



**Board meeting (public) minutes**  
**Thursday, 27 January 2022, 13:00 to 15:30**  
**Zoom**

**Present**

Sally Cheshire, Chair  
Eileen Munro, Board member  
Catherine Doran, Board member and Chair of the People Committee  
Helen Jones, Board member and Chair of ARAC  
Paul Grant, Board member and Chair of the Performance and Quality Committee  
Joanna Nicolas, Board member (Co-opted)  
Mandy Jones, Board member  
Rohan Sivanandan, Board member

**In attendance**

Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive  
Julie Brown, Director of Resources  
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy  
Jack Cordery, National Director of Operations  
Sarah Parsons, Deputy Director and Principal Social Worker  
Mel Carew, Head of Legal Services  
Adam Bowles, Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development  
Merryn Hockaday, Interim Head of Communications  
James Jackson-Ellis, Corporate Officer (Secretariat Services)  
Scott Harnett, Projects Officer (Minutes)  
Morgan Proverbs, Business Services Officer Chief Executive Office  
Benjamin McCormick, FJYPB representative  
Nicola Blakebrough, Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services)  
Neal Barcoe, MOJ representative  
Alison Wedge, MOJ representative

**Guests**

Jennifer Okoro-Thompson, Family Forum Facilitator

**Apologies**

Sophie Humphreys, Board member (Co-opted)

## **1. Introduction from the Chair**

### **1.1. Welcome and apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first Cafcass Board meeting of 2022. The Chair thanked those stakeholders attending for having taken the time to join, reminding those observing they had the opportunity to submit questions ahead of the meeting or afterwards if they wanted to follow up on a particular matter. Attendees were informed that the meeting would be recorded, and audio extracts would be made available on the Cafcass website.

Apologies were noted.

### **1.2. Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **1.3. Minutes, actions, and matters arising**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

## **2. Chief Executive Officer's Report**

The Chief Executive Officer informed the Board that the report would comprise of updates from the senior leadership team on Cafcass's ongoing response to the impact of Covid-19, together with more general updates in terms of our practice, our people, and our partners in the family justice system. Before proceeding, she wished to express thanks to Cafcass staff for all the hard work they were doing to deliver and improve the overall quality of the organisation's practice.

### **2.1. Covid-19 overview and the numbers**

Cafcass continued to operate and sustain the quality of practice despite the continued heightened levels of open children's cases. Senior leaders were working hard to remain visible and support frontline staff, sustaining dialogue with them through vlogs, live-events, think-ins, and other engagement.

The Covid-19 Programme Board continued to meet fortnightly, and prioritisation remained a key item of discussion. A contingency planning meeting had also been convened and was being held on a bi-weekly basis to review the impact of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 on staff and capacity. There had been a rise in absence and self-isolation in January and currently around 30 members of staff were absent due to Covid-19. Staff morale continued to hold but the relentless pressure of allocations, lengthening child case durations and absence of a pay award was impacting Cafcass' staff. Notwithstanding the winding down of Covid restrictions, Cafcass had maintained a near business-as-usual model, with Family Court Advisors (FCAs) continuing to visit children (subject to a risk assessment) and attend offices or court in person, as required.

The Chief Executive Officer reported that although demand in overall terms was lower than at the same time last year, open proceedings remained around 5,000 cases higher than before the pandemic which equates to 8,000 more children.

System throughput remained compromised as disposals remained lower than before the pandemic and the system continued to hold more open work than it closed. Open children's cases held by FCAs remained high despite some reduction in the last 12 months following a decision by Cafcass' leadership to protect staff from excessive levels of open children's cases and invest in frontline recruitment. Duty allocations in service areas were close to the highest they have been since the introduction of the Child Arrangements Programme in 2014 and this was absorbing 25% of service manager capacity with Cafcass remaining concerned about the pressure on managers and their ability to oversee practice safely. This was a significant factor in the decision to activate the prioritisation process in some areas. The risk remained that any recent decrease in new referrals might be temporary as a result of suppressed demand while the family justice system recovered from the impact of the pandemic. The recent Ministry of Justice (MoJ) forecasts suggested demand might increase by 10% in 2022 – 23.

