



## Protocol for the use of Cafcass offices during the COVID-19 pandemic

### Introduction

Following government advice to protect against the spread of COVID-19 Cafcass made the decision to close all its offices on 20 March 2020. Since then almost all work with children, families and the family courts has been conducted remotely. Cafcass has been largely successful in transforming the organisation into one which is able to fulfil its functions remotely (including remote court hearings and high-quality interventions with children and families).

We are now in the process of successfully reopening 16 priority offices for the purpose of safely seeing children and families. The first office opened on 27<sup>th</sup> July and the final priority office is due to open on 28<sup>th</sup> August. Following the successful delivery of this plan we are going to continue to progress with the re-opening of all 33 core offices, including putting new arrangements in place for staff to book desks to use in the general office space.

This document provides an outline of the safety measures we have put in place in line with government guides to make office spaces COVID-secure. A guide will be produced for each office, which will clearly set out the changes made to make the office environment a safe place from which to work and meet with children and families.

This protocol supports the [attendance at court](#) and [visiting children and families](#) protocols.

### Reasons for using a Cafcass office

In the first phase we re-opened our offices on a priority basis for meeting with children and families but not for general business as usual activities. We did this working collaboratively alongside Assistant Directors who prioritised the key locations for their Service Areas. In addition to using the offices for meeting with children and families, we are now moving to a second phase including putting arrangements in place for staff to book desks to work from an office if they wish to.

In the second phase which will commence in September through to the end of November, we are going to:

1. Conduct risk assessments for the safe re-opening of the remaining 17 core offices as COVID-secure working environments.
2. Put in place the required COVID-secure measures to re-open each of the offices.
3. Review office usage and arrangements in place after a two-week period of the office reopening with the Assistant Director and discuss the need to open space for desk and other meeting use.
4. Extend the room booking system to allow staff to access and book desks in the priority offices as well as meeting rooms.
5. Continue to review the COVID-secure measures in place to check they meet the required government guidelines, updating staff as and when required working closely with Assistant Directors, Business Services colleagues and local staff.

The third and final phase of the office reopening process will be to reopen the 6 touchdown offices following the same process as we did for the core offices.

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Taking the above into consideration our offices will:

- Be open between 10:00 and 16:00, Monday to Friday
- Rooms will be available for online pre-booking between 10:30 and 15:30.
- Desks will be available for online pre-booking between 10.30 and 15.30.
- The offices will be staffed by two people to assist with the arrival and departure procedures for the safety of visiting families and Cafcass staff. These will principally be Business Services staff but not exclusively. This will be managed locally through the Service Manager and Business Services Manager.
- These arrangements will be reviewed for each office after a fortnight of the office reopening.

To further support staff with the reopening of our offices the following additional measures will be put in place:

1. Staff who are based at the office will be provided with a simple room and desk booking system. A review mechanism will also be linked to this system which will identify office usage. Guidance on using the system is available [here](#).
2. Continue to use the Visitor Management system we have introduced as the method for all staff to manage attendance at our offices. Guidance on using the system is available [here](#). (Add in a link to the system guidance here?)

### Criteria for using Cafcass offices during the recovery period

The Cafcass Estates and Health and Safety Team alongside the local Business Services Manager (BSM) will carry out initial desktop assessments of the remaining 17 offices to review whether they can be made COVID-secure. A schedule of reopening dates will be provided to the Assistant Directors once all the assessments are completed. Initial assessments will operate on a RAG system as outlined below.

- These will consider the principles for providing COVID-secure offices as outlined in HM Government's publication "[Working safely during COVID-19 in offices and contact centres](#)" and
- will also consider other factors such as:
  - availability of staff to support the safe use of the office;
  - lone worker risks;
  - landlord and host department requirements (for example if it is a closed or partially closed building); and
  - the ability to introduce a suitable and effective cleaning regime.

### Assessments and actions

#### 1. Desktop evaluation

The COVID-secure principles as detailed in [Appendix 1](#) will form part of the assessment using information and knowledge of the offices within the Cafcass estate, designating Green, Amber or Red status.

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## **2. Physical Assessment**

The remaining 17 offices will be prioritised by Assistant Directors for in person work with children and families and ranked into assessment priority order based on the desktop RAG rating.

Green workspaces will be visited first, followed by Amber and, only if there is a compelling need, those identified as Red.

Further details on the assessment process and a link to a completed assessment are included within [Appendix 2](#).