

# **Co-Parent Hub: Evaluation of Learning**



## **Cafcass – April 2021**

Cafcass Model Office and National Commissioning Team

## Contents

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Previous pilot learning, p.3
- 1.2 Relaunch in April 2020, p.3-4
- 1.3 Co-Parent Hub evaluation (April-December 2020), p.4

### 2. What is Co-Parent Hub doing well?

- 2.1 There is interest in and good uptake of Co-Parent Hub, p.4-5
- 2.2 Some parents have said that engagement with Co-Parent Hub is securing child-focussed outcomes and changing their behaviour, p.5
- 2.3 People are interested in the Parenting Plan and, in a few cases, has been used to good effect, p.5-6
- 2.4 The Parenting Plan is potentially supporting ‘out of court’ users, p.6
- 2.5 Family Court Advisers give broadly positive feedback and are making referrals to Co-Parent Hub, p.6-7
- 2.6 Where Family Court Advisers use Co-Parent Hub with parents, it can have a helpful impact in Cafcass cases, p.7-9
- 2.7 Family Justice System partners are recommending Co-Parent Hub in their practice, p.9
- 2.8 Co-Parent Hub content is generally well-liked, p.9-10

### 3. Issues with Co-Parent Hub in its current format

- 3.1 Only a very small proportion of users interact with Co-Parent Hub’s interactive features, which limits its impact as a tool for Online Dispute Resolution, p.10-11
- 3.2 There is limited engagement from parents, which is exacerbated if technical issues are experienced, p.11-12
- 3.3 The Voice of the Child does not come across as strongly in some elements of the Co-Parent Hub, p.12
- 3.4 Co-Parent Hub is hard to find, p.13
- 3.5 Content development and creation is time consuming and is not our expertise, p.13-14
- 3.6 There are issues with the functionality of Co-Parent Hub in its current format, p.14

### 4. Thank you and next steps, p.14

## 1. Introduction

Designed as an innovative digital resource for separated families, Co-Parent Hub is targeted at families who are involved in family proceedings and have an open case with Cafcass, although it is also available online and can be accessed by families who may be considering an application. It provides advice, support and access to a range of information and educational programmes to help families understand the needs of children when parents separate, and the impact of conflict on them. It has a unique interactive Parenting Plan feature for parents to negotiate arrangements for their children on a neutral platform and set out agreements where it is safe to do so. This hopes to help families narrow and/or resolve issues away from court proceedings and manage arrangements to avoid returning to court.

The idea for developing a digital resource arose in early 2017, when Cafcass recognised that Online Dispute Resolution was likely to take root within the UK, in line with emerging trends in other countries. Co-Parent Hub was informed by a number of research and policy papers, which unanimously identified that there was a need for an online resource that could serve as a single point of access for information and support for separated families. These papers include, but are not limited to:

- > “Breaking Up is Hard to Do” – Relate, November 2014;
- > “Mapping Paths to Family Justice” – ESCR funded project, 2011- 2014;
- > “The Varying Paths to Justice” – Ministry of Justice, 2015.

It was proposed, in the first instance, that Cafcass should pilot a website that was purpose-built with a focus on dispute resolution. Piloting in this way gave Cafcass the opportunity to evaluate the Hub’s effectiveness and ensure that the platform was helpful for the families it aims to support.

## 1.1 Previous pilot learning

In phase one of the pilot, from September 2018 – February 2019, Co-Parent Hub tracked 1,224 people accessing the website from two local pilot areas, A2 and A9, which resulted in 20,697 unique pageviews, exceeding expectations for this phase.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, 369 individuals were sufficiently motivated to create accounts on Co-Parent Hub, 223 of which, could be matched to a Cafcass case via the registered email address.

Applying Behavioural Insights to phase two of the pilot, from March 2019 – September 2019, was shown to improve uptake and engagement. It resulted in a 78% increase in the number of accounts created on Co-Parent Hub in A2, in comparison to the first phase of the pilot.