The leadership team had acted in partnership with the Cafcass Board to protect the well-being of colleagues and prioritise the effectiveness of the organisation's work with children and families. As a result, it had been agreed that an upper-level ceiling of open children's cases held by FCAs should be set. This had been set at 25 for Work After First Hearing (WAFH) and no more than 40 in the Early Intervention Team (EIT) or Work to First Hearing (WTFH). It was noted that this was not intended as a fixed or absolute number but a starting point for discussions between FCAs and managers.

Board members were informed that Cafcass' main challenge was to reduce the additional 8,000 open children's cases back down to pre-pandemic numbers. In the short term, it was confirmed that the MoJ had recognised the pressure Cafcass was currently under and agreed to support Cafcass to sustain its current staffing levels.

The Board acknowledged the profound impact that the higher demand and consequent staff turnover was having on frontline capacity and wanted to recognise the work Cafcass was doing to recruit, train and induct staff while continuing to ensure high-risk child cases were properly safeguarded and prioritised and demand met. They acknowledged Cafcass was constrained by the limited availability of trained social workers to recruit, and the increasingly competitive staff salaries of local authorities.

## **2.2. Prioritisation**

The National Director of Operations reported that four regions had activated the prioritisation protocol and opened allocation hubs, supporting six service areas. This was already having a positive impact by helping to free up service manager capacity, with three of the areas already potentially on course to deactivate the protocol and return to business as usual by March. The Board were reminded that one of the key tools in monitoring whether there was a need to trigger prioritisation in each area was the balanced scorecard which the Covid-19 Programme Board, Assistant Directors and local teams used to review key information by service area level.

Part of the additional funding received from the MoJ was being used to establish post assessment hubs to take on responsibility for children's cases in which Cafcass' assessments were complete but a final court date remained outstanding.

The Board thanked Cafcass and its partners across the family justice system for its work in reducing frontline demand. They asked if extending proceedings to allow time for Cafcass to allocate a lead FCA was directly impacting children. In response, it was acknowledged that the main feedback received from children and young people, including the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) was that extended proceedings could have a profound negative effect on their morale, schooling, and mental health. The Chief Executive Officer informed the Board that Cafcass continued to work closely with the FJYPB to consider ways to enhance children's voices. It was noted that the recent Cafcass' Partners Forum had agreed to focus on the impact of delayed proceedings on children, and what constructive steps can be taken in the wider system to reduce this.

### **2.3. Performance and Accountability Framework**

The National Director of Operations reported that work was ongoing to continue to improve the organisation's performance and accountability framework. The framework provided FCAs and managers with the knowledge and skills they would need to deliver their jobs effectively, and to enable leaders to set clear and honest expectations about the overall standard and quality of practice required. This was intended to help improve the overall quality of frontline practice, and to reduce the number of children's cases graded 'met' or 'requires improvement' through audit.

An important component of the framework included being more open and clear with staff, children, and families about what good practice looks like. It also required Cafcass to review its current approach to frontline management by considering how many FCAs a service manager should be responsible for safely overseeing and setting stricter parameters to ensure there were enough managers and supervisors in post to undertake management oversight and practice supervision effectively. The final stage was having a comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date system of data to enable Cafcass to identify any potential capacity shortfalls and respond to emerging trends.

The performance and accountability framework cycle would be supported by an enhanced quality assurance framework with regular moderation exercises and quality assurance of Cafcass practice at several points in the organisation's annual cycle. This was intended to help challenge staff and organisational thinking, and to ensure there were suitable checks and balances in place to provide appropriate oversight and safeguarding to the work Cafcass delivered for children and families.

### **2.4. National and Regional Improvement Planning**

The National Director of Operations reported that progress in implementing the local improvement plans agreed for each region were being evaluated by the region's respective assistant directors with support from Cafcass' Learning Analysis Manager. Impact narratives were being written to inform the organisation's annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. Improvement plan evaluations were evidencing that the quality and impact of practice had been sustained through another challenging year – with some aspects of practice improving. Variations in performance between regions existed for a combination of reasons, including differences in demand pressures; capacity of service managers; staff turnover and sickness; and the level of reliance on locum practitioners.

### **2.5. Ofsted Annual Self-Evaluation**

The Chief Executive Officer reported that Cafcass' annual self-evaluation for Ofsted would be ready for submission in the coming weeks and would form the basis of the organisations' annual engagement meeting in April. The outcome of these discussions would establish the areas of practice Ofsted choose to focus on during their next inspection in 2023.

