

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team
Overview

3 November 2025



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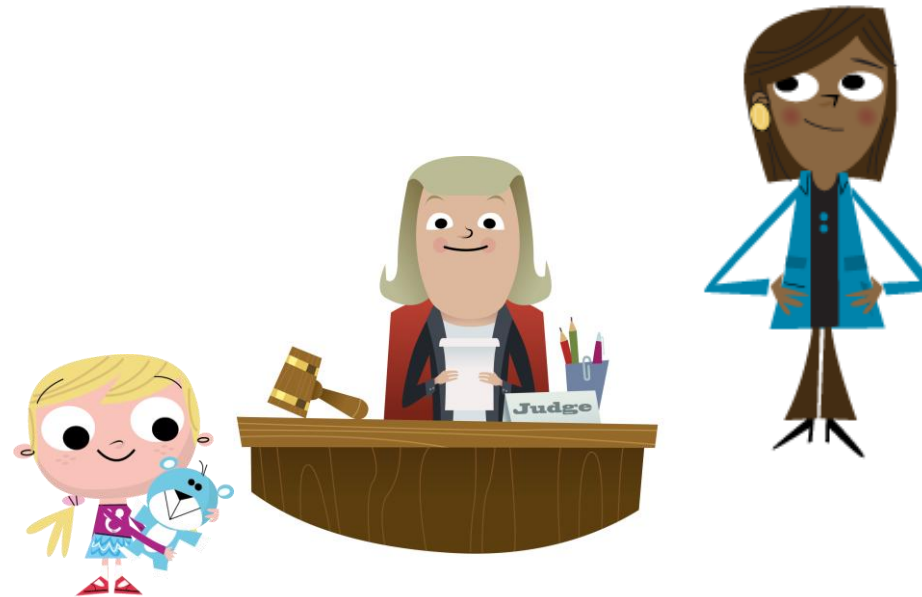
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Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April - August 2025: New demand and performance headlines (1)



- **23,667 total new children's cases featuring 36,474 children in the period; an increase of 3.1% (+702 children's cases / +1,055 children) of which:**
 - **Public Law demand 5.3% higher** (+364 children's cases / +631 children)
 - **Section 31 Care Applications have increased by 6.6%** (+316 Care Applications / +591 children)
 - **Private Law demand 2.1% higher** (+338 children's cases / +424 children)
 - **Section 7 demand is -7.3%** (-564 reports) compared to the same period last year
 - **Addendum report demand is -19.9%** (-435 reports) compared to the same period last year (but skewed by pathfinder cases which number **845 child impact reports in this period**)
 - **Unspecified Proceedings: Deprivation of Liberty: 590** Deprivation of Liberty Applications (589 children). This represents an increase of **11.5%** (+61 applications)
 - **228 new children's cases per working day** between 1 April 2025 and 31 August 2025
- **Section 31 Care & Supervision proceedings average 39 weeks in Quarter 1 2025/2026** (-3 weeks compared to same period last year), **Private Law, Work To First Hearing 10 weeks** (-1 week) and **Work After First Hearing, 53 weeks** (-4 weeks) compared to Quarter 1 2024/2025
- **97% of children on applicable cases had a completed child engagement record, with 93.1% seen in person**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April to August 2025 : New demand and performance headlines (2)



- Overall number of open children's cases (27,021 cases and 43,390 children) reduced by 3.8% (1,071 fewer children's cases / -2,307 fewer children) compared to the end of August 2024
- 23.9% decrease in children (2,361 fewer children) in proceedings lasting more than 52 weeks
- End August 2025, 7,502 children (4,389 children's cases) whose cases have been open for 52 weeks of whom 1,993 children (1,215 cases) open for 100 weeks or longer

This comprises:

- Public Law proceedings, 2,565 children (1,249 cases) 52 weeks or longer, of which 359 children (176 cases) open for 100 weeks or longer (32.0% (169) reduction)
- Private Law proceedings, 4,937 children (3,140 cases) 52 weeks or longer, of which 1,634 children (1,039 cases) open for 100 weeks or longer (33.1% (809) reduction)
- Average social work caseload at end of August 2025, 18.2 for long-term teams compared to 18.5 in August 2024
- For work to first hearing teams in Private Law, the average was 29.3; compared to 32.0 in August 2024
- In the last 3 months, 1,120 local audits were completed. 88.6% of eligible Family Court Advisers had a local case file audit (undertaken for 810 Family Court Advisers against 914 intended)
- 12-month social work turnover is stable at 14.3%

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April - August 2025: Domestic abuse and Pathfinder courts – Private law proceedings



- A total of **10,887** (circa. 19,590 children) Private Law children's cases were closed where domestic abuse was identified, representing **57.0%** of all closures—an increase of **1.1% points** compared to the 2024/2025 baseline.
- For **closed children's cases, where domestic abuse was identified** and at least one 16A was filed, accounted for 14.4% of cases—an increase of 0.6%pts compared to the 2024/2025 baseline

Revised Private Law practice direction (Practice Direction 36Z), 'Pathfinder', is now active in the Dorset, Birmingham & Solihull and West Yorkshire court areas

- On 1 September 2025 there were **939** children (**618** cases) in private law proceedings in a Pathfinder court (**3.9%** of children in open Private Law proceedings)
- For Pathfinder children's cases closed between 1 April and 30 June 2025, the average filing time for a child impact report (not welfare) was **7.9 weeks** (31 closed children's cases)
- For Pathfinder children's cases closed between 1 April and 30 June 2025, the average filing time for a child impact report (welfare requiring a harm and/or welfare assessment of the child(ren)) was **22.8 weeks** (127 closed children's cases)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Delay for children – progress with Family Justice Board priority – Cafcass action



- **Improve the focus on delay within the assessment and child's plan:** Managers review whether the Children's Guardian sets out and analyses an appropriate timetable for the child. A public law data dashboard supports practitioner managers and leaders to monitor the causes of delay and track proceedings
- **Mandatory supervision and oversight for delayed cases:** A full review of all proceedings over 100 weeks in both public and private law has been undertaken. Managers and Assistant Directors conducting regular reviews, identifying actions and escalating concerns to the court
- **Management oversight:** All proceedings exceeding 26 weeks have situational supervision focusing on actions to reduce delay
- **Reduce reliance on expert witnesses:** Children's Guardians are encouraged to challenge the use of experts
- **Collaboration with Courts and Partners:** Regular meetings with Designated Family Judges (DFJs) and Local Family Justice Boards (LFJBs) to review long-running cases, discuss barriers, and agree on solutions to expedite proceedings
- Children in **proceedings over 100 weeks to be escalated to Assistant Director** who will liaise directly with the Designated Family Judge
-
- **Updated guidance for proceedings with a Rule 16.4 appointment**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

National targeted improvement priorities: Domestic Abuse (1)



Ten revised workstreams in Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan (pre Ofsted findings and pre policy revaluation):

1. **Consistent use of new policy in practice** - specifically harm and risk assessment, the safety and action taken for connected children, review of existing contact arrangements, analysis of all safeguarding history and information from police checks, using the words that are reported by victims and safeguarding interviews (work to first hearing) that report clearly what is said about domestic abuse and harm.
2. **Clear rationales** that explain what is considered, the impact of harm on the child and how these are weighed together in professional advice to the court.
3. **Use of 16A risk reports consistently**, clarity about harm and risk being referred to local authorities with specifics on what is likely to happen if nothing changes.
4. **Continued use of targeted audit** to March 2026 (including any adjustments for Public Law proceedings).
5. **Regional self-evaluation (domestic abuse) priorities** into regional improvement plans

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

National targeted improvement priorities: Domestic Abuse (2)



6. **National Improvement Service led benchmarking** on what works in reflective supervision and use of supervision template.
7. **Revision to Rule 16.4** improvement programme to incorporate new timetable on appointment, early engagement with the child, review of options after first Section 7 report and target reduction to zero of all appointments over 100 weeks.
8. **Understanding and applying Practice Direction 12J** where domestic abuse is a risk factor.
9. **Strengthening practice support** - supporting inadequate and requires improvement work with strongest practitioners, two additional learning audits, moderation and practice support.
10. **Domestic abuse champions training** with exemplars of the Assessment and Child's Plan, specifics on identifying what has happened and what needs to change and collaborative oversight of management review of plans.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