## 1.2 Relaunch in April 2020

Following the announcement of a national lockdown in March 2020, Cafcass and the Ministry of Justice recognised that Co-Parent Hub could support a large number of parents who may be struggling with arrangements as a result of Covid-19, as alternative options were suddenly restricted. Co-Parent Hub was therefore launched as a free, online resource in April, with an additional focus on helping to support separated families through the impact of the pandemic.

---

<sup>1</sup> A2 and A9 are Cafcass service areas, of which there are 18 (A1-A18). The A2 service area covers York across to Cumbria, including Blackburn; A9 covers the area around Liverpool.

## 1.3 Co-Parent Hub evaluation (April-December 2020)

The Co-Parent Hub evaluation has been split into two main sections, focussing on: **what Co-Parent Hub is doing well; and, the issues with Co-Parent Hub in its current format.**

As outlined in the Project Initiation Document, we have collected evidence to review:

1. Take up and use of Co-Parent Hub within private law proceedings
2. What information users choose to access, whether they find it useful, and their views on the difference it makes to a) resolution of their issues; b) their relationship with their co-parent and c) the positive outcome for the child from proceedings
3. The role of Co-Parent Hub in supporting the frontline during recovery and any prioritisation of caseloads, including for delayed cases

The information for this evaluation has been collected from the following sources: 1) Google Analytics; 2) Parent Interviews; 3) User Feedback through MS Forms (parents and professionals); 4) Clickrelationships admin reports on users; 5) Parenting Plan report; 6) Cafcass Analytics reporting.

19 parent interviews have taken place, which followed the same format as user MS Forms surveys sent via email link, where we received 25 responses from parents and 10 responses from professionals. This evaluation is therefore based on feedback from 44 parents and 10 professionals.

## 2. What Co-Parent Hub is doing well

### 2.1 There's interest in and good uptake of Co-Parent Hub

As evidenced by the learning from previous pilots, and supported by data in this period, there has been interest and good uptake of Co-Parent Hub. **Since its launch on 28<sup>th</sup> April – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020, 18,093 users have accessed Co-Parent Hub** looking for the online Parenting Plan, information on Alternative Dispute Resolution, and articles on how to improve communication and reduce parental conflict.

This averages at 615 users per week, however, 47% of users that click onto Co-Parent Hub instantly drop-off and do not engage with its content. Therefore, approximately 328 users actively engage with Co-Parent Hub per week.

2,834 accounts have been created, of which, 61 are Cafcass Family Court Adviser accounts, which suggests **that up to 2,773 accounts have been created by parents**, though it is likely that other professionals have also created accounts. This means that roughly 15% of people who access Co-Parent Hub are sufficiently motivated to sign-up to access more features.<sup>2</sup>

From Google Analytics data, we can see that Co-Parent Hub gives a generally positive picture in terms of engagement:

---

<sup>2</sup> Currently, the online 'Parenting Plan' and 'Getting it Right For Children' features require users to create an account, so that their progress can be saved in a private area of the website. Creating an account also allows users to bookmark articles that they've found useful and want to return to. Finally, it gives you access to a Goal Setting feature, which allows users to set a goal which signposts them to relevant content to work on that goal e.g. "To improve communication with my ex-partner, for our children".

- The average session duration per user is 4 minutes 15 seconds.
- The average number of pages looked at per session is 6.96, which means users often click through to view more content.
- Finally, our returning user rate is 16%. In the most recent period, **Co-Parent Hub has 3,455 users that returned to Co-Parent Hub** to view more information or continue to work through interactive elements of the website.

Finally, we made Co-Parent Hub compatible to use with smart phones and tablets. In the pilot period, **48% of Co-Parent Hub users accessed the website using their phone**, and 7% accessed it using a tablet, which shows that this accessibility option is preferred.

