



2024-2025

Annual report and accounts

**An executive non-departmental
public body**

HC 1559

Ambitious for children, ambitious for our people,
ambitious for further improvement



Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Annual report and accounts 2024-25

For the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Presented to Parliament pursuant to paragraph 12(3) of Schedule 2 to the
Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 11 December 2025.

HC 1559



© Crown copyright 2025

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.
To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/official-documents.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at Cafcass Post, PO BOX 5076, Slough SL1 0RX.

ISBN: 978-1-5286-5983-3

E-Number: E03446259 (12/25)

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum.

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Contents

P02	Section one	P102	Section three
	Introduction and overview		Feedback, learning and change
1.1	Foreword from the Chief Executive and Chair of the Board	3.1	What are the experiences of children and families with Cafcass?
1.2	Foreword from the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)	3.2	What are we learning from complaints and serious incidents?
1.3	Our statutory responsibilities	3.3	The action we have taken in response to feedback, learning, complaints and serious incidents
1.4	Our vision and ambition for children: strategic planning and reporting progress	3.4	Enhancing our direct engagement with people who have direct experience of proceedings: the work and contribution of the Family Forum
P20	Section two	3.5	Leadership, culture, accountability and improvement priorities
	Performance and impact report	3.6	Learning from private law reform – the Pathfinder courts
2.1	Our year in numbers: national performance comparisons for 2024-25 against 2023-24 and national family justice system success measures	P136	Section four
2.2	Our year in effectiveness		Accountability report
2.3	Our year in the difference we made: regional performance and Family Justice Board success measures	4.1	Corporate governance (Directors' report, Statement of accounting officer's responsibilities, Governance statement)
2.4	The quality and impact of business and corporate services	4.2	Our people: remuneration and staff report
2.5	The influence of the FJYPB work programme on Cafcass' effectiveness	4.3	Parliamentary accountability and audit report
2.6	Sustainability report	P180	Section five
2.7	Financial commentary		2024-25 Annual accounts
		P214	Appendix
			Glossary



Introduction and overview



1.1

Foreword from the Chief Executive and Chair of the Board

One dictionary definition of ‘ambitious’ describes it as ‘having or showing a strong desire and determination to succeed’. Another, as ‘A plan intended to satisfy high aspirations.’ Where the safety, welfare and futures of children are directly affected, who would question the intention to be ambitious? As with everything however, aspiration and intention have to be balanced against what is possible and achievable. In this reporting year, we have continued to try to find equilibrium between what our people can manage and the experiences we want to offer to children, young people, their families and carers.

Everyone at Cafcass, our people, our Board, and our partners remain ambitious for children. What this means is that we work hard for them, we want to succeed for them and are therefore continually looking to learn from what is going well and to improve where this is needed.

Those reading this report will know from experience, from the experiences of others or through their profession, that our work in family justice is hard. It takes skill, commitment and courage to advise on life-lasting decisions for children in situations where the facts are most often disputed, harm may be hidden, conflict is ever present, and parents and carers have different perspectives about the right outcome for their children. Added to that, the challenges of attracting, retaining and developing social work professionals will provide context for the account that we present to you here. As ever, we are thankful to all of our Cafcass people for holding on to the ambitions we have and for getting through yet another challenging year.

This year, we are pleased to be able to report that the quality and effectiveness of practice is judged to be good or better in

73% of the work that has been audited. This means that with the support of practitioners, managers and corporate colleagues, we have been able to maintain in many operational service areas the standard of work that was seen in our [Ofsted inspection](#) of January 2024 in which Cafcass was rated as outstanding.

We remain however, an organisation wanting to do more – more for the children who are not offered an exceptional experience yet, more for the children in the regions and teams where outstanding work isn’t sustained all of the time. ‘Listening to children – lighting the way’ was the title of the 2024 Bridget Lindley lecture, given by our Chief Executive in March 2024. Its relevance to Cafcass’ strategic ambition is simple: regardless of the complexity, regardless of the parental conflict that obscures the children, regardless of how much improvement we need to make and regardless of how right we think we are as adults, it is the children whose experiences should guide us and whose voices are the light to follow. This is what underpins the adjusted national priorities in the year ahead.

We continue to make good progress but need to continue to improve the experiences of child and adult victims of domestic abuse in family proceedings. We need to find more time and capacity to support the people and the teams doing less well. We need to reduce the pressure on our frontline practitioners and managers whose caseloads and work life balance are affected by vacancies and sickness absence and we need to remain relentless on reducing delay for children in proceedings.

These are the key areas of continued focus for us this year so that we get closer to our stated intentions for children and families, set out on page 8 of this report.

As part of our foreword this year, unusually, we wish to share just a few words about one colleague in particular who died in November 2024. Jack Cordery was our National Director of Operations for four years. He led, supported and challenged us to be better all the time for children, for their families and for their futures. Jack was an inspiration to everyone who met him. He left people with energy and hope that they could make a difference. He was known as a leader who heard, who felt and who believed in the right things. We miss him and attribute much of our continued progress to the work he did with us.