## **2.6. Budget and Spending Review 2022 – 23**

The Director of Resources reported that Cafcass had received provisional allocations of funding for 2022 – 2025 and the allocation consolidated the additional spending approval of £4.7m into the baseline awarded in 2021 – 22. Included within the allocation were uplifts for pay and general inflation through to 2025, and it was noted the balance of increase in the allocation would have to cover any unavoidable cost increases including several upcoming estates moves and the resources required to deliver the remainder of the organisation's strategic programme. The Board were informed that MoJ had been supportive in providing Cafcass the funding it needed to increase spending and retain the higher levels of staffing it needed to continue to meet demand. The Director of Resources and Board members expressed thanks to MoJ colleagues for their continued support.

## **2.7. Workforce Update**

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development reported that although higher than usual turnover of both social workers, corporate and business staff remained an issue, Cafcass had been able to recruit more joiners than leavers between April 2021 and January 2022. The findings of the recently conducted staff survey suggested that the most common reason for staff choosing to leave were retirement or opportunities for career progression elsewhere. To address this, work was underway to improve Cafcass' brand. Two live virtual attraction events had already taken place for prospective employees.

The Board acknowledged that even if Cafcass had recruited more starters than leavers in the period between April and January, the high level of FCA leavers could represent an enormous loss of professional expertise, skill, and knowledge for the organisation in social work.

Sickness absence had increased following the emergence of the Omicron variant and the average loss of working days for the last three months for social work staff was 12.5 days and 10.7 days for corporate and business services staff. Sickness absence linked to mental ill health at work for social workers had decreased significantly, from a peak of around 25% of all absence days reported to just 15% currently. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development agreed to provide more information and data on the reason for the recent decline in mental health related sick leave. The Board were informed that several proposals would be submitted to the Corporate Management Team in February in response to the recent increase in sickness-related absence, including more focussed and less discretionary triggers for managers reporting sickness related absence, improved training for staff on sickness related absence, and increased oversight by managers, among other things.

MoJ confirmation had been received that in line with the Civil Service Pay Guidance issued by the Cabinet Office, the pay award for 2021 – 22 would be limited to an additional £250 (pro-rata) for those with a full-time equivalent salary of less than £24,000. This had been communicated to both staff and the Unions, the latter of whom had expressed disappointment in the decision and were raising their concerns with the MoJ and Secretary of State in writing. It was acknowledged that the

limitations in Cafcass' ability to set its own pay awards over the last six years had left the organisation at a comparative disadvantage in recruiting and retaining staff compared to local authorities who had more autonomy.

Cafcass was considering a variety of options to ensure staff were better remunerated, including potentially seeking greater autonomy to determine staff pay, reflecting the arms-length nature of Cafcass' relationship with the MoJ and recognition that the appropriate pay benchmarks for Cafcass' social work staff were not with the civil service but local authority children's services. The Chair of the Board and Chief Executive Officer had a ministerial meeting scheduled for February, during which the issue of the discrepancy between Cafcass and local authority pay awards would be raised and discussed in more detail.

**Action 1:** The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development will provide the Board with additional information and data on the possible reasons for Cafcass' recent decline in mental health related sick leave.

## **2.8. Workforce Matters – Transformation Update**

The Director of Strategy reported that progress continued to be made across the four elements of the workforce matters transformation programme, which focused on a new rewards package, pay structure, the Cafcass academy and development of the HR/Payroll system. The Board were informed that the new career and qualification pathways were not expected to be in place until 2023 at the earliest, and as such more short-term recommendations would need to be identified.

## **2.9. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy**

The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Steering Group had met in November 2021 to review the respective role and contribution of the steering group, diversity champions and diversity staff networks to the wider equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy (the Strategy). The steering group had also met in January 2022 to review the draft Strategy and set out the priority actions and principles underpinning each of the Strategy's four main objectives, each of which would be the responsibility of an assigned Director and the Chief Executive Officer. The Strategy would be further refined at the steering group's next meeting in March before its presentation to the Cafcass Board in April.

The Board noted that Cafcass' Annual Gender Pay Gap Report was being finalised ready for publication in March.