## **2.2 Some parents have said that engagement with Co-Parent Hub is securing child-focussed outcomes and changing their behaviour**

From speaking to parents and Family Court Advisers, it's clear that when users create an account and are sufficiently engaged with Co-Parent Hub, the intended benefits of the website are realised, and Co-Parent Hub is successfully supporting families to make child-focussed arrangements. Within feedback, **30% (13/44) of parents agreed that using Co-Parent Hub has made a difference to how they'll make child arrangements in the future:**

- *"I would definitely use the Hub in future, rather than a solicitor, as it feels open and transparent for each parent."*
- *"We previously used email, and it became hard to deal with the amount of messages. It's good to have one place that keeps a 'true' account of the arrangements that can then be referred to."*

Furthermore, **82% of parents said that they would recommend Co-Parent Hub to a friend**, in its current format (56% - 19/34), or if improvements were made (26% - 9/34). When asked about who they thought were suitable for Co-Parent Hub, **many parents believed most people would benefit from using the website:**

- *"Yes, it's suitable - I believe all parents to be honest with you"*
- *"It would definitely help both parents and it can be varied when children's or parents needs change"*
- *"Yes ... even though it requires engagement to be fully successful. I can't see why it wouldn't be helpful. Anybody and everybody!"*

However, there are particular barriers that are preventing greater engagement with the website and are therefore limiting its efficacy. **Please go to page 8 to see an outline of the issues with Co-Parent Hub in its current format**

## **2.3 People are interested in the Parenting Plan and, in a few cases, has been used to good effect**

The online interactive Parenting Plan feature, in particular, is key to securing child-focused outcomes for families through Co-Parent Hub and is where we find the most evidence for successful dispute resolution. **The Parenting Plan page on Co-Parent Hub is the most popular page, with 13,197 pageviews** from 28<sup>th</sup> April – 14<sup>th</sup> December (over 10,000 more pageviews than the second most popular page).

From 28<sup>th</sup> April – 15<sup>th</sup> December, **1,637 Parenting Plans were created**, of which a small number, **156, have a paired user**.<sup>3</sup> Of those Parenting Plans with a paired user, 67 have been significantly worked on, with **an average number of 17 interactions made per Parenting Plan** (1,109/67). Furthermore, 41 paired Parenting Plans have “approved suggestions”, which means that **26% (41/156) of co-parents that start a Parenting Plan together successfully negotiate and agree on a final arrangement**.

- *“In terms of accessibility and presentation on a screen, I think it’s very clear and concise. Usability is absolutely great and easy to use”*
- *“It provided a starting point. Initially, I was just lost as to where to start, and this gave me a clear plan”*
- *“It would be nice if someone oversaw it the first time, to see you are getting off on the right foot”*
- *“It was laid out in a simple, informative style and I liked the fact that it was split into easy steps, so it didn’t feel overwhelming”*

Reporting cannot track whether an individual has worked on a Parenting Plan by themselves without a paired user, however, **it is likely that there are a significant number of Parenting Plans by an individual that have been completed. 1,481 Parenting Plans have been created by an individual in the same time period**, though we cannot confirm how far through the Parenting Plan each individual user got.

## 2.4 The Parenting Plan is potentially supporting ‘out of court’ users

Of the 67 paired Parenting Plans, we could successfully match 32 to a Cafcass case. This suggests that **up to 52% (35/67) of users who significantly worked on a Parenting Plan with a co-parent could be classified as ‘out of court’ users**. 27% of traffic to Co-Parent Hub is through a referral from the Ministry of Justice government website, where a link to Co-Parent Hub is included on the [C-100 application](#) page. Potentially Co-Parent Hub may therefore be diverting a small number of families from making an application to court, if they engage with the website prior to making an application.

- *“I am trying to keep things as amicable as possible with my ex-husband so have found it really useful to be able to create a plan in the hub and to each make suggestions about co-parenting without going down the legal route. I also have limited finances so paying for a solicitor would have been difficult” – out of court user*

## 2.5 Family Court Advisers give broadly positive feedback and are making referrals to Co-Parent Hub

We successfully matched 863 Co-Parent Hub accounts (involving 778 cases overall) to a person on our case management system, suggesting that **up to 31% of users with a Co-Parent Hub account (863/2,773) have been directly referred by a Cafcass Family Court Adviser**.