National targeted improvement priorities: Private Law



Five revised workstreams for Private Law Improvement Programme (PrLIP):

- 1) **Reduce delay for children in Private Law: reduce to zero all Private Law proceedings over 100 weeks**
- 2) **‘Please don’t leave me in this situation for too long’: Rule 16.4 appointments.** Revised guidance being developed and plans to engage the judiciary with a focus on concluding Rule 16.4 proceedings within 26 weeks
- 3) **Taking me seriously: sharing recommendations.** All children to know what their Family Court Advisor is recommending to the court, and have their views recorded in those reports
- 4) **Providing consistent experiences for children in Private Law proceedings: reducing regional variation.** Operational Service Area leadership teams identify two areas of development where they are considered outliers and undertake targeted work. All teams will focus on reducing the rates of addendum reporting.
- 5) **Private Law proceedings where the safety and protection of a child requires deeper consideration – strengthening and clarifying the role of the local authority and Cafcass.** This workstream is to consider the interface of 16.4 and local authority open work, Section 37 orders and role of Cafcass and Section 7 work ordered to Cafcass where the child/ren is the subject of a child protection plan

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

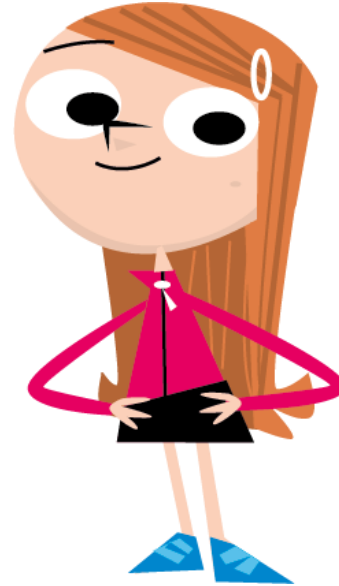
National targeted improvement priorities Public Law



Five revised workstreams for Public Law Improvement Plan (PLIP) :

- 1) **Unification or reunification of children under the age of two** – Children are seen by their guardian with their carers and supervision about this decision has taken place
- 2) **Delay for children and effective management oversight** – Mandatory supervision triggers through proceedings are required
- 3) **Rigour and challenge within practice** – demonstrating the value and independence of a children's guardian, reviewing evidence for proposed care plans
- 4) **Working effectively with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)** –throughout proceedings and writing at the close of our involvement summarising the outcome for the child and explicitly sharing safety and welfare issues to be considered
- 5) **Achieving consistent practice for children deprived of their liberty** – engaging children regularly and with purpose, using practice aids to support analysis, sharing recommendations and outcomes without delay

Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news:

Business and corporate services improvement plan update



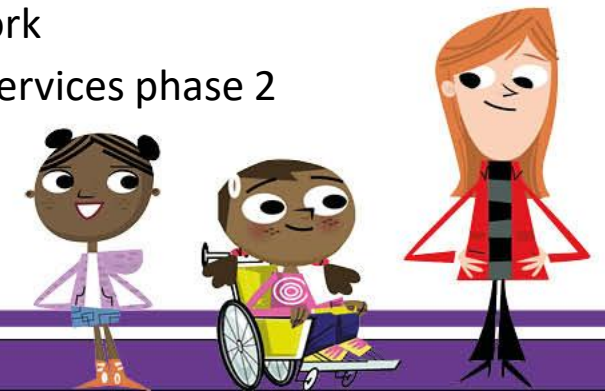
1. Corporate and Business Services Improvement Plan

☐ Directorate plan reviewed:

- a) Programme items now completed include, leaders developing and submitting a self-assessment with improvement priorities, local staff survey action plans, clear policy, guidance, leadership and engagement in the development of the work under the health and safety priority, sickness absence process and arrangements
- b) New actions arising from the Corporate and Business Services Performance Board in June 2025 (Review of flexible working arrangements, Further modernise business services phase 2, reporting on compliance with Performance Learning Review (PLR) framework)
- c) Team improvement plans updated following the formal Performance Board and the monthly directorate lead Performance Boards