## **2.10. Seeing Children Update**

The National Director of Operations reported that as of 20 January 2022, 96% of children with open children's proceedings were recorded as having had a meeting with their FCA, with over 71.1% of children having been 'seen in person'. Ensuring all children had a record of the engagement with them remained a key focus for Cafcass' practitioners.

## **2.11. Family Justice Young People's Board Work Programme Update**

The Board were informed that the number of commissions undertaken by the FJYPB had increased from 316 in 2020 to 457 in 2021, with 239 undertaken with Cafcass. Cafcass had helped to promote this increase by providing funding for additional support to the FJYPB; committing to advance the representation of the FJYPB in many more areas of organisational work; and supporting additional challenge from the FJYPB and the work they deliver.

## **2.12. Together Framework Implementation Plan 2022**

The Board were informed that following its official launch in September 2021, work was progressing on the implementation of Cafcass' new practice framework 'Together for children and families'. A new template for the child's plan was being launched on Cafcass' 'ChildFirst' case management system on 31 January 2022. The new plan would help FCAs focus on and consider the risks and strengths that each child was facing in their day-to-day lives, as well as what was special or unique about them and to analyse how this might impact them. Cafcass' would be holding a festival in 2022 for the volunteer champions of the Together framework. This event was intended to bring champions together and secure their commitment for the implementation activities agreed for 2022.

## **2.13. Principal Social Worker Update**

The Deputy Director and Principal Social Worker highlighted that Cafcass had undertaken a child case quality audit of 120 children's public and private law records in November 2021. This audit concluded that practice was 'good' or 'outstanding' in 71% of the children's cases reviewed, a better result than reported previously thanks to an increase in FCAs demonstrating a clear and concise rationale for the recommendations and decisions they made, making detailed but clear and respectful recordings that children and families could understand, and working hard to understand what was unique about each child.

26% of the work reviewed was graded 'met', while 3% of the children's cases assessed did not meet the standards of practice expected. Understanding and assessing risk in families with domestic abuse was identified as a common area of improvement in children's cases graded as 'requires improvement', as well as recording and understanding children's diversity. The Board were advised that addressing these learning themes already featured prominently in Cafcass' national and regional improvement plans, and further plans to support the transfer of this learning into practice had been approved by the Corporate Management Team.

The Board were informed that Cafcass had also conducted a domestic abuse child case file audit in November 2021. The Deputy Director and Principal Social Worker highlighted that the number of children's records in which FCAs were found to have made decisions that did not fully promote children's safety had almost halved, from 8.5% of all records in November 2020 to 4.5% in November 2021. However, these improvements were not yet consistent nationally, with significant regional variation identified in this and other quality audits throughout the year. The Board were advised that operational managers and supervisors would need to bring a relentless and forensic focus to this aspect of practice in the coming year, learning from the approach and success of those areas that have achieved more progress and improvement in the quality of practice.

The Board asked if the regional variations identified in the domestic abuse audit could be addressed by simply transferring knowledge or learning between regions, or if they were caused by more specific contextual issues that had to be addressed locally. The Deputy Director and Principal Social

Worker confirmed that a fuller analysis was currently underway; however, initial evidence suggested some of the variation evident appeared to be connected to wider systemic issues, including the distinct thresholds applied to safeguarding by Cafcass and local authorities, as well as the need to train and familiarise new FCAs with Cafcass' own internal thresholds and guidance. It was suggested closer co-ordination between Cafcass, and the local authorities could be one way of addressing these issues. The Board noted the recent collaboration between Cafcass and local authorities in Essex to undertake joint-training and deliver shared thresholds for identifying and assessing domestic abuse.

### **3. Family Justice Young People's Board Report**

The FJYPB representative provided an update on activities and highlighted that a series of Voice of the Child Webinars had been held in October 2021 in place of the annual in-person conference. They had been joined by over 200 professionals and the FJYPB had used their webinars to focus on the theme of communication, including their first webinar aimed at children and young people on Children in Care Councils on the subject of 'empowering your voice'. The key messages of the webinar included ensuring the language used by professionals was accurate and understandable for children regardless of whether it was shared in writing or spoken; ensuring that professionals were open and enthusiastic when asking children or young people about their diversity to ensure they understand what makes them unique; and the importance of sharing as much information as possible with children or young people in their first language.