**Early Intervention Team Family Court Advisers**, at an A2 team meeting, **unanimously agreed that they found it easy to identify parents who would be suitable for Co-Parent**

---

<sup>3</sup> If a Parenting Plan has a paired user, it indicates that co-parents are working on a plan together rather than individually.

**Hub.** This is supported as 90% of Family Court Advisers who were asked for feedback on cases where a Parenting Plan had completed, had done so during the Work to First Hearing stage of proceedings. In all cases, however, the Family Court Advisers were not aware whether the parents had gone on to complete an online Parenting Plan following their referral, because of the nature of engagement with families at the Work To First Hearing stage. Early Intervention Team Family Court Advisers suggested that, whilst they can make referrals to Co-Parent Hub, it is **unlikely they have the scope within their current role to support parents through the website**. This is particularly so within the context of this pilot period, where Early Intervention Team Family Court Advisers caseloads have been significantly high due to the Covid-19 pandemic (in December 2020 active Early Intervention Team caseloads were the highest on record for Cafcass).

- *“If the Family Court Adviser identifies at the Work To First Hearing stage that there are low risks and a Parenting Plan is appropriate, Cafcass should be empowered to ... direct completion prior to the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment, this would seem to be particularly important when parties are LIP.”* – Family Court Adviser

Data and feedback from Family Court Advisers suggests that **Work After First Hearing Family Court Advisers are using Co-Parent Hub with parents and supporting them to complete an online Parenting Plan**, particularly in some areas e.g. A14. Family Court Advisers have submitted the following feedback about Co-Parent Hub and how it supports their practice:

- *“It’s a useful resource and can provide much needed thought-provoking resolutions”*
- *“I think it’s a good tool for separated parents to help them to focus on the child/ren”*
- *“It provides a useful format for parents to attempt to get support and advice”*

## 2.6 Where Family Court Advisers use Co-Parent Hub with parents, it can have a helpful impact in Cafcass cases

As mentioned in the previous section, we know that **32 families known to Cafcass have successfully completed a Parenting Plan together**. 16 Family Court Advisers provided feedback on these cases, which showed that 69% (11/16) had been directly referred to Co-Parent Hub by the Family Court Adviser. The following case examples evidence how Co-Parent Hub can be used to support families and secure child-focused outcomes, across different areas of Cafcass’ work<sup>4</sup>:

**Case 1:** This case is in A2, which is a previous pilot area of Co-Parent Hub. The Early Intervention Team Family Court Adviser recommended parents access Co-Parent Hub resources in early August, after identifying **no safeguarding issues and communication breakdown**. Parents created an account on Co-Parent Hub on the day before their First Hearing. The court ordered further Co-Parent Hub use and stated that “parties have indicated that they will complete a shared Parenting Plan”, which they did for a round table meeting without Cafcass present. **The case duration was 6 weeks.**

**Case 2:** Application was received from Dad to stop relocation of Mum and their two children. The two parents were conflicted, **so a S.7 report was ordered at the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment to explore children’s wishes and feelings.**

<sup>4</sup> In case 2, both the Early Intervention Team and Work After First Hearing Family Court Adviser referred parents to Co-Parent Hub.

The recommendation to Co-Parent Hub came from Cafcass in June 2020, after both parents had completed a Separated Parents Information Programme. Both parents signed up to Co-Parent Hub in June and by August the case was closed after **parents were able to resolve issues and come to full agreement using the Parenting Plan on Co-Parent Hub**, with support from Cafcass to oversee arrangements being made.

