repeated conflict in their families. Most feel worried, uncertain and scared about their lives and the impact that court decisions will have on their futures with their families, friends, pets, hobbies, schools and all that is familiar to them.

Our responsibility, regardless of the role we have at Cafcass, is to preoccupy ourselves and obsess about how to resolve arrangements for children, so that:

- They understand what is happening in proceedings about them and feel able to influence the advice to the family court.
- They live in the safest possible arrangements and are protected from harm.
- They trust the adults with whom they have contact at Cafcass and feel able to share what life is like for them and their wishes for the future.
- They feel that who they are as individuals is understood, respected, valued and represented clearly to the court in the advice that is given.
- They are able to confidently tell us about their experiences with us and can expect to see a response that commits to any necessary improvement and change.

Children have told us what is important to them in family court proceedings and we have set this out on pages 17, 21, 25, and 29 against each strategic priority. In addition, we have developed a range of performance data and success measures to help us to determine the progress we are making. We show some examples of those measures against our work programmes on pages 15, 19, 23, and 27 and in Annex 2 on page 47. It is the combination of these things that tell us whether we are achieving what we intend for children.



Why our professional environment matters

In an organisation tasked with understanding what life is like for children, presenting their experiences to the family court and advising about what is safe and in their best interests, comes a responsibility for Cafcass as an employer, to provide the best possible environment for this work to take place. Add to this, the complexity of professional judgement associated with where children live, who with, whether they are safe and how to secure their best interests, and there is an even more important responsibility – the provision of strong leadership, effective management, and workloads that are manageable. This is why we have a strategic plan with a strong focus on our people. We have and we need a range of professional people to realise our vision for children. For all of them, we intend that they feel part of an organisation that listens, makes regular enquiry about the effectiveness of their work environment, provides safety and security at work and directs resources to where they are most needed.



We are a partner in the family justice system

Our family court advisers work closely with judges, magistrates, legal advisers, local authorities and a range of professionals who know the children whom they represent. Our corporate and business services colleagues work also with judges, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), employment partners, lawyers and barristers, technology companies, family services providers, contact centres, DNA testing services, and many government departments and agencies, focusing also on making sure we are operating efficiently and sustainably as a public service body with children's best interests prioritised at all times. Nothing that we do can be completed by Cafcass alone. Our partnerships and our role as a partner in the family justice system is critical to our strategic success. This is why our strategic plan has a strong focus on the priorities we share with partners. We are working closely with the MoJ to agree a new system-wide Family Justice Strategy.

The ambitions that we set out in this plan for the next three years relate therefore to our practice, our people and our partners. We are both proud and privileged to be alongside children and their families as we try to help them find safe arrangements and the best possible outcomes for their futures.

Foreword

From our Board and Chief Executive



We published our last strategy, ‘Ambitious for children’ in November 2023. At that time, the family justice system was still recovering from the disruption and the impact of the pandemic. Much of our focus was about ‘sustaining practice effectiveness’ in order to realise our hopes for children and families.

In the years to be lived and led for this new strategy (2026-2029), it feels encouraging and positive to be able to set out how we will now ‘**sustain our ambition**’ for all children, but specifically for the c130,000 with whom we work in family court proceedings each year. To do this, we intend to lead both **the priorities set out here, and in parallel, our practice and corporate improvement programmes**. Both go hand in hand if we are to enable positive change for children.

Everything we do at Cafcass derives from our commitment that children will be able to say that they have experienced exceptional care and services, anywhere in England where they have had an engagement with us and every time they do so.

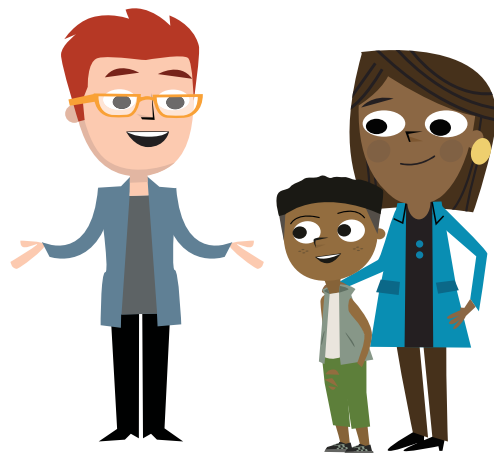
Continuing with our now familiar focus on the **quality of practice, our effectiveness as an employer and as a family justice system partner**, we set out here **nine priorities** for the three years – each supported by a number of work programmes, success measures and a clear suite of statements from children about what is important to them.

Fundamental to every single work programme, is our statutory responsibility to keep children safe in family court proceedings and to promote their welfare. In both public and private law and those proceedings where an application is made to deprive a child of their liberty, there are complex assessments to be made about harm and the risk of further harm to children and their protective adults. **This plan should give everyone reading, clarity and confidence that in all of our work – as complex and contested as it may be – we will treat people fairly, we will use our authority with care, we will promote the principle of equality and the value of uniqueness and we will be relentless about what matters to children and what protects them.**



To do this, we need to retain and attract the best people. Our colleagues feel the pressure of vacancies, of sickness absence and the impact of people leaving the organisation. Children feel it acutely too – having to wait longer to meet their family court adviser or to meet a new one if someone they have been working with leaves. In this plan, we commit as leaders to focus on the capacity we need to find and keep, the investment we need to make in professional development and the action we need to take quickly and consistently when adults in proceedings threaten, harass or abuse anyone working at Cafcass.

As a partner in the family justice system, we know that improving the experiences of children and families in proceedings comes only from work that is done in collaboration. This plan extends through the whole implementation period of the Child Focused Court reforms.



Working together, we will resource, lead and regularly evaluate the difference the changes are making for children and families. Designed so that Cafcass sees more children, sees them earlier and is able to advise the court more quickly, the reforms present a significant opportunity to consider the safety and protection of child and adult victims of domestic abuse at the first and single decisions hearing. We are excited to be at the centre of this transformation of private law proceedings and committed to it, because it makes sense for children and for the professionals undertaking this work.

We say every time and in every national report, that **it is a privilege to be able to help children, families and carers in decisions that affect both their present and future lives. You have our commitment that we will do all that is possible to operate efficiently and effectively as a public service body in the explicit interests of children’s safety and welfare.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this plan.



Professor Eileen Munro CBE
Deputy Chair



Jacky Tiotto
Chief Executive



Sally Cheshire CBE
Immediate past
Board Chair until
May 2026

Foreword

From the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)

As members of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB), we are pleased to have worked closely with Cafcass for many years to improve their work with children and families in proceedings. The organisation continues as a very supportive sponsor for our board. We meet regularly with senior leaders, with practitioners and managers. We are actively invited to have our voices and our experiences at the heart of the work Cafcass is doing. We know that we can influence this strategy as we did the last.

In all our sessions with Cafcass staff, we speak honestly about what makes a difference. We say that children should always feel listened to, be understood, and be respected. We say that when we meet our family court adviser, we should know who they are, why they are involved, and how they will help us. We talk about consistency — knowing that wherever a child lives, they should have the same quality of support and the same chance to be heard. We also speak about the importance of feeling safe, especially where domestic abuse is a factor in our proceedings. We want to feel safe from physical, emotional and sexual harm and we want every professional to understand the emotional impact that conflict, abuse and harm has on us.



We have asked that this strategy prioritises communication with children that is clear, kind, and personalised. That professionals check their understanding about what we have said, explain their decisions, keep in touch, and tell us what has been done with our feedback. We have said that all these things really matter.

Feeling prepared for meetings also matters. Being able to track what is happening in our proceedings matters. Having adults with the skills, time and compassion to work with us matters. **And we have asked that change should always start with one simple question: What will this mean for children?**

We want to hear over the time of this strategic plan that the things that make the biggest difference during proceedings are always at the front of every professional mind, including:

- being **engaged with regularly** and not having long periods without seeing our family court adviser.
- **feeling safe** and comfortable in the environment where we meet.
- seeing staff who **understand our experiences** and our uniqueness.
- having progress at a pace that is right for us — not rushed, not delayed; and
- making sure all partners, including local authorities and the courts, work together so that **children do not fall through ‘system’ gaps.**

We know that this strategy prioritises many of the things we have asked are included.

Our hope is that our success statements (pages 17, 21, 25, and 29) will not only provide a measure as to whether this strategy is achieving for children, but whether they also become part of everyday practice across the family justice system.

Children and young people will remember how they were treated long after their proceedings have ended. As one member put it: *“I will never forget my FCA — the difference they made.”* We want every child to be able to say the same.

Children’s voices must lead the way — and we are pleased to see that happening here.

Family Justice Young People’s Board



SECTION 1

Sustaining ambition for children 2026-2029: Our vision, our values and our priorities

In 2023, we established our first series of ambitions. Published as a three-year strategic plan, ‘Ambitious for Children 2023-2026’, it described how we intended to succeed for children through nine important programme priorities set out under three established areas of focus: Practice, People and Partners. The plan has served us well as a framework for prioritising how we serve children and their families. It has also enabled us to hold ourselves accountable for improvement and change over the period.

Three years on, we know we are doing better in our work with children. More of our internally assessed and audited work is being judged to be good or better.

The sort of evidence seen, is that more children are prepared for their visit with their family court advisers through the use of introductory letters. We are listening to children’s feedback and more of them are receiving personalised introduction and goodbye letters.

Family court advisers and children’s guardians are sharing their advice and describing what children feel about this in reports to the court. Children are being seen more often and the assessments of harm and the risk of further harm continue to improve in specificity and the quality of the analysis and judgement.

