



# **Cafcass Open Board Meeting**

## **23 January 2019**

# Cafcass strategy refresh: Early thinking

## Background

The purpose of Cafcass Open Board meetings is to allow board members, stakeholders, members of staff, and members of the public to discuss issues of significance to the children, their families, and the professionals we work with. Cafcass holds two of its Board meetings in an open forum annually.

This first Open Board meeting of 2019 focused on the refresh of Cafcass' Strategic Plan, which is currently being developed. An introduction to our approach was delivered by Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy, followed by a presentation on service user engagement delivered by Kevin Gibbs, Assistant Director. The meeting ended with a question and answer session between Cafcass, board members and other attendees.

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## Introduction by Edward Timpson, Chair of the Cafcass Board



The Chair of the Board, Edward Timpson, started by setting out the reasoning behind the strategy, including the ambition to build on the progress Cafcass has made since our Outstanding Ofsted result in 2018. He also confirmed the ambition for our work to be high impact and to help the children and families we see.

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## Strategic consultation, Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy



Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy at Cafcass, set out that this open session is an important part of Cafcass engaging with members of staff, service users, stakeholders and professionals, to gather views on how we can improve our service. She provided background to our current strategic plan and noted that its aim was to drive where we are going as an organisation, with a coherent approach and clear understanding of what we will focus on. The current operating context was discussed, observing an increase in demand as well as more complexity around cases. She noted that these demands also require a continued focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

The framework for the new strategic plan was built from the feedback received from discussions in team meetings, from a webinar on values organised by the strategy's working group and from discussions with the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB). Teresa explained the proposed structure, which is based on three pillars: Practice, Partners and People; and set out some initial feedback around refreshing our organisational values.

The three pillars are intended to capture how we will deliver the best outcomes for the children we work with, working with the courts, the family justice sector, and wider social policy. Teresa outlined current initiatives which will deliver these, and then more ambitious examples of what we might do. For example, the practice pillar refers to the delivery of high quality service to all children and families, wherever they live.

A more ambitious approach to this could involve extending the menu of commissioned services and interventions. The partners pillar involves the exchange of knowledge, expertise and learning to improve the family justice system: the ambition or 'stretch' could include extending our partnerships to include other areas of public policy. Teresa emphasised the importance of building local relationships and partnerships as well as sharing our data. The people pillar focuses on having a more active role in the wider workforce issues including a commitment to continue to provide the necessary and best resources for our staff so that in turn they can carry out their best work.

Teresa then set out some initial thinking around measuring success. This is likely to involve moving on from performance indicators towards assessing feedback from service users and staff and partner organisations. She concluded by considering what outcomes we may need to focus on. For example, do families walk out of court and think the decisions that have been made will last? And how do we capture this?

Cafcass is working to improve capability, infrastructure and technology to support its staff, as well as capturing long-term outcomes. We are already beginning this work with partners, such as ADCS, and through considering an end-to-end pathway approach for children and families across the family system and other sectors, such as health and education.

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## Improving service user feedback and outcomes, Kevin Gibbs, Assistant Director



The presentation delivered by Kevin Gibbs, Assistant Director, considered one aspect of our draft strategic plan, which is improving outcomes through better engagement.

Kevin acknowledged that Cafcass is already doing well on many fronts, evidenced by positive feedback received from children, families and stakeholders; from the low volume of complaints from adults and children; from the reduction in Ombudsman investigations; from greater engagement with service user representatives such as on the Child Impact Assessment Framework; and through our role in sponsoring the FJYPB.

However, he also acknowledged that more can be done to enhance the voice of the child at all stages, including when the case is concluded. This, would require greater communication around what we do and why; before, during and after our work has concluded. Children and young people should have access to information at all points in their journey.

One way we are improving the journey for children and families is through the behavioural insights approach to managing demand and expectations. Kevin explains that we have a complaints process that delivers in key aspects. In relation to children, we generally receive three or four complaints from them on a quarterly basis. However, there is a need for a more active and systematic approach to seeking feedback, for a clearer delivery of information at each stage, and a need for capturing data on individual needs and analysing broader themes. Cafcass is currently looking at developing our work on the voice of the child (VOTC) to be a centre of good practice.

Kevin concluded by talking about the next steps involving the Cafcass Family Forum. This is an opportunity to bring together people who have used our service to help identify improvements and act as a sounding board for us at all levels.

# Themes from the discussion

## Feedback and the Cafcass Family Forum

There was strong interest and initial support for this initiative. Attendees and Board members considered how people will be selected to join the Family Forum and how it will be most effective. Teresa confirmed that this would be modelled on best practice from other organisations which have developed this approach, such as the Family Rights Group. There was support from the FJYPB for offering a wider range of feedback mechanisms and doing more to explain decisions at each stage of the process.