☐ Corporate and Business Services Improvement Programme – Current status

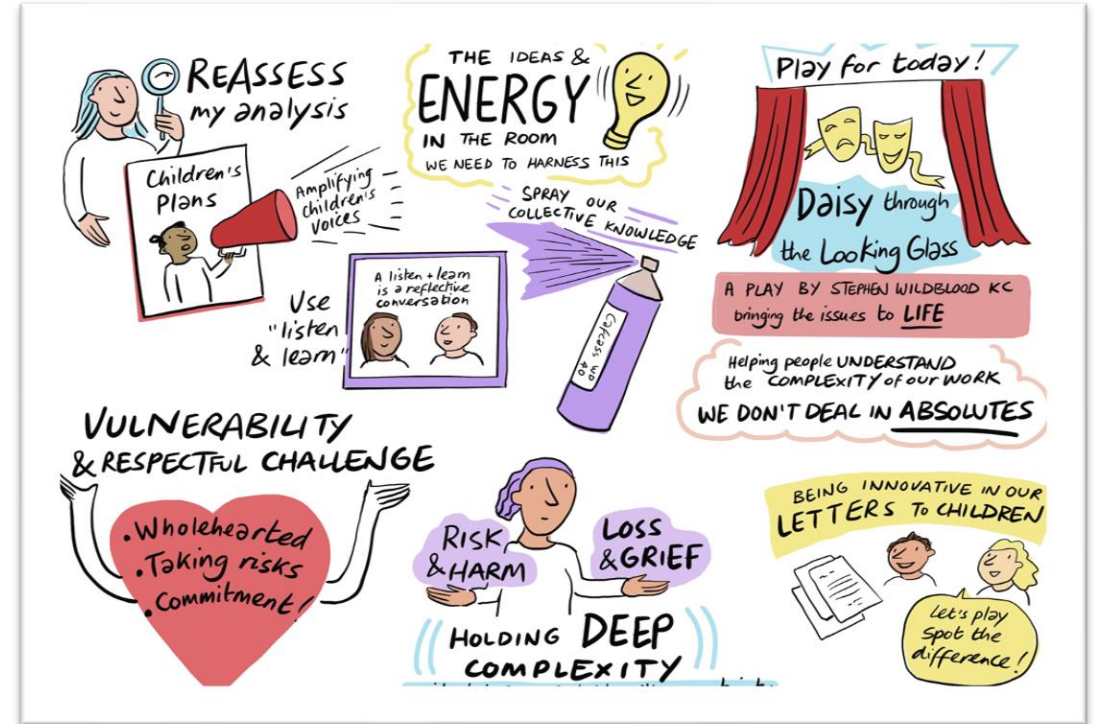
- a) Partially met: All corporate and business services managers to assess against each of the management standards, priorities for innovation, Corporate Management Team will progress and develop the minimum expectations for in person work and visible leadership, improving absence management arrangements, review of flexible working arrangements, reporting on compliance with Performance Learning Review (PLR) framework
- b) Not met: Directorate level framework for quality of services, further modernise business services phase 2



Part 2: And in other news:

Ambitious for Children Week 2025 – summary and successes (1)

- Formerly known as Practice Week, **Ambitious for Children Week** continues to be a dedicated time for reflection, learning, and connection. It centred on our shared ambition to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and families involved in family court proceedings.
- Now in its fifth year, the event provided **space to pause and invest in learning**- recognising the importance of doing our best for every child. This year, we deepened our focus on delivering child-focused practice by strengthening assessment, supervision, and court processes. We also explored how to build a connected and inclusive workforce through strong leadership, wellbeing support, meaningful induction, and agile recruitment.
- Throughout the week, colleagues from across the organisation engaged in a **wide range of learning opportunities**. These included required sessions and elective events focused on professional development, health and wellbeing, and reflective conversations with our diversity networks.