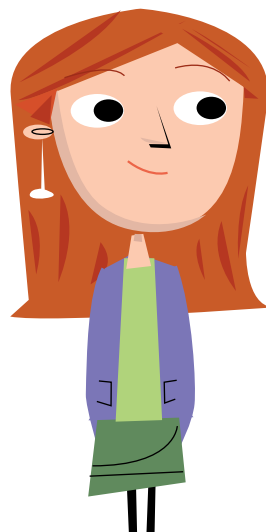


The [Ofsted inspection in January 2024](#) gave testimony to the dedication and commitment of our people at Cafcass, and the judgement of ‘outstanding’ provided recognition of the sustained positive difference our work makes to the lives of children. This judgement was again consolidated following a targeted [Ofsted inspection in October 2025](#), specifically looking at the effectiveness of practice and advice to the family court in private law cases where domestic abuse is a factor. Inspectors determined that in these types of children’s cases, Cafcass had strengthened practice and advice, that children remained the central focus throughout the organisation and that child and adult victims of domestic abuse were being well supported in most proceedings.

As a national organisation however, we are determined that no child or family has a poor experience with us. This means working harder still to improve the consistency and effectiveness of practice. Our inspections and internal quality assurance framework still identify some teams where practice is not good enough. Reducing local variation remains a foundation priority for this next strategic planning period.

In addition, we cannot expect to lead effective and improving practice or business processes, if we do not have enough people in work. Attraction, retention and keeping people well at work are also foundation priorities for the next three years.

On this basis and for the next three-year period, we intend to continue with the same priorities (see figure 2, page 14), adjusted to increase the rate of improvement where this is possible and to bring more scrutiny to some of our work that requires more targeted leadership. In the same period, our local operational service area oversight will move more deeply into specific teams with challenges in respect of recruitment, sickness absence and consistently effective practice that is judged to be good or better.



We retain the same vision for this strategic planning period.

“For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family court, we seek to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time.”

All work programmes and priorities in the three years, will prioritise the safety and welfare of children, listening to feedback from them and their families and making sure that every operational service area and professional function is reaching the level of the best in respect of the quality and effectiveness of practice. **These are the cornerstones underpinning our vision and ambition for children.**

A single page overview is set out on page 13, and a one page overview of our priorities can be found on page 14.

Child Focused Courts

In respect of private law proceedings for children and families, 2026-2027 marks the beginning of a programme of fundamental change in how these arrangements are to be managed across the family court system. On 17 March 2026, the Government confirmed Child Focused Courts – formerly known as the Private Law Pathfinder – would be implemented across the entirety of England and Wales. This is supported by £17 million in Government funding for 2026-2027 and represents the most significant reform of private family law proceedings in a generation.



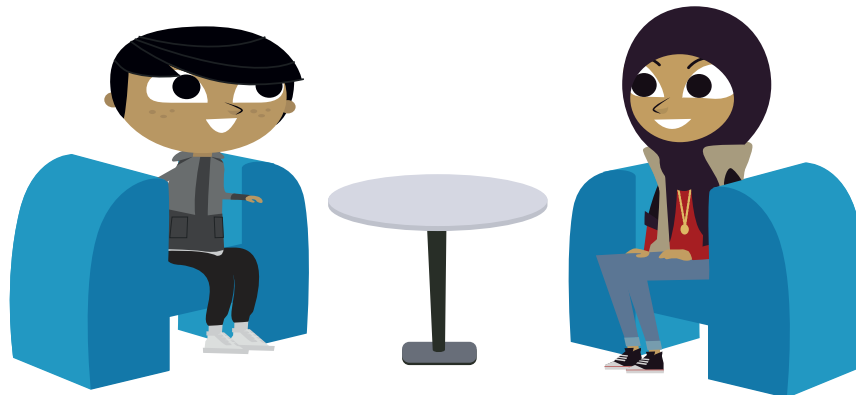
The family justice system is embarking on a change programme that requires significant practice and culture change at Cafcass, in the family courts, within HMCTS and in local authority children's services where they are involved. The Child Focused Model replaces the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP) with a more investigative and problem-solving approach that prioritises earlier information gathering, multi-agency collaboration, and the voice of the child being central from the outset of proceedings.

The opportunities for children cannot be overstated. More will be seen by family court advisers, they will be engaged at the start of their proceedings and it is intended that there will be one and only one single decisions hearing to conclude the proceedings.

For Cafcass, the Target Operating Model requires us to see up to 75% of children, to understand, assess and provide an analysis and advice to the court within eight working weeks of the application being received.

The reforms are designed with a particular focus on improving the family court experience and outcomes for child and adult victims of domestic abuse. Locally commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) are available when a referral is made, to provide support to adults and to offer advice to the court.

Local authorities will complete Child Impact Reports when the court order this and when they have been recently involved with children assessed as in need or in need of protection.



We have spoken to some children and young people about this new way of working in private law proceedings. Their definitions of success are set out on page 29. They have been clear that the quality of professional understanding about domestic abuse is fundamental to their safety and welfare. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's assessment that the pilot courts are "effective at engaging with domestic abuse" gives us confidence, but we recognise that consistency in trauma-informed safe practice for the family justice system must continue to improve as the model scales nationally. In addition, continuity of practitioner was one of the most strongly expressed priorities from children and young people. Child Focused Courts, which require deeper early engagement through the Child Impact Report, makes continuity of relationship more achievable and more essential. As we move to national implementation and invest in additional social work capacity, we must ensure that workforce planning supports relationship continuity for children.

To make sure that we are able to continue leading improvement and discharging our statutory responsibilities for children effectively, we have set out additional priorities for Child Focused Courts in this strategic period and which will be led by an internal transformation team working closely with the courts and the MoJ.

Child Focused Courts as a work programme is therefore formally adopted as a fourth 'pillar' of our strategy in addition to our work on practice, people and our engagement with partners.

We very much welcome these reforms and look forward over the next three years to full implementation and all that means for our Cafcass service to children and their families.

Figure 1: Sustaining ambition for children 2026-2029

Our strategy and associated priorities are built on our vision and underpinned by:

- ✓ our responsibility for children’s safety and welfare in proceedings
- ✓ a commitment to listening and using child and family feedback to learn and to improve
- ✓ reducing local variation in the quality of children and families’ experiences as well as the effectiveness of our work with them
- ✓ organisational values that promote respectful relationships, always looking for family strengths as well as risks, holding children centrally in all that we do, showing our reasoning for decisions we take and the advice we give, and understanding uniqueness in children, families and ourselves.

Our vision

For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family court, we seek to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time.

Our four cornerstones

Exceptional experience for all children in proceedings

Listening to children and families’ experiences

Safety and welfare of children in proceedings

Reduce local variation

Our five values



Always looking for the strengths and risks



Believing in respectful relationships



Decision making is clear and reasoned



Holding children and families at the heart of our practice



Wishing to know more about you and what is important in your life

Our three pillars

Our nine priorities



PRACTICE

Our practice ambition is to enable all children to tell us that they have had an exceptional experience when they engage with us, everywhere and every time.

- 1 Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation
- 2 Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children’s experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)
- 3 Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children’s experiences

PEOPLE

Our people ambition is to attract, retain and keep colleagues well at work, to offer professional development and sustain a working environment that enables our people to thrive.

- 4 Attract, engage and retain people
- 5 Provide a safe, child focused and modern environment that works for our colleagues
- 6 Lead and govern well



PARTNERS

Our partner ambition is to collaborate with other professionals to improve the experiences of children and families in family law proceedings.

- 7 Improve children’s safety and experiences of proceedings
- 8 Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings
- 9 Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts



CHILD FOCUSED COURTS



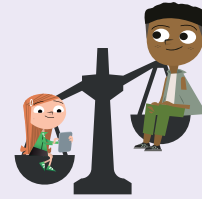







System objective: Improve experiences for children and families, particularly child and adult victims of domestic abuse, including enabling their safe participation in proceedings that resolve more quickly for them.



- A Implement the Child Focused Model across all English court areas – prioritising effective and timely outcomes that are safe for child and adult victims of domestic abuse
- B With our partners, resource and lead the transformation programme

Figure 2: An overview of our new strategic priorities

Everyone at Cafcass, our people, our board, our partners remain ambitious for children. We have updated our nine priority programmes for 2026 to 2029 to set out how we intend to succeed for children, what we will do to enable our colleagues to become stronger representatives of children’s best interests, and how we will work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and families, everywhere and every time they engage with us.

PRACTICE	<p>Priority 1 Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation</p> <p>Because children everywhere should receive an exceptional service from everyone they engage with at Cafcass.</p> 	PEOPLE	<p>Priority 4 Attract, engage and retain people</p> <p>Because children and families are best served by diverse, well-supported and skilled people.</p> 	PARTNERS	<p>Priority 7 Improve children’s safety and experiences of proceedings</p> <p>Because children and families need support from professionals to protect them from harm and the risk of further harm.</p> 	CHILD FOCUSED COURTS	<p>System objective Improve experiences for children and families, particularly child and adult victims of domestic abuse, including enabling their safe participation in proceedings that resolve more quickly for them</p> <p>Because we need to consider what works well and what we might need to develop further to provide a better experience for children and families.</p> 
	<p>Priority 2 Seek out and learn from feedback - (including children’s experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)</p> <p>Because children deserve the opportunity to tell us how we influence their lives and the difference we make.</p> 		<p>Priority 5 Provide a safe, child focused and modern environment that works for our colleagues</p> <p>Because modern offices and systems help us do better work with children and families.</p> 		<p>Priority 8 Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings</p> <p>Because the family justice system needs to work more decisively together so that outcomes for children improve.</p> 		<p>Priority A Implement the Child Focused Model across all English court areas - prioritising effective and timely outcomes that are safe for child and adult victims of domestic abuse</p>
	<p>Priority 3 Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children’s experiences</p> <p>Because our practitioners need effective support so they can prioritise the variety of their work and engagement with children.</p> 		<p>Priority 6 Lead and govern well</p> <p>Because good leaders and strong decision-making are safer for children and families.</p> 		<p>Priority 9 Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts</p> <p>Because child and adult victims of domestic abuse deserve earlier and better help and protection.</p> 		<p>Priority B With our partners, resource and lead the transformation programme</p> <p>Because transformation only happens with resource, leadership and good governance.</p>

Section 1 (i) Our Practice ambition and work programmes 2026-2029

Our Practice ambition is to enable all children to tell us that they have had an exceptional experience when they engage with us, everywhere and every time.



Priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation

We want children to receive the same exceptional experience from us wherever they are located in the country. To achieve this, we will:

1. **See and engage all children** throughout their proceedings.
2. Increase the effectiveness of **management oversight and supervision arrangements**.
3. Embed the consistent use of our **Together Practice Framework**.
4. **Improve the oversight and national consistency** of practice and systems for children who have yet to meet their first or new family court adviser.
5. Take action to **review and protect caseloads** to enhance the quality of practice and to support the work to bring cases to conclusion.
6. **Reduce delay in proceedings, including improvements in the oversight of Rule 16.4 orders**.

Priority 2: Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children’s experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)

We want children to be able to tell us how they experienced their proceedings and their engagement with Cafcass. We want to listen to, learn from and act on their feedback. To achieve this, we will:

1. **Evaluate our current strategy for seeking and learning from feedback**, including improvement and change in response to practice alerts.
2. Lead consistently and implement learning from **complaints, compliments, significant incidents and learning reviews**.
3. **Develop an ‘insights’ survey for all children involved with Cafcass**, trying to provide national feedback to system leaders and policy makers about the impact of family conflict, harm and abuse on them – three phased years.

Priority 3: Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children’s experiences

We want colleagues to have the support and time they need to do their jobs effectively so that they can focus on their engagement with children. To achieve this, we will:

1. **Lead, monitor and report progress against operational service area improvement plans**, preparing for mid and end year reviews and self-evaluations – assessing progress throughout each year of this plan.
2. **Review, revise and implement a new system for information and screening to support both the Child Arrangements Programme and Child Focused Courts** – including arrangements to allocate safeguarding letters.
3. Review and implement a **workload management system for social work practice**.

Priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation

- 7. **Lead and improve national priorities for public and private law.**
- 8. **Improve practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor**, including specific changes to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, and promoting consistent use of Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Practice policy.
- 9. Lead and improve the **quality of assessments of harm and the risk of future harm** to children in public and private law proceedings and when the thematic learning review is complete, consider what is needed to assess the risk of sexual harm for very young children.

Priority 2: Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children's experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)


Priority 3: Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children's experiences

- 4. Further embed in all teams, the use of our **performance and accountability arrangements** so there is consistency in identifying where practice needs to improve further and faster.
- 5. **Lead and implement 'Strengthening Practice Support' programme**, including a review of local quality assurance systems and the impact on practice.




What children and young people say is important to them

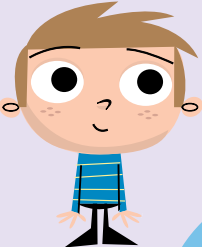
We worked with Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) members to think about what is important to children and young people in their family proceedings and what they could expect to experience if we are getting things right. This is what they said success would feel like to them in practice. We have set out the same for our people, partner and child focused court priorities in later sections.



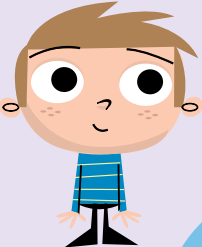
Make sure I understand the reasons for your advice to the family court.



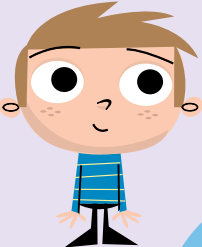
Tell me what you did with my feedback and help me understand why you are asking for it.



Check with me that you've understood what I've said and keep checking in if things change.




Take me seriously and help me see that my voice shapes what happens.




Tell me how long things are expected to take and explain why they might be delayed.



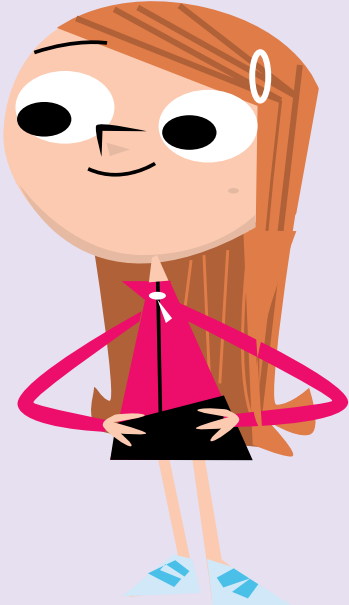
Understand how domestic abuse has affected me, both emotionally and physically, and do everything you can to help me feel safe and protected.



Every professional should know how racism and being treated badly or differently because of my heritage affects me. Please take my experiences seriously and talk to me about them during our work together.



Safeguarding letters, Section 7 and Child Impact Reports should be timely and responsive, especially if something worrying happens.



Remember I may not feel I have had an exceptional experience but try to give me the best experience possible.

How will we know how well we are doing for children?

- ✓ We will sustain in **person engagement** with all children.
- ✓ We will see a continued increase in the **proportion of practice that is rated good or better**.
- ✓ In proceedings where **domestic abuse** is a factor, the quality of practice will continue to improve.
- ✓ We will see improved **use of letters, sharing recommendations and children's responses** shared with the court.
- ✓ We will see continued **decline in the average duration** of children's cases in public and private law.
- ✓ All work judged to be inadequate will **show safe and immediate intervention** and improvement for children.
- ✓ We will see an **increase in the volume of feedback received from children** and the proportion of reported positive experiences with Cafcass will improve.
- ✓ **Learning reviews** will result in visible and changed practice, evidenced in annual performance boards.
- ✓ **Children's complaints** will feature in all performance oversight including specific learning and change.
- ✓ We will develop three **annual insight reports** from children and use them to inform change in the family justice system and in the making of children's policy in England.
- ✓ There will be **eight effective annual reviews of progress** and improvement and **one additional for Cafcass Associates**.
- ✓ **Safeguarding letters** will be allocated consistently across regions.
- ✓ **Caseloads** will be more manageable for all practitioners with systems to help them close children's cases efficiently and safely because orders are received promptly from HMCTS.
- ✓ **Improving and reducing performance will be identified effectively** and quickly by senior operational leaders.
- ✓ There will be increased use of the **strengthening practice programme** and feedback will be positive about its intention and outcome.



Section 1 (ii) People ambition and work programmes 2026-2029

Our People ambition is to attract, retain and keep colleagues well at work, to offer professional development and sustain a working environment that enables our people to thrive.



Priority 4: Attract, engage and retain people	Priority 5: Provide a safe, child focused and modern environment that works for our colleagues	Priority 6: Lead and govern well
<p>We want children and families to be served by diverse, motivated, well-supported and skilled colleagues. To achieve this, we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prioritise wellbeing including support for practitioners and managers affected by the death and injury of children. 2. Prioritise, lead, and implement initiatives to support the retention of colleagues, including effective induction and recognition. 3. Prioritise, lead and regularly report on resourcing and recruitment in all operational service areas, implementing targeted attraction and retention initiatives in 'hard to recruit' areas. 4. Review and include the resourcing requirements for Child Focused Courts in all operational service areas, taking account of 'go live' dates and capacity needs. 	<p>We want our colleagues to have modern offices and systems to enable them to do their best work with children and families. To achieve this, we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement and evaluate the impact of the new health, safety and security priority, including clear action, support and follow up for practitioners and managers who are threatened by adults during proceedings. 2. Implement and regularly evaluate the impact of the estates strategy. 3. Continue to implement ChildFirst changes to include mandatory child need recording and to enable oversight of practice effectiveness for children. 4. Develop a digital strategy and include the use of artificial intelligence to improve process efficiencies. 	<p>Good leaders and stronger decision-making will help us make the improvements we need to provide safer outcomes for children and families. To achieve this, we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen the leadership and oversight of sickness absence management, to reduce sickness absence in all teams, prioritising where children are most affected by absence. 2. Revise and implement our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities, including setting up the project to understand the experiences of Black and Asian women in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor. 3. Review the use of our leadership and practice quality standards, including the priority associated with visible in-person leadership.

Priority 4: Attract, engage and retain people

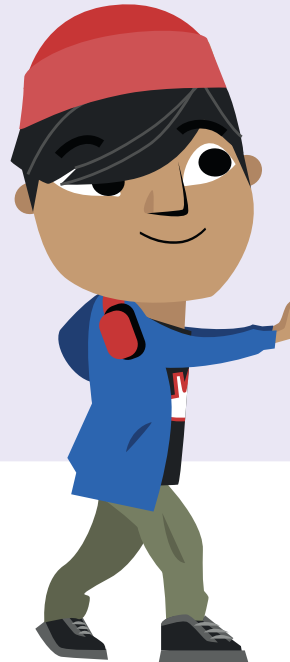
- 5. **Complete the review of arrangements for our 'flexible' workforce** – including Cafcass Associates, locum and fixed fee work.
- 6. **Revise arrangements for the Cafcass social work academy**, including training provision for less than three years qualified social workers.
- 7. Review and introduce **leadership development and talent initiatives**.
- 8. **Develop a full training programme for practitioners and managers to support their development and readiness** to work in Child Focused Courts.
- 9. Develop a plan for **opportunities for alternatively qualified professionals** in supporting and advising families in private law proceedings, and consider the **risks and opportunities for practitioners to work in all family law proceedings**.

Priority 5: Provide a safe, child focused and modern environment that works for our colleagues

- 5. Continue **modernising Corporate and Business Services** to meet the needs of children and families who engage with Cafcass.
- 6. **Review and strengthen Analytics capacity**, so there is sustainable capability to provide management information for current and future arrangements in family proceedings, children's outcomes are clearly understood, and there is strong assurance over data quality.