- The Work After First Hearing Family Court Adviser in this case, has said: ***“I feel passionately that the [online] Parenting Plan can make such a difference to children. It’s recommended in the majority of cases I am involved with ... it helps to narrow the issues and agree communication moving forward.”***

**Case 3:** Mum had made an emergency application in 2019 due to an incident involving Dad putting the children in harm’s way. Since then, Dad had received support to improve his mental health, alcohol abuse and repair his relationship with Mum. Mum made an application in April to **dismiss the Prohibited Steps Order and renegotiate child-arrangements with Dad**. The Early Intervention Team Family Court Adviser in the case recommended Co-Parent Hub use in June and two days later Mum and Dad were working on a joint Parenting Plan online. Outcome of the First Hearing in June was no further work for Cafcass as a partial agreement had been made. The Local Authority was requested to follow-up and review these arrangements, however, **case closed to Cafcass after 7 weeks and 5 days**.

**Case 4:** In this case, parents were informed about Co-Parent Hub in June, but it wasn’t until July that they signed up to the website. However, both parents worked on an online Parenting Plan and **arrived at their First Hearing “very close to agreement ... in Child A’s best interests”**. They came to a full agreement at the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment and a final order was made.

- A mum has shared the following feedback on the online Parenting Plan: ***“It’s helpful having a third-party platform, and the structure and draft agreements are helpful, but sometimes it’s hard to keep track of who wrote what. Communication with my ex-husband has been difficult and is primarily via email where discussions can go round and round. The use of the Parenting Plan was written into the CAFCASS report, and then within the interim order. It’s easy to refer to an agreement when something happens that challenges an agreement, and it’s easy to include a new agreement.”***

As these case studies show, Co-Parent Hub can help parents at various stages in proceedings and with varying degrees of conflict, however, only with the right package of support and when both co-parents are actively engaged. The parent who shared the feedback above mentions how easy it is to “refer to an agreement” once a Parenting Plan is in place. Co-Parent Hub, and the online Parenting Plan, may also be useful in helping parents to sustain and renegotiate arrangements once an order has been made.

In the 10 cases that Family Court Advisers referred parents to Co-Parent Hub, where a Parenting Plan has since been completed, 8 cases have closed to Cafcass and 2 cases remain open. For the cases that have closed, 2 cases signed up to Co-Parent Hub after the case had closed.

For the remaining 6 cases, where parents signed up to Co-Parent Hub during proceedings, **the average time from the point where both parents had an account to when the case closed is 4 weeks and 5 days.**

## 2.7 Family Justice System partners are recommending Co-Parent Hub in their practice

Professionals across the Family Justice System recognise Co-Parent Hub as an important and useful tool. The 10 family justice professionals, who responded to the Co-Parent Hub survey, gave Co-Parent Hub an average score of 7.7 out of 10. Furthermore, **90% said that they were recommending Co-Parent Hub to the families they work with.** The one respondent who was not recommending Co-Parent Hub was because they were a researcher who does not work directly with parents.

- *“This has allowed parents to find a safe forum to speak to one another about their children” – Mediator and Separated Parents Intervention Programme provider*
- *“Mediation helps separated parents to begin to talk and trust each other again. Co-parent hub helps them build on that” – Mediator*
- *“Parenting Plans are building blocks and access to them at the outset helps to guide parents along a the path that their children wish them to take - in that that they can be brought up in the love and guidance of both (or indeed all) their parents.” – Researcher*

**The majority of parents have found their way to Co-Parent Hub from a Cafcass referral (47%),** followed by being signposted from the gov.uk website (27%) or Cafcass website (11%). However, **referrals have also been made from multiple Cafcass partners:** gingerbread.org; support through court charity; Facebook; ‘strengthening families, strengthening communities’ newsletter; oneplusone.org; NACCC.org; advicenow; Brighton and Hove LA website; a number of mediation websites and also seeitdifferently videos (part of DWP challenge fund).

## 2.8 Co-Parent Hub content is generally well-liked

**Users, from 28<sup>th</sup> April – 14<sup>th</sup> December, have looked at 183,468 pages and articles on Co-Parent Hub.** The most popular content being:

- Parenting Plan page (13,197 pageviews)
- Getting it Right for Children activity (3,048 pageviews)
- Separated Parents Information Programme page (2,942 pageviews)
- Covid-19 information page (2,148 pageviews)
- Listening to Children page (1,913 pageviews)

The Parenting Plan is attracting the most traffic and interest, which is positive, as it is the online feature that actively facilitates making child arrangements.