Teresa also confirmed that by introducing this model, we would not be closing other forms of engagement with partner organisations and stakeholders. It was noted that working with these groups was an important part of making the case for reform in the family justice system.

There was a discussion around current behaviours around seeking and providing feedback. There was a suggestion that Cafcass should use the work on behavioural insights to identify ways in which it can be more responsive and effective. Terminology was also considered, with a challenge around whether Cafcass should refer to cases or children.

A Cafcass manager present reinforced the positive response she had seen in her team around the work done to date to gather staff views, to shape the strategic plan.

## Cafcass profile

It was noted that there is a strong level of trust between the social work staff and children and families, and whether this model could help build confidence with other professionals. There was also the suggestion that trust on this level could help build confidence in the service that Cafcass provides. Reciprocity, i.e. what we can learn from partners, stakeholders and the children and families we work with, as well as what we can offer to them, is key.

There was a discussion around whether it was time for the work of Cafcass to become more prominent, with Board members noting that some staff felt that this was the case. This would not be done for the sake of 'branding' but to share our expertise and build an understanding of the work we do.

There was a discussion around the name of the organisation: whether this accurately represented our role and whether this could be improved.

## Outcomes for children

The discussion continued around what success would look like, from the perspective of the children and families we work with, and from partner organisations and stakeholders.

There was a discussion on the length of cases: specifically, the time between hearings and the impact that this may have on children. 'Waiting time' was suggested as a new performance indicator by one attendee. Cafcass noted that some time did need to be allocated to receiving information from outside the organisation, to inform safe decision making, but acknowledged the impact time does have on children and parents.

The Board considered how to achieve the right balance between focusing on reviewing processes and continuous improvement against maintaining delivery, when designing our new strategy. It was noted that there is a tendency to focus on processes when dealing with the practicalities of rising case demand, but we need to remain focused on the outcome of our interventions.

Board members raised the importance of technology, noting the sophisticated tools and systems Cafcass uses and to ensure that these continued to feature in our strategy.

# Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Edward Timpson CBE	Chair of the Board
Deep Sagar	Board member
Paul Grant	Board member
Fay Selvan	Board member and co-Chair of the Performance and Quality Committee
Catherine Doran	Board member
Mandy Jones	Board member
Sally Cheshire	Board member
Caroline Corby	Board member
Francis Plowden	Board member and Chair of ARAC
Sophie Humphreys	Co-opted board member
Anthony Douglas	Chief Executive
Teresa Williams	Director of Strategy
Kevin Gibbs	Assistant Director
Melanie Carew	Head of Legal
Julie Brown	Director of Resources
Christine Banim	National Service Director
Merryn Hockaday	Senior Communications Manager
Colette Jacobs	Head of Communications
Nicola Blakebrough	Corporate Strategist
Grace Egbewole-Adereti	Board and Corporate Support Assistant
Ioana Oprea	Cafcass Graduate
Richard Morris	Cafcass Assistant Director
Sophie Vessey	Cafcass Policy and Communications Manager
Claire Beckingham	Cafcass Local Strategy Champion, National Improvement Service
Katie Goldstraw	Family Justice Young People's Board
Neal Barcoe	Deputy Director, Family Justice Policy, Ministry of Justice
Brenda McLaughlin	Lead Inspector, Ofsted
Alice Twaite	Coordinator, Transparency Project
Michelle Phillips	SafeLives
Jane Robey	Chief Executive Officer, National Family Mediation
Daniel Monk	Professor of Law, Birkbeck, University of London
Lall Singh	Shared Parenting Association
Graham Porter	Shared Parenting Association
Jay Barlow, Vice-Chair	Napo
Arran Poyser	Former Cafcass Inspector
Jamie Niven-Phillips	Association of Lawyers for Children
Dean Rogers	Assistant General Secretary, Napo
Janie Spring	Helpline Adviser, The Fostering Network
Marc Gammon	Policy and Research Officer, Magistrates Association
Maria Mansfeld	Assistant Director of Communications, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Amy Bedford	Family Policy, Department for Work and Pensions
Dr Jan Macvarish	Research Assistant, Birkbeck, University of London
Ann Furminger	Relationship Support Manager, Family Action

# Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Tammy Knox	Senior Associate, Penningtons Manches
Simon Franklin	Child Maintenance Policy, Department for Work and Pensions
Louise Relph	District Judge, Manchester Civil Justice Centre
Jenny Birchall	Research and Policy Officer, Women's Aid
Dr Linda Wijlaars	Senior Research Associate, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health
Matthew Jay	PhD student, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health
His Honour Judge Kambiz Moradifar	Designated Family Judge for Berkshire
Angela Frazer Wicks	Family Rights Group (FJYPB) (attending on behalf of Cathy Ashley)
Michael Lewkowicz	Director of Communications, Families Need Fathers
Ed Bowie	ALB Governance Division, Ministry of Justice