Priority 6: Lead and govern well

- 4. Prioritise the **review of in-person and flexible working arrangements**, to ensure these meet the needs of children and families who engage with Cafcass.
- 5. Clarify, lead and embed the **consistent implementation of the performance capability** policy.
- 6. Develop with the Cafcass Board, a **senior leadership succession plan and strategy**.
- 7. Complete the review **addressing the efficiency and effectiveness of complaints arrangements**.
- 8. **Evaluate the impact of the Recovery and Improvement Board**, including progress in identifying local variation in areas that require more targeted support.



What children and young people say is important to them



Listen to what safety means to me and act to protect me throughout proceedings.

Have the skills, kindness and time to understand me and my experiences.

I will never forget my FCA. If you're coming to work for Cafcass, you should know that the role you play in my life is important and lasting.

Make our meetings comfortable — a mix of fun and serious when needed.

Make sure I know who is there to help me throughout my journey with you.

Make sure I feel safe and comfortable where we meet and talk.



Treat me as an individual, recognising my uniqueness.

Make sure I feel welcomed in the office or online.



How will we know how well we are doing for children?

- ✓ Practitioners and managers will report that there are **supportive systems** for them to access when they are involved in proceedings **when a child dies or is seriously harmed**.
- ✓ There will be **fewer social work vacancies, reduced turnover, and quicker recruitment** of high calibre applicants, particularly in areas with the greatest capacity challenges.
- ✓ There will be a reduction in the **number of children waiting to meet their family court adviser or children's guardian**.
- ✓ We will continue to support colleagues from **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic** backgrounds to progress into **leadership positions**.
- ✓ All practice teams will be able to **allocate public and private law proceedings effectively and agree timescales in areas where Child Focused Courts** are being implemented.
- ✓ The skills and training made available to all practitioners and managers will equip them with the **skills to manage all law types as required**.
- ✓ Children will say that they have been able to see their Cafcass worker in a **safe and comfortable space**.
- ✓ Colleagues will report that they are able to work effectively in **safe offices that promote communication and creative work**.
- ✓ **Cafcass practitioners and managers consistently report all incidents involving threatening behaviour** from adults in proceedings with appropriate and prompt action taken by managers.
- ✓ In all incidents where an **adult in proceedings is threatening or abusive** to a Cafcass colleague, appropriate **child protection action will be taken** to make sure that the children in those proceedings are safe and protected.
- ✓ **Reporting capability from ChildFirst** will enable reliable data about what is happening for children, particularly in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.
- ✓ **Sickness absence will reduce** in all teams and functions and where it does not, there will be a targeted oversight and intervention programme so that children's cases do not have to be repeatedly reallocated causing delay for children.
- ✓ The **uniqueness of children in proceedings will be clearly set out in reports and advice to the family court**.
- ✓ **Anti-racist practice** will be discussed more regularly and will be visible in our work.
- ✓ Cafcass colleagues report that they feel part of an **organisation that values and promotes difference and opportunity**.
- ✓ **Induction arrangements** are clear, realistic and enable new starters to work effectively and safely.
- ✓ **Local variation in practice quality reduces** and there is greater consistency in children's experiences.



Section 1 (iii) Partner ambition and work programmes 2026-2029



Our Partner ambition is to collaborate with other professionals to improve the experiences of children and families in family law proceedings.

Priority 7: Improve children’s safety and experiences of proceedings

We will work with partners to make sure that children are safe and protected from harm or the risk of future harm in proceedings. In order to achieve this, we will:

1. Improve how we learn as system partners about **proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor**.
2. Improve our work with the **senior judiciary so that there is coordination about local interventions and plans to reduce delay in Rule 16.4 proceedings**.
3. **Revise and implement a new section 7/ Child Impact Report/section 37 and Rule 16.4 protocol with local authorities**.
4. **Engage with the Families First reforms** and influence their effectiveness and safety for children in proceedings.
5. **Work more closely with the Department for Education National Safeguarding Panel, collaborating on learning reviews and improving practice in family justice**.

Priority 8: Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings

We want to work more decisively with partners on long running proceedings and processes that create delay for children. To achieve this, we will:

1. Understand and report on the extent to which the **advice given by family court advisers and children’s guardians influences the final decision made by the family court for children**.
2. Report, influence and intervene with the **main factors causing delay for children**.
3. **Monitor and report on regional variation with the Public Law Outline**, establishing judicial partnerships to do so.
4. **Prioritise with HMCTS the prompt, secure and accurate transfer of data**, including new applications, the dispatch of orders and review the impact of the new portals.

Priority 9: Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts

We are working closely with partners to implement Child Focused Courts and to continue to do so, we will:

1. **Safely implement Child Focused Courts across all Cafcass regions**, collaborating with the national governance leads and being clear about operational readiness criteria for each new area – including that no area should go live without confirmed workforce capacity, training completion and effective multi-agency partnerships.
2. Complete the internal evaluation of the **impact, risks and opportunities of the Child Focused Model**, including specific analysis of whether child and adult victims of domestic abuse are experiencing improved safety and support – addressing the January 2026 MoJ evaluation findings.
3. **Secure effective partnership arrangements with local Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) services, local authority children’s services and other relevant agencies** in each new area, so that the multi-agency approach central to the model is functioning before implementation.
4. **Engage with the development of the new Practice Direction (PD36Z successor) and Courts and Tribunal Bill** so that Cafcass’ operational requirements and children’s experiences are present in the legal and procedural framework.

Priority 7: Improve children’s safety and experiences of proceedings

Priority 8: Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings

Priority 9: Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts

- 6. Work with the family courts to **prioritise and secure professional safety and respectful behaviour in proceedings – including making use of the potentially violent persons protocol.**
- 7. Be an active partner in supporting the MoJ with the **implementation of the recommendations set out in the Public Accounts Committee [‘Improving family court services for children’](#) report.**



What children and young people say is important to them

When you change how you work, think about how it affects children and use the FJYPB members to understand what impact this may have.



Involve children and families when making improvements to Cafcass.

Help me see how my children's case is progressing, like tracking a journey.



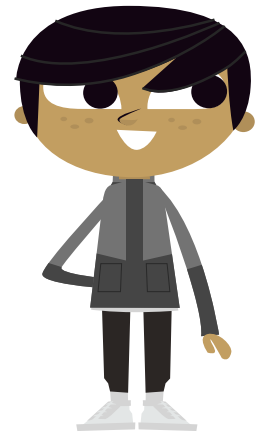
Make sure everyone in my proceedings is focused on what is safe and best for me.

Keep in touch with me — don't leave long gaps where I don't hear from you.

Work effectively with the courts to progress my case without delay.

Recognise that emotional abuse and controlling behaviour can be just as harmful as physical abuse.

Make sure the pace of my case works for me — not too rushed and not too slow.



How will we know how well we are doing for children?

- ✓ **Learning from our Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group**, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's 'Everyday Business' report and our partnership with SafeLives continues to support improved practice.
- ✓ There is a **new national protocol agreed between Cafcass and ADCS** in place to enable children to stay central in proceedings where there is more than one social work agency involved in proceedings.
- ✓ **Rule 16.4 proceedings run to 26-week timetable** and they help resolve complex issues for children more quickly and effectively.
- ✓ **Serious incidents and learning reviews offer appropriate opportunity for the National Safeguarding Panel to learn with Cafcass.**
- ✓ Colleagues feel **safe and respected in the courtroom**. There are more regular and appropriate **referrals to the potentially violent persons list** supported through relevant training and guidance.
- ✓ We are able to **report on the reasons for delay and understand local and national barriers** to reducing durations.
- ✓ **Most children's cases will conclude before 26 weeks.**
- ✓ We will have the workforce and operational infrastructure to **implement Child Focused Courts effectively** in each new operational area.
- ✓ Children and families report they are **listened to and protected in Child Focused Court areas and teams – with specific evidence for child and adult victims of domestic abuse.**
- ✓ Multi-agency partnerships are established and functioning in all new areas before launch, including **effective IDVA referral processes, information-sharing agreements with local authorities and police forces for the coordination of timely safeguarding checks.**
- ✓ The new **practice direction is realistic and workable for Cafcass** and has provision for circumstances where demand, complexity or resources require proceedings to extend beyond the eight-week timeline.
- ✓ There is **effective partnership with MoJ and good governance** of the change programme.
- ✓ **Family time arrangements are safe, effective** and do not increase the duration of private law proceedings such that a second report is required.
- ✓ **Evaluation evidence demonstrates that the pace of proceedings in each new area supports children's emotional readiness** and the quality of engagement with children improves.

Section 1 (iv) Child Focused Courts practice change programme

Our Child Focused Courts system objective is to improve experiences for children and families, particularly child and adult victims of domestic abuse, including enabling their safe participation in proceedings that resolve more quickly for them.



The national implementation of Child Focused Courts and the associated practice direction (Child Focused Model), represents a transformation in how private family law proceedings serve children. Building on four years of piloting in Dorset, North Wales, Birmingham, West Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the model is now the agreed national approach, with eight further court areas launching in 2026-2027 and full national coverage by 2029.

As the strategy has already indicated, children’s feedback has been central to shaping these priorities. They told us they want professionals working with them who understand their experiences of domestic abuse, who take time to build trust, who explain what is happening and why, and who see them as individuals rather than cases to be processed. A

As one young person put it:

“ Social workers need to be curious and open-minded, not making assumptions based on what they initially read.”

These expectations align with the [Ministry of Justice evaluation \(January 2026\)](#) and, which confirmed that children whose proceedings were managed through a Child Focused Court, reported that they felt they were listened to more effectively and that the Child Impact Report helped describe their needs and wishes more meaningfully than those served by the current Child Arrangements Programme.