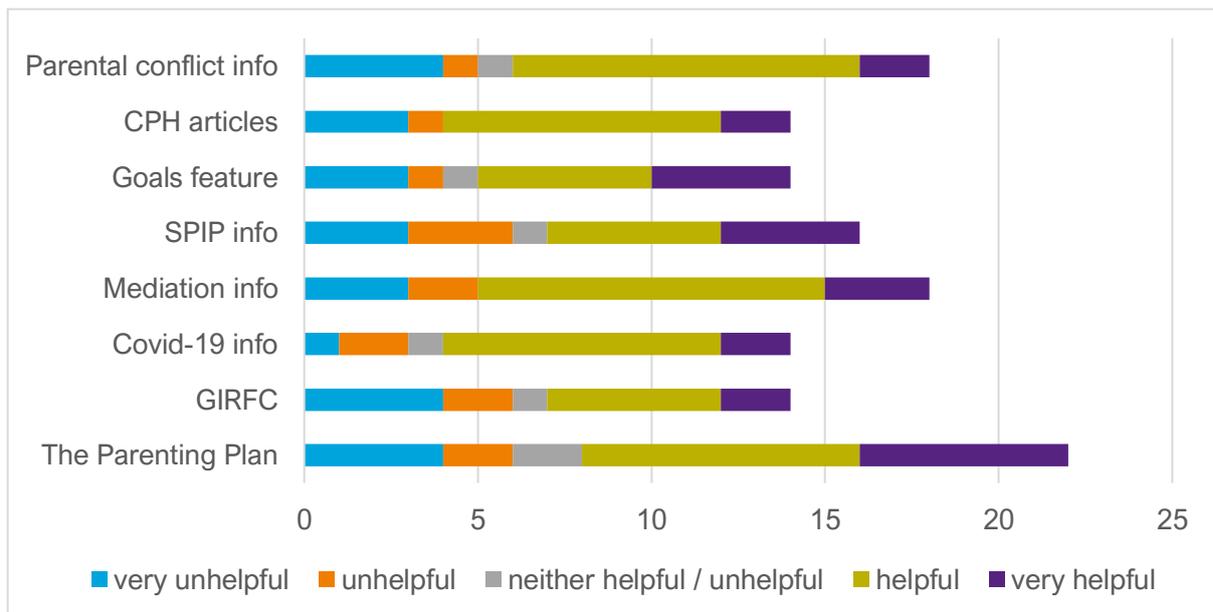
Parents who were interviewed, or who chose to submit feedback through the user survey, were asked to rate features on Co-Parent Hub from very unhelpful to very helpful and **the majority of content on Co-Parent Hub was considered to be helpful of very helpful.**

The **information on Mediation was the most popular**, with 72% of parents finding it helpful or very helpful. The Co-Parent Hub project team worked closely with Mediators on reviewing and updating the content at the beginning of the March 2020 lockdown, to ensure parents had the right information available.

The **Covid-19 content also scored well with 71% of parents stating that they found it helpful or very helpful.** The ‘help for parents during lockdown’ article was the most viewed article on Co-Parent Hub, from 28<sup>th</sup> April – 14<sup>th</sup> December, with 639 pageviews.

Co-Parent Hub also gives parents the option of providing feedback after completing the ‘Getting it Right for Children’ activity, which was rated as the least helpful feature of Co-Parent Hub (only 50% of parents found it helpful or very helpful). Although there are only very few submissions to the separate user survey, two users provided the following feedback:

- *“I’ve found the videos I’ve watched on getting it right for children really helpful and made me see things so much more differently”*
- *“I agree with all the situations and the ways to improve each situation. I have seen my children affected by similar situations.”*



**Graph 1:** to show ‘how helpful’ parents scored different features of Co-Parent Hub

### 3. Issues with Co-Parent Hub in its current format

Section 2 evidences that Co-Parent Hub is working well for a small number of users but is having limited wider impact. We know that take-up is good, the content is well-liked, and that some Family Court Advisers are using it effectively in their practice to support parents in coming to arrangements. However, getting both parents to engage with Co-Parent Hub is presenting a problem and reducing the efficacy of the service. Fewer parents than we’d like to see are completing a Parenting Plan, however, where it is used it can be effective and contribute to positive outcomes.