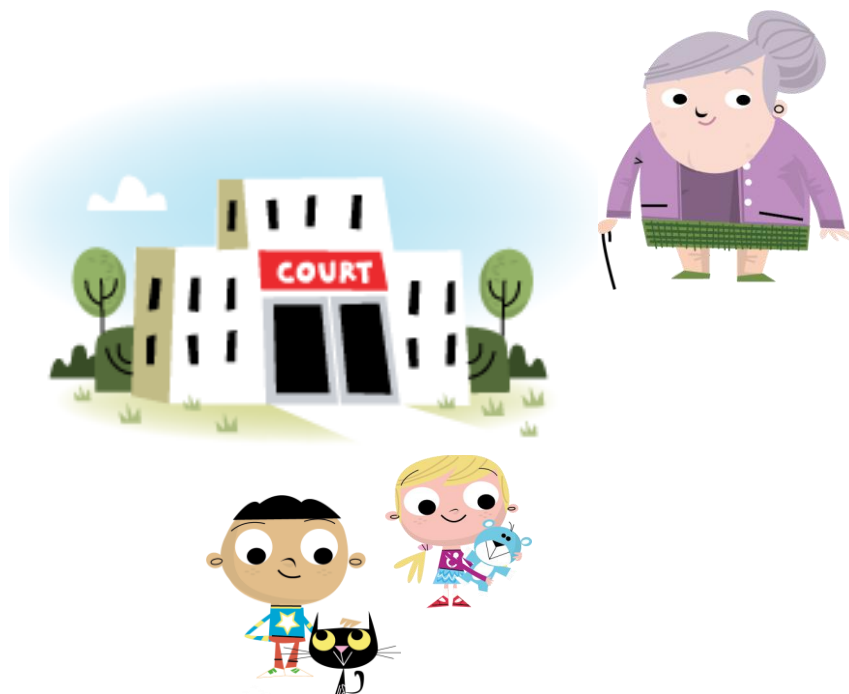
Part 2: And in other news:

Ambitious for Children Week 2025 – summary and successes (2)

- **1300 colleagues** joined the opening session where **Sir Andrew McFarlane**, President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice, was in conversation with our CEO, Jacky Tiotto, about the challenges and opportunities in the family courts now and in the months ahead
- **Up to 43 hours of training and development were on offer across the operational and resource and business services timetables**
- The FJYPB joined us every morning to discuss the ‘word of the day’ as well as leading a standalone session on **Seeing and Engaging Children**
- External speakers were an important part of Ambitious for Children Week 2025. **820 colleagues** watched the live performance of *Daisy Through the Looking Glass*- a play written and performed by Stephen Wildblood KC and cast. Over **500 colleagues** joined each of the sessions on Practice Direction 12J and Anti – Racist practice
- In the closing event there was a focus on the **priority stand outs and what will be taken forward into improvement planning**
- For Ambitious for Children Week 2025, **there were a total of 15634 learning hours** attended live by colleagues during the week



Part 3: Priorities in the next period



Part 3: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in Private Law proceedings - progress update (1)



- **Future funding and further roll out of Pathfinder:** Decisions are still pending and expected soon
- **Readiness for expansion:** Preparation is on track in the expansion areas which include Stoke, Stafford and Worcester courts in the Midlands and Hampshire and Isle of Wight in the Southwest region – risks include staffing capacity and provision of specialist domestic abuse services
- When this expansion is completed (January 2026) 18.7% of all children's cases will be in a 'Pathfinder court'.
- **Target Operating Model** - Ministry of Justice is overseeing the development of a system-wide Target Operating Model
- **Feedback from Family Court Advisers and managers** is very positive. When recently asked if they had the option to return to working under the Child Arrangements programme, the unanimous response from colleagues was that they would not



Part 3: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in Private Law proceedings - progress update (2)