Priority A: Implement the Child Focused Model across all English court areas – prioritising effective and timely outcomes that are safe for child and adult victims of domestic abuse

Priority B: With our partners, resource and lead the transformation programme

What do we need to do?

We will work closely with our family justice system partners to develop the necessary arrangements to realise the benefits of Child Focused Courts for children and families.

We will work alongside our family justice system partners to make sure that Child Focused Courts have the right resources, leadership and governance in place for children and families.

What do we need to do?

Our programme priorities include:

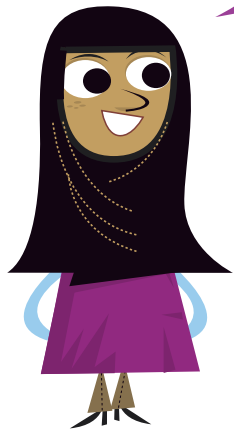
1. Establish the necessary **leadership, governance and Cafcass Board reporting arrangements to implement Child Focused Courts effectively across all regions**, learning from operational experience in our ten existing Child Focused Court areas.
2. **Agree operational team processes and structures** that prioritise **continuity of practitioner** (including Cafcass Associates) for children throughout their proceedings and that **enable public and private law children's cases to be effectively allocated** within agreed timescales.
3. **Embed the Child Impact Report and the associated social work practice as a high-quality, child-centred assessment** that identifies and describes safety, welfare, the harm children have experienced, the risk of future harm, the impact of the family dispute on them and the advised arrangements that serve their best interests.
4. **Strengthen and embed effective practice in all proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor**, ensuring that both child and adult victims are identified, supported and protected – including through effective referrals to locally commissioned IDVAs and specialist domestic abuse services where this is required.
5. Agree a robust means for **evaluating the experiences of children and families in each new area**, including specific evaluation of safety and outcomes in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, and whether the timeliness of proceedings supports children's emotional readiness.
6. **Provide children with clear, age-appropriate explanations of what is happening in their proceedings**, how their views have been considered, **sharing recommendations with them and including their responses in the report** to court.
7. **Lead the change programme, so that the Cafcass national improvement priorities, the existing quality assurance systems, performance accountability arrangements and the Together practice framework continue to underpin all social work practice.**

Our programme priorities include:

1. Clarify and **secure the capacity, resource and timeline requirements** for the full implementation of Child Focused Courts, working within the allocation for 2026–2027 to recruit and deploy additional social work capacity across the eight new court areas.
2. **Agree a phased strategy for implementing Child Focused Courts nationally**, ensuring that each area is operationally ready before going live and that readiness criteria include workforce stability and practitioner and manager training.
3. **Devise and implement training and development programmes** that equip all practitioners and managers with the skills required for Child Focused Courts – including the preparation of Child Impact Reports, trauma-informed practice, and engaging effectively with children of all ages.
4. **Ensure the transition from Child Arrangements Programme to Child Focused Courts in each area is managed safely**, with clear arrangements to avoid disruption to children in open proceedings.
5. **Work closely as part of the MoJ-led programme board overseeing implementation of the Model to secure shared performance data and objectives, fidelity to the model as it is implemented and to influence the final practice direction required for the Child Focused Model.**
6. **Develop a partnership contingency protocol to activate** should any Cafcass operational service area, court area or partner agency have significant difficulties complying with the Practice Direction.



What children and young people say is important to them



Meeting my FCA earlier helps me form a relationship and sense of trust, which is so important to me.

See me as an individual and don't fit me into a box - my situation might be more complicated than it looks.

Having a relationship with the same social worker is important to me. Faster proceedings don't mean better.

Make sure the people helping me take my experiences of domestic abuse seriously and explain things in a way I can understand.

Make sure I don't feel rushed or overwhelmed by how quickly your advice is given to the court.

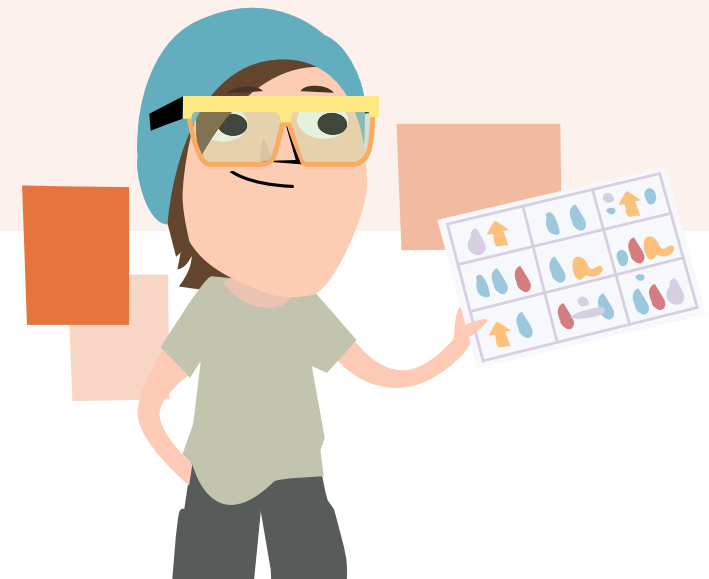
Help me feel confident that I'm getting real care and attention, not just being moved through the system.

Quality time with me counts more than how often I see you.



How will we know how well we are doing for children?

- ✓ **More children are seen earlier in proceedings, with at least 75% of children in Child Focused Court areas** having direct engagement with a family court adviser before the single decision hearing.
- ✓ **Shorter duration of proceedings** from receipt of application to decision, with evidence of sustained improvement across all operational areas.
- ✓ **Earlier identification of domestic abuse, safeguarding concerns and specific needs**, including effective coordination with local authority children's social care services and IDVAs where required.
- ✓ **Children report that they have received an introductory letter, that they understand what is happening in their proceedings, that their views have been taken seriously, and advice to the court has been clearly explained to them, with their views included in the child impact report.**
- ✓ There is **one practitioner through the child's proceedings and reduced reallocation of children's cases.**
- ✓ Local quality assurance and impact audits **seek children's feedback in increased number** and they report that their proceedings move at the right pace for them.
- ✓ The **proportion of practice judged good or better in Child Focused Court areas is at least equivalent to or better than the quarterly reported overall effectiveness of practice.**
- ✓ **The workforce capacity required for national implementation is in place**, with recruitment targets met and vacancy rates within acceptable thresholds in all new areas.
- ✓ All new **Child Focused Court areas launch on time** and to the agreed readiness criteria, with no area going live until staffing, training and systems are confirmed.
- ✓ **Governance arrangements are functioning effectively**, with clear escalation routes and **risk management between Cafcass, MoJ, HMCTS and the judiciary.**
- ✓ **Practitioners report through colleague surveys that they feel trained, supported and confident** in delivering the Child Focused Model.
- ✓ The **transition from the Child Arrangements Programme is managed safely** in each area, with no adverse impact on children in open proceedings during the changeover period.
- ✓ **Family time arrangements are safe, effective** and do not increase the duration of private law proceedings or require a second report to the court.



How do Child Focused Courts work?



A child impact report is ordered to Cafcass and an assessment is undertaken in respect of the child's welfare and safety. In some cases, the court is advised that the family can be offered support to enable them to resolve their arrangements away from the court; in others, an assessment is undertaken in respect of the child's welfare and safety.

There is intentional strengthening of the requirement for a Mediation Information Assessment Meeting (MIAM) for families or a clearer account to the court as to why an exemption is to be applied.

The work involves a number of agencies, with the court engaging and developing positive working relationships with mediators, local authorities and domestic abuse support providers.

Child impact reports are filed with the court within eight working weeks of the application being received by Cafcass. Where domestic abuse is identified, the experiences of both the child and adult victims must be clearly assessed and advice about the harm and risk of future harm must be set out to the court.

Children are seen directly by a family court adviser where an assessment is completed **before the single decisions hearing**. Their experiences influence the advice and the decision of the court. They are central to the considerations that the court makes.



SECTION 2

How will we report on Sustaining Ambition for Children?

This strategic plan has so far set out what we will prioritise for children and families over the next three years, how we will know that we are doing well for children and what success will feel like for them, as developed with members of the Family Justice Young People’s Board.

As the leader of an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the MoJ, our Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Secretary of State for Justice and to Parliament for the organisation and quality of work carried out by Cafcass. Our strategic objectives and progress are overseen by the Cafcass Board. We agree an annual delivery plan which takes account of our statutory duties, our contribution to MoJ objectives and targets, and our contribution to reform and efficiencies.



We report on progress in a number of places and to a range of leaders including:

- At the public meeting (held every three months) of the Cafcass Board.
- In a bi-annual review of the strategy at a Cafcass Board seminar.
- In the Annual Report and Accounts submitted to Parliament.
- In the annual self-evaluation submitted to Ofsted.
- In the quarterly business assurance meetings with the MoJ as our sponsor government department.
- In quarterly meetings with the Minister responsible for family justice.

Executive Directors and the Chief People Officer report to the Chief Executive on progress against strategic priorities and the associated work programmes:

PRACTICE – National Director of Operations

PEOPLE – Chief People Officer

PARTNERS – Director of Resources

PRIVATE LAW REFORM – National Director of Private law reform

Our Corporate Management Team oversees formal strategic decisions, and agrees intended impact for children and for Cafcass colleagues.

In addition to the work programmes set out in this plan, there is also a **national improvement plan – ‘Listening to children, lighting the way’** which enables more purposeful and directed leadership, scrutiny and review of the most important aspects of our work for children. **Specifically, improvement priorities derive from learning, feedback, data, quality assurance and Ofsted inspections.** Improvement work is subject to change depending on what we are learning about practice that is improving or declining and typically, actions that need to be undertaken more quickly to secure more immediate change.