Section 3 outlines the main issues with Co-Parent Hub is its current format.

#### 3.1 Only a very small proportion of users interact with Co-Parent Hub’s interactive features, which limits its impact as a tool for Online Dispute Resolution

The interactive features of Co-Parent Hub, including Getting it Right for Children and the online Parenting Plan, are the key elements of the website that can help parents come to child-arrangements. Only 10% (156/1,637) of users that have created a Co-Parent Hub account and started an online Parenting Plan with the other parent, and it is not clear if these plans are finalised.

Put another way, of the 18,093 users who accessed Co-Parent Hub in the pilot period, **less than 1% used Co-Parent Hub in the way it was intended** – as a resource that supports co-parents to come to arrangements together using the online Parenting Plan.

### **3.2 There is limited engagement from parents, which is exacerbated if technical issues are experienced**

Many parents do not sufficiently engage with Co-Parent Hub, with only 15% of users going onto the website creating an account to access more features. Furthermore, approximately 47% of users who click onto Co-Parent Hub choose to leave the site immediately and do not engage with any content or the interactive features.

Within parent feedback, on average, **parents scored Co-Parent Hub 5.5 out of 10**. For parents who gave lower scores, generally three different reasons were provided as to why Co-Parent Hub had not helped them, which are all linked to lack of user engagement:

Primarily, **if a parent believed their ex-partner was not willing to engage with Co-Parent Hub**, they saw no point in continuing to work through the website.

- *“In theory, I did like the idea of it, but my ex-partner just won’t engage.”*
- *“I’m not a detailed user, as you can’t do it one-sided”*
- *“My ex-partner is not contributing so [it] hasn’t worked ... I’ve left it for the moment”*

Secondly, **if a parent experienced technical issues when using Co-Parent Hub**, they tended to disengage with the website.

- *“Content is very good, I would just improve technical side (e.g. I used Apple Mac and sometimes it didn’t work smooth)”*
- *“I found it hard to use. Difficulty navigating. When editing and it saves, I can’t figure out how to save and submit.”*

Finally, a few parents commented that **the animosity between them and their co-parent is “too big” to be solved by online dispute resolution**.

- *“Tried to deal with it without going through court, but no form of co-parenting hub is going to be useful when dealing with this sort of person”*
- *“The hub would be more helpful if the laws ensured the resident parent and the child were safe and there were mediators to assist maybe.”*

**For Co-Parent Hub to have a positive impact on children and families, it is important that parents work together on Co-Parent Hub**, which is not something the current website is achieving well.

Parental feedback has indicated that **making Co-Parent Hub content fit more clearly with Cafcass and court-ordered activity would better incentivise parents to work together**. This sentiment has been reflected in previous pilot learning, for example, in the Support with Making Child Arrangements pilot where it was found that a key reason why parents didn’t take

part in Alternative Dispute Resolution options was because they “wanted an enforceable agreement”. Parents who used Co-Parent Hub have said the following:

- *“It was helpful having it [Co-Parent Hub use] ordered (and written into the Cafcass report). Previous attempts at having a plan in place have failed. It has been working during the court process.”*
- *“It’s a pity the court can’t order it. They can say to go to Mediation - why can’t they instruct you to do this. It would’ve made sense - not everyone can afford mediation, whereas this is cheap. Going to court is ridiculously expensive. When you come out at the end, which could be monitored by Cafcass... Where is the support after the case is concluded?”*

### **3.3 The Voice of the Child does not come across as strongly in some elements of the Co-Parent Hub**

Although this is a priority content area (that has been in development during phase 3 of the pilot and will be rolled out in January 2021), there are still areas of Co-Parent Hub that do not clearly emphasise the importance of the Voice of the Child to users.