The FJYPB were in the process of launching their first book, *In Our Shoes*, on 27 January 2022. This was the FJYPB's first external publication, and all attendees were invited to join the launch event. The book featured the personal stories and experiences of many of the FJYPB's own members and attendees were informed that many members felt positive to be able to share their experiences in writing to help enlighten others about the experiences of children and young people in the family justice system.

Two FJYPB members had recorded videos to celebrate and share important messages about Black history month and the videos had been shared across Cafcass. The FJYPB was continuing to work with Cafcass to ensure appropriate language was used about children and families. In particular, the FJYPB were keen to ensure that Cafcass used language that a child would understand when speaking to families or young people, and attendees were reminded that a 'word busting team' had been established to identify two appropriate words a month to eliminate from use and replace with more child friendly language.

The Board asked for the FJYPB's view on the impact on children of long-term delays in the family justice system. The FJYPB representative advised the Board that family court proceedings could be periods of profound uncertainty for children and young people and many members were therefore concerned that anything which prolonged that sense of uncertainty could leave children feeling stressed and worried. They were also concerned by the lack of support available to children to help with mental health issues, and some members reported feeling their voices had not been heard particularly where a frequent change of FCA or social worker had resulted in their having to share their own thoughts and experiences on more than one occasion.

The Chair thanked the FJYPB representative for his presentation and for the number of commissions the FJYPB had undertaken in the last year and congratulated everyone involved in the creation of the new book.

#### **4. Reports from Committees**

##### **Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reported that the Committee had met on 13 December 2021 and had reviewed the organisational and strategic risk report. The main emerging risks for the Board to note were the potential impact of the upcoming review into transparency in the family courts, as well as the ongoing impact of high staff turnover and the potential loss of specialist knowledge associated with social work staff leaving Cafcass.

##### **Performance and Quality Committee**

The Chair of the Performance and Quality Committee reported that the Committee had met on 6 December 2021 and had received an update on the recent Bell v Tavistock judgement, following a Court of Appeal ruling in September 2021. The ruling meant that children under 16 could now take puberty blockers without their parents' consent, provided the clinician was satisfied that they were competent. A practice toolkit was in development which would be released to practice staff to use, when ready.

Committee members had noted that Cafcass was continuing to achieve most of the headline key performance indicators set by the MoJ, although this was becoming increasingly challenging to sustain consistently.

The Committee received an overview of the Customer Services Team, including an update on complaints and compliments received by Cafcass. Cafcass had received 871 complaints and 891 compliments in the year to October 2021 and positively, this was the first time Cafcass had received more compliments than complaints for its service. There had been a reduction in the timeliness of responses to feedback and this was predominantly due to an increase in complaints received and an increase in staff sickness absence in the Customer Services Team. The Committee would receive a further update in March 2022 on the current Complaints review.

##### **People Committee**

The Chair of the People Committee confirmed that the Committee had held its second meeting on 15 November 2021 and had reviewed the People and Organisational Development Strategy, which had been approved by the Board in October, as well as the organisation's existing emerging talent programme and proposals for an employee recognition strategy. The Committee also received a workforce summary report providing the Committee with headline data on staff numbers, turnover, recruitment, sickness absence and employee relations.

#### **5. Annual Report and Accounts 2020 - 21**

The Director of Resources and Head of Communications presented the published annual report and accounts for 2020 – 21 which had been laid before Parliament and published on gov.uk on 28

October 2021 following an unqualified audit certification on 22 October 2021. The Board thanked everybody involved in the production of the annual report and accounts.

## **6. Family Forum**

The Family Forum Facilitator reported that following the induction of its members in July and August 2021, the Family Forum had held its first meeting and agreed the three priorities over the next 12 months. Current members included parents, carers or extended family members who had either been nominated by one of Cafcass' partner agencies or else had participated in a 'listen and learn' conversation with Cafcass after submitting feedback. Feedback from the Family Forum would continue to inform the content for national learning across Cafcass through various event and learning opportunities for practitioners and teams moving forward.