Our national improvement plan sets out operational and corporate areas for improvement and requires all regional operational leaders and all heads of profession to set out annually, their plans to achieve what is required. Progress against improvement priorities is managed by the National Directors of Operations and Resources, reporting through Corporate Management Team meetings, to the Cafcass Board, in annual performance boards and in mid and end year improvement reviews.

In addition to the Annual Report and Accounts, a summary of strategic progress will be published mid-way through the next three year period. We will make annual self-evaluation submissions to Ofsted as our regulator. These are reviewed in an annual engagement meeting in accordance with the inspection framework. We expect to host one further full inspection (with a judgement) before the end of the business year, 2026-2027.



National family justice system: family justice strategy and success measures

The measures outlined in this strategic plan, complement our five Key Performance Indicators (KPI), which are agreed with the MoJ, and constitute our core statutory responsibilities working with children and families in public and private law proceedings. They include, the allocation of a family court adviser or children's guardian to every case ordered by the court, the timely allocation to a Cafcass practitioner for section 31 care and supervision proceedings, the proportion of cases where we are filing section 7 welfare reports by the date set by the court and the number of children involved in long-running proceedings, including those over 52 weeks and those over 100 weeks in duration.

Additionally, in every reporting year, Cafcass agrees a set of success measures with the MoJ. These set out progress against the priorities of the National Family Justice Board.*

There are three nationally agreed system-wide objectives managed by the National Family Justice Board, and Cafcass contributes to these objectives using our own supporting data across six priority areas of work. The summary below provides an overview of our contribution to these objectives during the 2025-2026 financial year.



FJS Objective 1: TIMELINESS

Ensure children and families have timely outcomes

Cafcass supporting priorities:

1. Reduce the number of children in long running proceedings.
2. Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks.

The number of children on open cases running over 52 weeks has decreased as of 31 March 2026:

- In public law, there are 2,584 children whose cases have been open for more than 52 weeks (down 8.6% from 31 March 2025), of whom 336 children have been open for 100 weeks or longer (down 24%).
- In private law, there are 4,385 children on cases open for more than 52 weeks (down 17.5% from 31 March 2025), of whom 1,333 children have been open for 100 weeks or longer (down 24%).

More children's cases are closing within 26 weeks:

- Between 1 October and 31 December 2025, there was a 3.1% increase (223 more children) to 37.3% in S31 care proceedings closing in 26 weeks or less (1,574 children).
- Final decisions in S31 care proceedings took on average 38 weeks (two weeks lower than the same period last year).
- Between 1 October and 31 December 2025, there was a 7.0% increase (1,439 more children) to 65.0% in section 8 child arrangements proceedings resolving (8,937 children).
- Private law work completing at the first hearing took on average 10 weeks (no change compared to the same period last year) and for further work ordered after the first hearing, this took an average of 47 weeks (8 weeks fewer than the same period last year).

FJS Objective 2: EFFICIENCY

Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available

Cafcass supporting priorities:

1. Reduce the number of open cases.
2. Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work.

Open children's cases are increasing as of 31 March 2026:

- There was a 5.2% increase to 46,501 children/29,313 children's cases compared to March 2025.
- In public law children's cases, this is an increase of 2.2% children (434 more children/267 more children's cases) and in private law children's cases, this is an increase of 7.4% children (1,851 more children/1,517 more children's cases).

Social work capacity increased slightly and turnover improved compared to the previous year as of 31 March 2026:

- Cafcass had 1,709 employed social workers (1,537 FTE) of whom 335 (319.37 FTE) were social work managers at the end of March 2026.
- 12 month social work turnover is 13.6% - a 1.5% improvement compared to the same time last year.

FJS Objective 3: EXPERIENCE

Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priorities:

1. Improve children's understanding and ability to engage in their proceedings.
2. Improve the consistency and quality of practice.

97.2% of children on applicable cases had a recorded child engagement as of 31 March 2026, with 94% of children seen in person.

Continued improvements in the percentage of audited practice with all personalised letters and explanatory notes present and appropriate at the time of audit, and recommendations shared with children:

- In public law children's cases, 74.5% of audited files showed personalised letters had been sent and well written (12.3% increase compared to the previous year) and 80.5% children's files showed recommendations had been shared with children (compared to 77.4% the previous year).

- In private law children's cases, 84.0% of audited files showed personalised letters had been sent (5.0% increase) and 77% children's files showed recommendations had been shared with children (compared to 75% the previous year).

Between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, Cafcass received 6,004 reflections (feedback) from children and families from our audit and digital feedback systems. 3,452 of these (57.5%) were positive.

SECTION 3

Feedback from children, our colleagues and partners



Feedback from children

Learning from children's feedback and experiences over the period of the first 'Ambitious for Children' strategy (2023-2026) has been fundamental in developing this new plan and informing our commitment to sustaining our ambition for them.

Every year, our Annual Report and Accounts describes in detail, the feedback we have taken from children and what we have changed in response. Additionally, in all annual regional performance boards, members of the FJYPB engage in discussion with leaders and managers asking, "How will children and young people know they are the most important people in your region?"



Our strategic priority (in place for three years), that requires practitioners to write introductory letters to children came directly from their feedback that they often did not know who was turning up to their house, why and how to talk about difficult private matters without any prior knowledge about the person. Our commitment that children will understand the advice being given to court (including the reason for that advice) and to share with the court what those children think about the advice, also derives from learning and feedback they have given to us. We are sending introductory letters to children routinely – it is part of our culture. We are increasingly sharing recommendations and children’s responses to them because their voices are influencing what happens in the proceedings that are about them. We are proud of this and want to do more.

This is why we asked members of the FJYPB to tell us again what is important to children in proceedings. They reminded us that we need to keep going with letters, sharing recommendations and keeping in touch throughout proceedings. But they also gave us new priorities to consider. These are set out on pages 17, 21, 25 and 29. Some, as you will have read, have existing measures we will use to review how well we are doing. Others will need the measures to be developed. We will report on both in reviews about this strategic plan and in the Annual Report and Accounts each year.

Feedback from colleagues and partners

As part of the development of this strategic plan, we engaged colleagues and partners in a series of in-person and online events between January and March 2026. This published version has benefited from focused and dedicated feedback.

We know there is unanimity in wanting a simple and easy to understand structure for the plan, a clear, **single vision**, enabled through our work across **nine important programme priorities** assigned to **three overarching ambitions for Practice, People and Partners**.

Some of the feedback about how to retain interest and currency over time with strategic priorities is reflected in these graphics from our engagement events.



Graphic feedback from colleagues and partners at our engagement events

Practice



People



Partners



Child Focused Courts



What were the feedback themes in order to make sure that the strategy is used in our daily work and continues to enable effective change and improvement for children?

Feedback from colleagues and partners	What are we planning to do?
<p>Colleagues need to understand the strategy as part of their own individual work role and responsibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-page summaries to be provided for display in our offices. • Leaders and managers will be asked to report regularly on the extent to which they are leading discussions about progress and contributions by teams to strategic work programmes.
<p>Colleagues want to continue to hear about the strategy and progress regularly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Live events to be organised on a regular basis. Regular updates on progress and milestones on work programmes to be shared with colleagues through Service Area Manager meetings, led by Regional Assistant Directors and Heads of Practice. • Resources Directorate Management team meetings to take a quarterly progress update and evaluate progress. • Strategy Champions to support continued engagement beyond launch to help embed the new priorities and work programmes.
<p>Embed the strategy for people new to Cafcass from day one.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an introduction to the strategy as part of the in person induction session.
<p>Family Justice Young People’s Board members would like regular feedback on strategy updates to understand how it is being implemented and what progress looks like for children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly updates shared with Family Justice Young People’s Board members as part of the reporting cycle, with a focus on impact for children.
<p>System partners reflected on the importance of being able to understand the outcomes of children, and to consider whether these differ depending on demographic and/or protected characteristics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with system and government partners on creating more effective reporting mechanisms to enable better understanding about differential outcomes of children and families.



Our intention is to regularly review progress in sustaining ambition for children, families, Cafcass colleagues and our partners. We hope to manage continued improvement, national reform and to lead actively as a family justice system partner. It is our greatest privilege to be able to do so and we thank you for taking the time to read about our intentions and progress so far.

ANNEX 1: Our progress with Ambitious for Children 2023-2026

Pages 40 to 46 in this annex set out some of our key achievements in the last three years, focusing on what has changed for children as a result. These successes and improvements have provided the baseline for our continued ambitious programme over the next three years.



PRACTICE – AMBITIOUS FOR CHILDREN 2023-2026 PROGRESS

Priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice – reduce regional variation	Priority 2: Seek out and learn from feedback	Priority 3: Enable Cafcass systems to support practice-targeted support
The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it		
<p>Increased the proportion of children receiving a personalised introduction and goodbye letter – so the work with children is relationship led, they are able to describe their experiences and feel safe in doing so.</p> <p>Introduced (and concluded in the 2025-2026 reporting year) a private law improvement programme and private law practice quality standards – to provide clear expectations about practice effectiveness and professional standards.</p> <p>Established a Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group and introduced a new Domestic Abuse Practice policy (second reissue in December 2025) – to further improve our work with children and families where domestic abuse is a factor.</p> <p>Introduced and reviewed our management oversight and supervision arrangements – so there are clearer expectations about when the advice of a manager should be sought and recorded.</p>	<p>Increased opportunities for children and families to provide feedback through QR codes, online surveys and in local audits – so children and families can tell us about their experiences and we learn alongside.</p> <p>Established a new Complaints and Correspondence function and appointed a dedicated Children’s Complaint’s Manager – to encourage feedback from children, to respond to them quickly, to learn from them and to listen to everyone’s experiences more carefully when they complain.</p> <p>Introduced a new learning framework – to formalise how we learn and change when children are harmed or killed and have been or are involved in family law proceedings.</p>	<p>Introduced improvement plans for all 19 Operational Service areas with progress reviewed every six months and annually – so we have assurance that every team in every area is consistently working on shared priorities to help bring us closer to children reporting an exceptional experience with us.</p> <p>Initiated a case progression and closure programme – to reduce delay for children and ensure they remain involved with Cafcass for only as long as they need to be.</p> <p>Developed our Ofsted inspection improvement plan, <i>Listening to Children – Lighting the Way</i>, to build on the improvements we have made in the last three years and continue to narrow the gap between the most effective practice and those areas where faster improvement is needed.</p>

What has changed for children?