- **Feedback from children and families:** *"I have been through court so many times, but this has been by far the best experience, it was so much less stressful than all the previous proceedings, this new Pathfinder process has been so much better and made everything so much less stressful". "The Independent Domestic Violence Adviser has been brilliant...so amazing."* Some feedback however about the process feeling rushed.
- **Duration remains positive** and children spend less time in open proceedings (21 weeks average).
- **Seeing children:** More children are being seen by their Family Court Adviser. As of 31 August 2025, in Birmingham 64.9% of children (where a Child Impact Report has been ordered) had been seen by their Family Court Adviser, in Dorset 72.7% and in West Yorkshire 70.8%.
- **Challenges** remain with the speed of the assessments, especially for families whose circumstances may be very complex, with achieving consistency in implementation of the model, and with realising the potential of the model to improve the experiences of victims of domestic abuse



Part 3: Priorities in the period

Preparing for mid – year reviews of regional and Operational Service Area improvement plans



- **Key purpose: holding leaders to account for their performance and progress for children**
- Reviewing progress against each operational service area improvement plan in November 2025
- **10 national priorities**, area improvement plans adjusted following the annual self-evaluation. Focus on where the most progress has been made, and which priorities are in focus in each Operational Service Area
- **Public, Private Law and domestic abuse national improvement priorities**, reporting progress with national actions reflected in local plans to connect to practice aspirations in every team
- **Quality of practice**, review with National Improvement Service the overall quality of practice and learning identified through the quality assurance and impact process
- **Learning from our most significant incidents and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews**, what we need to change in response and how this is led locally
- **Workforce planning**, recruitment, vacancies, sickness management, use of flexible workforce– how it feels to work here
- **Training and development**, local needs, strengthening practice support and investing in succession and talent
- **Leadership**, testing the impact and effectiveness of leadership in the region
- **National Director of Operations and Deputy Director review of progress and formal feedback**, identified actions and priorities from the mid-year review with clear guidance on what progress will be expected at the end of year self-evaluation



Part 3: Priorities in the next period

Developing a new strategic plan – Sustaining ambition for children,
Accelerating progress 2026 – 2029 (1)



- Current strategic plan Ambitious for Children 2023-2026 completes in March 2026
- The plan **secured our intentions for children and enabled practice improvement**, and we know **children's experiences are closer to what is required and expected**, evidenced by our **Ofsted 2024 inspection and internal quality assurance work**
- But we know there is a lot more we can do. As such, we are currently in the process of **developing our strategic priorities for next three years**
- Our intention remains providing an **exceptional experience for all children in proceedings, every time they engage with us and wherever in England they do so**
- We also need to protect the **safety and welfare of children in proceedings**, continue to **listen to child and family experiences of us**, and **reduce regional variation of these experiences**
- To do this, we need enough **skilled, well supported and experienced colleagues** to do what is right for children



Part 3: Priorities in the next period

Developing a new strategic plan – Sustaining ambition for children,
Accelerating progress 2026 – 2029 (2)



- **Retain a focus on practice, people and partners with some strengthening and adjustments to work programmes**

These include:

- ✓ **Continued challenge of delayed proceedings for children and adults where domestic abuse is a factor, when children are joined to proceedings (Rule 16.4) and meeting requirements of the public law outline (statutory 26 week timeframe for case resolution)**
- ✓ **Regular reporting of improvement, progress and good experiences for children in operational service areas and teams**
- ✓ **Leadership to support the pace and targeting of recruitment in operational service areas where most needed**
- ✓ **Social work manager training programme and talent fast-stream**
- ✓ **Involving children in developing success measures as defined by them**
- ✓ **Readiness for private law reform together with national partners**



Part 3: Priorities in the next period

Developing a new strategic plan – Sustaining ambition for children,
Accelerating progress 2026 – 2029 (3)



Our next steps for developing our work programmes for the next three years:

- ☐ Engaging with our **key consultation groups in Quarter 3 2025-2026** – Family Justice Young People’s Board, Cafcass Family Forum, and Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group – about what our priorities and what is important to them
- ☐ **Colleague engagement events over the course of Quarter 4 2025-2026** to engage and discuss priorities and ambitions
- ☐ **An event for key partners in Quarter 4 2025-2026** setting out our priorities and objectives and considering how we work together to do more for children and families
- ☐ **Launch of Cafcass’ vision for sustaining our ambition for children and accelerating progress** in 2026-2029 expected early in Quarter 1 2026-2027



Discussion and questions.....