## **7. Close and Any Other Business**

The Chair reiterated that the Board invites questions from stakeholders and members of the public who attend the open Board meetings and asked that if anybody wished to raise any further questions on the matters discussed, that these should be sent in by writing to the Members Office. The Chief Executive Officer and members of the management team provided a response to those questions received in advance and responses can be read in appendix 1.

No other business was raised.

**Minutes approved by the Board Chair, Sally Cheshire, 28/04/2022**



### **ACTION SUMMARY**

Action 1: The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development will provide the Board with additional information and data on the possible reasons for Cafcass' recent decline in mental health related sick leave.

## Appendix 1 - Questions submitted in advance for the Cafcass Board meeting on 26 January 2022

Anne Coyle, Interim Director for Children's Services, City of York Council asked, *"I welcome a conversation about the use of placement with parents and Cafcass view on the effectiveness of such an outcome in care proceedings. Does Cafcass believe that the local authority sharing parental responsibility whilst children remain with at home is a positive outcome for families and if so, why? Given that the holding of shared parental responsibility is by definition an agreement that significant harm exists. It would be helpful to understand how Cafcass assures itself that such recommendations by the Children's Guardian are proportionate, specifically do you consider the use of this practice regionally, nationally and locally?"*

Our response is that we would welcome a conversation with you, especially as there are regional differences in the consideration, proposal and use of 'care orders at home'. We have made a commitment to support the implementation of the recommendations of the President's Public Law Working Group and this arrangement is one of those recommendations we are prioritising at Cafcass. Whilst children's guardians are appointed by the court and have greater independence than local authority children's social workers, Cafcass has a statutory duty to set standards for the quality of practice and guidance for practitioners. We have put in place practice quality standards in public law, drawn up in discussion with practitioners and a wide range of partners, including Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), independent Reviewing Officers and the Principal Social Worker network. The standards include one entitled 'Questioning care orders at home', which reflect the reservations you express in your question. The practice quality standards are on our website and can be found at <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/about-cafcass/policies/cafcass-policies/>. The first standard states, *"I have questioned and challenged why the local authority is seeking to safeguard the child through applying for parental responsibility at this stage rather than using its other powers to protect the child."* We are also undertaking a scoping exercise about the prevalence of these arrangements in different areas as the basis of discussion with local courts and local authority partners.

Alice Twaite, Coordinator/blogger, The Transparency Project, asked, *"we understand there are places in England where neither Cafcass guardians nor NYAS contractors are currently available for allocation to new cases. What are the arrangements for cases where Cafcass is unable to allocate (and in particular those where NYAS is also unable to provide a backup alternative), which areas are currently unable to allocate or have a delay in allocating, and what are the likely timescales for Cafcass normalising service in those areas?"*

Cafcass has activated the prioritisation protocol and opened allocation hubs in 6 of its 19 service areas, serving 14 courts in England. This is the result of pressures on the system caused by a combination of demand pressures and capacity challenges. In terms of demand pressures, these are the increased numbers of orders for reports in private law which were rising before the pandemic; the backlog resulting from the pandemic; and the increased time it is taking for the courts to dispose of children's cases, which often requires additional work by Cafcass. In terms of capacity challenges, there is a rise in staff sickness in part due to the pandemic but there are also issues in respect of recruitment and retention and the additional demands on frontline managers. These have driven up the numbers of children's cases held by family court advisers and service managers, which if not mitigated would impact on the quality of practice.

Prioritisation does not include public law applications, which are allocated in the normal way. We monitor the impact of these pressures on the capacity of our service to allocate work to family court advisers and where this is compromised, we initiate discussions with local judiciary and other partners to seek joint measures to mitigate the challenges outlined above. If these measures take time to work, we consider activating prioritisation and opening an allocation hub.

The allocation hubs open when the prioritisation protocol is activated, assist in ensuring that the children's cases that are urgent or where the welfare and safety of the children is at risk, are prioritised. Longer timescales are agreed with the court for completing reports in less urgent cases. The children's cases held in the allocation hub are closely monitored by a senior practitioner, providing regular risk assessment of new information and offering families and courts a single point of contact.

The protocol has been successful in that it has helped to manage the number of children's cases allocated to family court advisers. It has helped to bring down the number of duty children's cases held by service managers so that they have the time for management oversight, supervision, and support of family court advisers with the aim of maintaining the quality of our service to children and families and courts. A full evaluation is now in progress.