% of our work assessed in audit as 'good' or 'better' has increased to 79.3% in 2025-26 compared to 73.1% in 2024-25. In the 2025-26 practice quality audit, good practice was characterised by well evidenced safeguarding actions to protect children, including connected children, improved information to understand children's and adults' lived experiences, management support to guide and provide a chance for reflection, and a continued increase in letters sent to children about what and why things are happening with recommendations increasingly being shared with them and their views in response provided to the court.

Family court advisers and children's guardians **recognise adult and child victims of domestic abuse** and assess harm and risk through their reported and lived experiences, using the domestic abuse practice policy as a consistent advice guide.

Small decrease in the % of assessment and child's plans with a management review – 92.3% public law and 83.8% private law from April-March 2025-2026 (from 92.9% and 88.6% in the same period 2024-2025) means that children's plans are receiving less oversight than we intend for them. This remains an improvement priority in the year ahead.

Nine in 10 children are seen in person and they receive better accounts of what has happened in their proceedings and why.

We received marginally less feedback in public and private law proceedings in the last financial year but a higher proportion of positive feedback overall – 1,333 returns of feedback in public law in 2025-2026 (down 7% from 2024-2025) and 4,671 in private law (down 13% since 2024-2025). 56.6% positive feedback in public law (up 2%) and 57.8% positive feedback in private law (up 2.1%).

Taking learning from all children's complaints so we are able to improve – in 2025-2026, there were 20 children's complaints. Some of the emerging themes included the need to improve how we listen to children and share their wishes and feelings with the court, our responsiveness to their contact, and not keeping them regularly informed from the beginning of our involvement. This learning is now incorporated into national and local improvement plans and priorities.

National learning is more consistent – our learning review and practice alert system is in place, supported by an annual national internal learning conference.

Reduction in the number of children in open private and public law proceedings for over 52 weeks – 4,385 children open 52+ weeks in private law at the end of March 2026 (-931 children/17.5% reduction when compared to the same time last year). **2,584 children open 52+ weeks in public law** at the end of March 2026 (-243 children/8.6% reduction when compared to the same time last year).

Reduction in the average duration of closed children's cases – S31 Care and Supervision cases took on average 38 weeks in Q3 2025-2026 (reduction of two weeks compared to Q3 2024-2025) and in private law where further work is ordered after the first hearing, work took on average 47 weeks (down by eight weeks).

New letters to children and independent reviewing officers to help adults who are important to children, explain safely and respectfully what has and will be happening to them and why.



PEOPLE – AMBITIOUS FOR CHILDREN 2023-2026 PROGRESS

Priority 4: Attract, engage and retain people

Developed career pathways for practice colleagues – to retain expertise and improve personal and professional development. Specifically, we have introduced new roles of consultant family court advisers, assistant service managers and senior service managers. Additionally, we have hosted three Ambitious for Children Weeks, which enable the whole organisation to train and develop together.

Hosted three annual colleague surveys – to engage our people, and to take their feedback on how well we are doing as an employer.

As part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, we have continued to support the Talent Pathways including a Brilliant Leaders programme – to promote and support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues in their leadership and management development.

Focused recruitment campaigns in operational service areas with targeted incentives where these are required, particularly in the South West, London, Surrey and Sussex and Child Focused Court areas.

Priority 5: Provide a modern child-focused working environment

Opened our third regional child and family hub, our London Gray’s Inn office and a new National Business Centre – to provide a modern, effective and safe work environment for colleagues so that the best work can go on in child-centred family rooms and in a place where children feel looked after and secure.

Implemented a new health, safety and security priority – to set out clearly our response and actions when anyone working at Cafcass is threatened or harassed by adult parties and/or their family members in proceedings.

New laptops distributed to all Cafcass colleagues – to secure modern and efficient working practices and systems.

Continued focus on colleague wellbeing through the provision of dedicated wellbeing days and membership for all colleagues to a health and wellbeing benefits plan.

Continued improvement of our case management system, ChildFirst – to enable good access and accurate recording of children’s records.

Launched the new Cafcass website – to make it easier for children, adults and professionals to access information about Cafcass and our services.

Reviewed and relaunched the induction process – so that new colleagues meet in person, feel well supported and able to fulfil their roles.

Priority 6: Lead and govern well

Introduced new Management Quality Standards – to provide clear expectations about how leaders and managers are expected to lead.

Updated our Performance and Learning Review system – to support effective conversations between managers and colleagues about their wellbeing, work objectives and development opportunities.

Reviewed and reissued our performance and accountability framework – with a local accountability cycle to strengthen the leadership and reporting of learning, improving and leading well. The Cafcass recovery board now also oversees improvement progress regionally as well as nationally.

Introduced a Corporate Improvement Plan to improve quality and performance within and across corporate and business functions and create an accountability framework to support our work with children and families.

The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it



What has changed for children?

12-month turnover for social work professionals has stabilised nationally – 13.6% between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, a reduction of 1.5% compared to the previous financial year, compared to 12% for local authorities. Some areas remain under pressure. Targeted plans are in place in operational areas where children are waiting too long to meet their family court adviser.

Increase in the percentage of managers supporting the provision of supervision – there were 281.2 FTE social work managers (285 headcount) supporting the provision of supervision on 31 March 2026, an increase of 129.6% (+158.7 FTE) when compared to 1 January 2023.

Achievements through the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group include developing a new training programme to support inclusive working practices and consideration of the uniqueness of children, families and colleagues, supported also by our work with the Racial Family Justice Network to advance anti-racist practice through guidance.

82 colleagues have successfully taken part in our Talent Pathway for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues since its inception – 15 colleagues have secured promotion following completion.

Both successes, mean that children's experiences of racism and the need for their uniqueness to be understood have improved.

High-quality offices with rooms for children and families to engage well – children say they love them! We have also improved the working environment so we can be together in person and for leaders to be visible and available.

A revised health, safety and security policy was issued in September 2025. Prioritises action to be taken by managers and the organisation when adults in proceedings threaten or harass our people. This helps us to take protective action for children and colleagues when adults pose a risk to them.

Improvements in recording, case management and oversight – a greater range of insight about how well children are doing in proceedings and the quality and effectiveness of practice, including reasons for delay and additional details describing the purpose of our visits to see children.

Clearer information for parents, as well as easier access for everyone to our published policies and statistics.

Induction mandatory requirements are clear and feedback from new starters is good. This means children benefit from well-equipped and motivated staff.

Managers are clear about what is expected, their work and the consistency with which this is undertaken is improving.

Performance and Learning Reviews are completed (92%). Objectives are clearer, including the follow up and action planning when work is judged to be less than good for children.

Mid and end year reviews of progress clearly describe improvement in operational service areas and teams. We have introduced Corporate Management Team reviews on a quarterly basis. Annual regional performance boards continue and have been introduced for corporate functions. Performance and learning corporate management team meetings review targeted improvement priorities in public and private law and in respect of our work where domestic abuse is a factor.



PARTNERS – AMBITIOUS FOR CHILDREN 2023-2026 PROGRESS

Priority 7: Improve children’s experiences of private law proceedings	Priority 8: Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes	Priority 9: Work with partners to improve family justice
<p>The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it</p>		
<p>Established Child Focused Court operational sites (previously known as Private Law Pathfinder courts), including Birmingham and Solihull, West Yorkshire, and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. This means more children are seen and earlier in their proceedings. The reforms prioritise improving the experiences of child and adult victims of domestic abuse.</p> <p>Released three animations in our ‘Taking me seriously’ film series developed in collaboration with members of the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) – to enable children to understand how we can help them, what happens when children meet their Cafcass worker and how we share recommendations with them and the court.</p> <p>Secured an internal implementation of a new guidance in private law where a Rule 16.4 guardian is appointed for children – to reduce delay and improve the assessment of harm and risk of future harm in the most complex private law proceedings.</p>	<p>Revised terms of reference for the internal Recovery and Improvement Board – to enable closer oversight by senior leaders of regional variation, improvement priorities and operational service areas where prioritisation is activated or being considered.</p> <p>Completed a review of the children who are subject to deprivation of liberty orders – to support policy and practice discussions with Ofsted and the Department of Education about the experiences of and provision for children.</p> <p>Developed initiatives to reduce delay for children through our public and private law improvement programmes – to support more timely resolution of proceedings for children, including a 26 week target to conclude all proceedings, reflection and management supervision where there is delay in a child’s case plan, and sharing reasons for delay with the child, their family and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).</p>	<p>Worked closely with the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to refine our practice and policy following recommendations from the ‘Everyday Business’ report.</p> <p>Contributed to the external evaluations of the Dorset Child Focused Court pilot site commissioned by the MoJ – to understand benefits, associated costs and areas of improvement based on how the system works compared to the Child Arrangements Programme and the experiences of children and adults, particularly in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.</p> <p>Developed a new success measures framework aligned to the national family justice board priorities – to support timely outcomes and improved experiences for children and families in the family justice system.</p>

Worked closely with the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) members to draw upon their experiences and reflect this in our work with partners across the family justice system – to continue our focus on improving what matters most to children and young people.

Worked in partnership with the courts to reduce the number of children in private law proceedings over 90 weeks in London.