One area, in particular, that fails to effectively and sensitively include children in decision-making that impacts them is the online Parenting Plan. A parent we spoke to gave the following feedback:

- *“Allow children to have a voice. I didn’t get as far to look as to what input children were given in the plan” – parent*

The Family Justice Young People’s Board was also consulted about how to improve the online Parenting Plan. They wanted:

- *“to be included in the decisions about the arrangements – to have a voice in what is best for them”*
- *“the child to be able to identify their own ‘busy’ days when they have hobbies or time with friends etc”*

Finally, Family Court Advisers have also shared ways to improve the Parenting Plan in a very similar way, that links to giving children a greater voice in decision-making:

- *“For older children, a format for expressing their views independently – in a way that relates directly to the headings of the Parenting Plan”*
- *“For younger children / more contentious cases a provisional version of the Parenting Plan in child friendly terminology which the parents share with the child and on which the child, perhaps with the Family Court Adviser, can comment. This could include options for the child to comment on. We noted the importance for all ages of parents sharing that they have agreed the basics – for example about communication – that shows the child that there is progress and agreement, not just the disagreement”*
- *“For all ages, a shareable version of the plan once agreed”*

Currently, there are issues with downloading the online Parenting Plan for individual users and also the PDF version that can be used is clunky and difficult to read. Whilst in pilot phase this format was appropriate, as a tool that can be more widely accessed, there are some concerns around whether the online Parenting Plan is technically fit for purpose.

### 3.4 Co-Parent Hub is hard to find

Unless a user has found Co-Parent Hub through other websites or referred to it directly by a Cafcass Family Court Adviser, it is difficult to intuitively search for Co-Parent Hub and find it. The current website URL for Co-Parent Hub does not have “Co-Parent Hub” in it, which may be confusing for users.

### 3.5 Content development and creation is time consuming and is not our expertise

Some parental feedback has indicated that Co-Parent Hub content is not always clear:

- *“On the parenting hub, I think what would be more helpful is if they were explained a bit better. So, everyone has a better understanding - some things are said in more legal terms, which is if you haven't gone to school to be a solicitor, you won't get it. The terminology used is failing it.” – parent*

Furthermore, the resource required to update and produce new content is very high, especially as our content creators have no formal training or expertise in producing interesting and engaging content.

Parents, professionals and Family Justice Young People’s Board members have also suggested that there is information they’d like to find on Co-Parent Hub that is not currently available. These topics include:

- Domestic Abuse v. Parental Alienation
- Parental Conflict
- Further information for children
- More specific examples for parents on how to plan for occasions where child-care is shared e.g. birthdays or school events
- Parallel parenting
- Information for extended families and grandparents

### 3.6 There are issues with the functionality of Co-Parent Hub in its current format

There are three main issues with the functionality of Co-Parent Hub, that limit its impact: 1) there are a number of technical issues with the online Parenting Plan that make it difficult for parents to use both individually and with a co-parent or other carer; 2) accessibility features are lacking and are a barrier to engagement for some parents and carers; 3) Cafcass are not in control of Co-Parent Hub functionality, so if there are experienced issues, they cannot be resolved in-house.

## 4. Thank You and Next Steps

Following the evaluation of Co-Parent Hub, and building on the success of this award-winning initiative, we are now taking it out of pilot phase and integrating it into our new offer for children and families. The valuable content on Co-Parent Hub will be moved to the Cafcass website where it will be easier to access, use and navigate. This will provide greater control and flexibility over the content and we will be able to be more responsive. We aim to complete the transfer to the Cafcass website by the end of June 2021.

The learning from this evaluation will feed directly into Cafcass' future work around developing better online support for children and families. Our aim is that the Cafcass website will provide families with clear information to help them negotiate child arrangements, and sustain effective co-parenting relationships, in the best interests of the child.

A huge thank you to all the parents, Family Court Advisers, the Family Justice Young People's Board members, and our partners for giving up your time and making such valuable contributions to this evaluation.

**End.**