Michael Lewkowicz, Director of Communications, Families Need Fathers, submitted three questions:

*(1) "What is being done to pro-actively reduce the time taken for proceedings?"*

Regarding durations, we are acutely aware of the detrimental impact of long proceedings on children and their families and are concerned about the recent increases in durations that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. As this is a system issue, Cafcass is working with our family justice partners to develop a coordinated response. The solutions include additional resources to expand capacity (including judicial sitting days and Cafcass social workers); targeted action for children and families in the longest running cases; and local agreements to amend processes to tackle local issues, often as part of partnership work to prevent the need for prioritisation.

The reality is that the scale of the challenge means we are unlikely to do more than stem further increases without more fundamental reform of the process and the forthcoming private law pathfinders will test a new approach that should reduce the need for repeated assessment, engage with children earlier and provide swifter resolution.

*(2) "What is the latest timescale for when Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes' (DAPPs) will be available online and when will they be available for women?"*

Regarding DAPPs, it is not possible for Cafcass to advise on a latest date. Cafcass currently commissions DAPPs on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and this is really a matter for them. The current DAPP contracts end in March 2023 and MoJ has established a DAPP Steering Group to advise on whether the programme requirements should change after that, including the need for a more specific focus to address the impact of behaviour on children for perpetrators who are parents, and the contribution of online delivery. In our view the need to substantially amend the programme and increase the number of providers means new programmes are unlikely to be in place in time for April 2023, but we cannot give a latest time.

*(3) The FJYPB were asked by Michael Lewkowicz to comment "on the effect on them of delays in the system (prior to the pandemic)".*

The FJYPB recognises the negative impact of delays in court on both children and families. This can be a time of uncertainty and worry and can place additional pressure upon children and young people. FJYPB Board members gave the following examples of the impact of delay.

- Delays in the court proceedings meant that everyone was stressed around me and that it had an effect on my mental health.
- Delays in the court system made me have no support for my mental health, making me stressed constantly about what was going to happen to me. Furthermore, I was always

worrying if I was going to move back home or not and that distracted me from many things like studying and forming friendships.

- Experiencing delays in the court process led to me being subject to further abuse by my mother, extending the period of trauma. It also made me feel that my voice was not being heard, and that my proceedings were not that important in the eyes of the court.
- The delays caused there to be an inconsistency with the support services working in my life, e.g., through staff changing, and as a result led to me frequently repeating my experiences but feeling as if my voice was not actually being heard by any professionals. I became confused as to what the reasons for me sharing my experiences were for.

The FJYPB recognises that delays in family courts have increased as a consequence of Covid. It is important to the children and young people in court proceedings that agencies work together to reduce these delays.

Karin Walker of KGW Family Law and Dr Supriya McKenna submitted a joint question and asked, *“to what extent do Cafcass officers receive specific training on the nature of narcissistic personality disorder, how to recognise its existence in a case and what if any effect would its existence have on the nature of the arrangements proposed for the child/ren and how do we go about training Cafcass Officers in narcissistic personality disorder?”*

Cafcass ran an extensive programme of training in 2019-20 on mental ill health and assessment. Following a tendering exercise this was delivered by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. The summary of the learning from this training is incorporated into induction training for all new Family Court Advisors and is available to access via our Cafcass Learning platform.

There was a section on personality disorder more generally, including narcissistic personality types. The Mental Health Thinking Tool that they developed for us (and which is appended), guides practitioners to think about the different ways a condition might manifest, the person's insight and management of that and the ways in which the behaviours (rather than diagnoses) impact the child. This tool doesn't mention any specific diagnoses but would be applicable in cases of narcissistic personality disorder.

Where there are chronic issues or evidence of significant harm because of narcissistic personality disorder there may also be a need for a part 25 psychiatric/psychological assessment (a psychologist's assessment would almost always be more useful in care proceedings). Our practitioners also have the option of talking through any possible concerns about narcissistic personality disorder with the psychology service too. In addition, our guidance where children are at risk of significant harm or have been harmed, requires us to take immediate action and refer them to local authority children's services and/or the police if necessary.

We would welcome Karin and Dr McKenna contacting us if they would want to signpost any resources and we could consider adding these to training material.