Developed and enhanced our partners’ strategy – to enable more consistent engagement with our strategic priorities.

Developed and published a **protocol with the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) for use when there are fundamental and significant differences between the Cafcass guardian and local authority** about what is safe and in a child’s best interest.

What has changed for children?

Proceedings are shorter in Child Focused Court areas – based on hearings that took place in December 2025, it took on average 17.96 weeks to reach a final decision for children from receipt to the Decisions Hearing where a Child Impact Report is filed in private law cases. Feedback received from children reports that they felt able to express their feelings with us and that their family court adviser helped them.

Our film series reflects our commitment to improve information and engagement with children and young people so that they can influence and be less intimidated by their own court proceedings.

Recovery board has been prioritising scrutiny of the areas requiring targeted support - including resourcing priorities, managing sickness absence and delays for children. The frequency of children being seen has been reviewed and assurance taken more regularly about the number of children waiting to meet their family court advisers.

Analysis of 180 children subject to deprivation of liberty applications – showed that many of the children had significant childhood trauma and additional needs, very specifically those relating to autistic spectrum disorders.

Our engagement with partners is improving and we are able to ask on behalf of children, what difference an initiative or a change will make for them. It is becoming more important that we represent their voices and experiences in national system change and specifically the voices of children and their protective adults who are victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Data is published quarterly in the Cafcass open public board, reporting on our contribution to the national family justice priorities.



FJYPB highlights over the three years include delivering the annual Voice of the Child conference – covering themes such as the impact of domestic abuse on children, and most recently, Empowering for Our Future; co-chairing the Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group to strengthen safe practice; influencing Cafcass’ national improvement priorities and new strategic plan so children’s voices are embedded in decision making; developing resources such as the Safe Family Time guide to help children feel safer when and where they meet family members; and continuing to challenge system leaders on delays that affect children’s safety, participation, and wellbeing.

37.3% S31 (care and supervision) proceedings closed in 26 weeks or less for Q3 2025-2026 – an improvement of 3.1% compared to the same quarter in 2024/25. There is a reduction in the number of children in long running public and private law proceedings over 100 weeks – 1,669 children at the end of March 2026 compared to 2,195 children at the same point last year.

Over 150 families have directly benefited from the work with the London courts – this includes earlier hearings or measures in place so that the hearing is more likely to be effective. In addition, learning has been shared across London where improvements have been identified, and Cafcass teams in London are filing reports more quickly where there has been a fact-finding hearing to try and shorten the length of proceedings for children.



ANNEX 2: MEASURES WE WILL USE TO DETERMINE HOW WELL WE ARE DOING FOR CHILDREN

PRACTICE

Priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation

Measures:

- % of children on applicable open cases that have a seen in-person record.
- % of audited work judged to be good or better.
- % of child's plans with management review.
- Increase in letters sent to children and recommendations being shared judged in practice quality audit.
- Average allocation and filing times for public law reports. Safeguarding letters and reports continue to improve as judged in audit and feedback from families.
- Reduced % colleagues with more than 20 open children's cases. Cases close in accordance with the operating procedure and there is effective use of case progression officers to support.
- Reduced average duration for S31 and supervision children's cases and for private law work to first hearing, work after first hearing and Rule 16.4 children's cases.
- % of audited work judged good or better where domestic abuse is a factor.
- Assistant Director and Heads of Practice have followed up on action following inadequate work.
- % of audited work requiring improvement continues to reduce.

Priority 2: Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children's experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)

Measures:

- Increase in feedback through audit and increase in percentage that is positive.
- Operational leaders will evidence learning from practice alerts in all performance oversight.

Priority 3: Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children's experiences

Measures:

- Nine (including Cafcass associates) annual performance reviews/boards have provided clear improvement actions and reviews of progress.
- Reduction in safeguarding letters waiting to be allocated.
- Practitioners and managers will report in feedback that caseloads are more manageable and that allocation is fair and balanced.
- Increase in % of work judged to be good or better.



* Cafcass reports on a number of performance measures - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/cafcass-publishes-annual-report-and-accounts-2024-2025>

PEOPLE

Priority 4: Attract, engage and retain people

Measures:

- Number of and trend for monthly and annual colleague recognition nominations.
- % of colleagues attending induction events and reporting positively.
- % of feedback from stay and exit interviews.
- Annual rate of social work turnover compared to local authority children's social care services.
- Number of and trend on vacancies – including by Operational Service Area (OSA).
- Reduction in working days for time to hire (national and OSA measure).
- % and number of children's private law cases awaiting allocation will reduce (national and by OSA).
- Increase in the number of Cafcass Associates.
- Increase in recruitment of newly qualified social workers nationally.
- % of employed social workers who identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic compared to local authority children's services.
- % of employed corporate and business services colleagues who identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic compared to the national population.
- % of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic colleagues who are participating in a talent and/or development programme.
- % of section 31 Care cases allocated within three working days remains at 99% or above.
- Timeliness for the allocate of private law children's cases improves nationally and in all OSAs.

Priority 5: Provide a modern, safe and child focused environment that works for our colleagues

Measures:

- Increase in the number of child and family hub offices that are well used and reported as safe and effective for work with children and families.
- The number of open and reported incidents with positive feedback about how support and protection were offered increases to 100%.
- Fortnightly report to Recovery and Improvement board on accessible arrangements for Cafcass colleagues and children and families using our offices.
- Cafcass is able to reliably record and report on what is happening for children through Child Need data, including the number of children's cases in public and private law where domestic abuse is a factor.

Priority 6: Lead and govern well

Measures:

- Reduction in 3 and 12 month annualised sickness absence rates for social work colleagues and corporate and professional staff.
- The reported rate of annual assessments by managers using the quality standards increases and there is evidence in PLRs of a leadership and management objective.
- % of audited cases where uniqueness is both identified and used to inform advice to the court.
- The reporting and data collection of Black and Asian women in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor becomes consistent and the project to understand their experiences and needs commences.

- There are no private law children's cases awaiting allocation beyond the timescales agreed so that child impact reports can be filed within 8 working weeks of receipt of the application.
- The % of public and private law judged to be good or better will continue to improve.
- The training and development plan will be understood and valued by colleagues (colleague annual survey), with session take up and application clear in quality assurance systems.

- % of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues who report positively about their experiences working for Cafcass.
- All flexible working arrangements are reviewed and signed off by a national director as effective with clear processes and standards in place for all new applications.
- In the annual colleague survey, there is increased positive feedback about connection with managers and teams by new starters and the induction itself is judged to be effective.
- Performance outliers considered by the recovery and improvement board are effectively managed, followed through and then reviewed again to record progress.



PARTNERS

Priority 7: Improve children's safety and experiences of proceedings

Measures:

- % of work judged good or better in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor increases.
- There is a reduction in long proceedings where Cafcass and local authorities are involved alongside the same child and family.
- Reduction in the volume and average duration of Rule 16.4 children's cases.

Priority 8: Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings

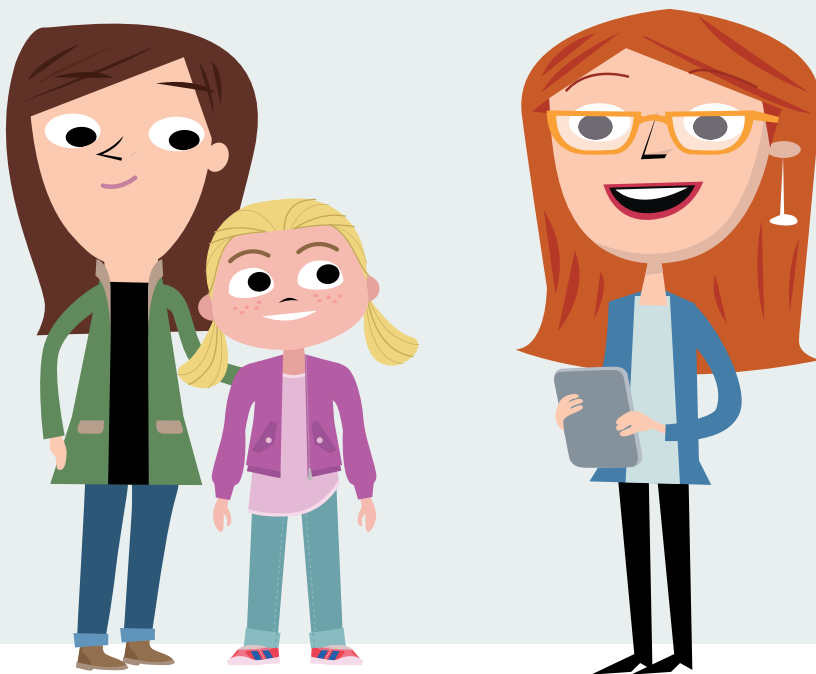
Measures:

- Implementation of ChildFirst changes to enable reliable recording and reporting on reasons for delay in all children's cases.
- Continued increase in the number of section 31 care proceedings that close in 26 weeks or less.
- A positive internal evaluation of all portals and the impact of intended change on practice and oversight of proceedings.
- Reduction in % of missing mandatory data to enable cases to progress from application.
- Improved internal timeliness to allocation of applications to local teams and 100% compliance with standard operating procedure which sets out that all applications must be allocated to a local team within 24 hours of receipt.

Priority 9: Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts

Measures:

- The required number of family court advisers permanently employed in Child Focused Court Areas is achieved three months before each transition.
- The % of work judged good or better continues to improve consistently in all discrete teams and in all law types - including work to first hearing.
- % of positive family feedback increases in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.
- % of child impact reports filed within eight weeks.
- Average filing time extension for Child Impact Reports.
- Number and % of child impact reports ordered to local authority children's social care services accords remains consistent and appropriate.
- Number and % of addendum reports in Child Focused Court areas.



We welcome your feedback

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