As ever, our thanks to you for taking the time to read our annual report for 2024–25 and for your support and partnership throughout.



Jacky Tiotto

Jacky Tiotto
Cafcass Chief Executive



S Cheshire

Sally Cheshire CBE
Cafcass Chair

1.2

Foreword from the Family Justice Young People's Board

We are the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) - a group of over 60 children and young people, aged 7 to 25, who have been through family court. We work to make sure children's voices are heard, respected, and taken seriously in the family justice system.

This year, we've focused on what matters most to children and young people: being seen, being heard, and being safe. We have been working with Cafcass to challenge delay in proceedings, improve how children are engaged, and help everyone to understand how domestic abuse affects our lives. We were proud to co-chair the Cafcass Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group and to help moderate the national domestic abuse audit.

At our 2024 Voice of the Child Conference, called 'Childhood lasts a lifetime,' we talked about how domestic abuse affects children. Nearly 500 professionals joined us, and we challenged them to think about how they can build trust with children and do better.

We've seen Cafcass continue to strengthen their leadership across the organisation. We've been part of conversations about how leaders can better support practitioners, to support every child to have an exceptional experience—no matter where they live or who they work with. We've contributed to national improvement priorities, on feedback and complaints, seeing and engaging with children, understanding the impact of domestic abuse, and making sure children's uniqueness is reflected in the advice given to the court.

We've seen real progress in how Cafcass practitioners are using children's own words in reports and making sure that recommendations are shared with them in ways they can understand and that also include their valued voices. We've loved seeing things like personalised letters to children and reports that include children's thoughts. One of our members said: *"They've been more thoughtful about when and where to meet with children, so it doesn't feel awkward or upsetting."*

We've seen how good leadership—people who listen, learn, and act—can make a big difference. We've helped with the strategy development across Cafcass, with one member commenting that; *"I've been involved in the original thinking for this, the launch day, feedback from the launch and now the midway review - nice to see how it's been followed across."*



We've also developed new resources, including a Safe Family Time guide to help children feel safer when spending time with family members and a Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lesson for schools to explain the family court. We've also co-developed others, including a toolkit for judges on writing letters to children and the second film in Cafcass' Taking Me Seriously series, which explains how recommendations are made and why it's important that children understand and can respond to them.

Looking ahead, we'll continue working with Cafcass in strengthening leadership across all regions. We'll keep challenging delay, promoting safe family time, and making sure that every child's voice is heard and respected. We'll continue to hold a spotlight on every child's uniqueness—including those who are neurodivergent or have additional needs.

We are proud of the difference we've made this year. And we're thankful that Cafcass continues to listen and act on what we say.



Our statutory responsibilities

Cafcass is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. We independently advise the family courts in England about what is safe for children and in their best interests.

We work with approximately 133,000 children every year whose arrangements with their families are decided by the family court and we provide a service that prioritises their safety, understands their experiences, listens to their voices and their needs, and takes into full account their families and those who are connected to them. We operate in accordance with the law set by Parliament (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) and under the rules and directions of the family courts. Our role is to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- give advice to the family courts;
- make provision for children to be represented; and
- provide information, advice and support to children and their families.

We are asked by the family court to work with families in:

- **private law proceedings**, including arrangements for children after parents have divorced or separated. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a Family Court Adviser (FCA). Their job is to provide information to the court about what is needed for a safe decision to be made about arrangements for whom the child lives and spends time with and what is in their best future interests.

- **public law proceedings**, including care applications where a local authority has serious concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a children's guardian. Their job is to work alongside the local authority to make sure that the plan for that child is in their best interests and will secure a safe outcome for them.

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, accountable to the Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice. As Accounting Officer, our Chief Executive is responsible for advising on appropriate objectives and targets agreed with our sponsor department, making regular assessments on risks and progress, intervening where necessary, undertaking an annual self-evaluation as required by the Ofsted inspection framework¹ and making an annual report to Parliament. They are responsible to the Cafcass Board on the effective discharge of our responsibilities, giving them assurances about performance, effectiveness, the wellbeing of colleagues and the management of public money. Cafcass also has a responsibility to contribute to wider government objectives relating to children, working especially closely with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Ministry of Justice.

We are inspected by Ofsted, under His Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI) duty to inspect, as set out in sections 143-145 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

We develop and publish our own strategic plan that accords with the national Family Justice Board priorities and sets out our ambitions for children and families, alongside the actions we plan to take in order to achieve what we intend. We report on our progress annually in this report and regularly throughout the year to our Board and to the Ministry of Justice through the Business Assurance process. Our work is the subject of a formal audit programme administered by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA).

Our Chief Executive was supported during 2024-25 by three Directors² and two Deputy Directors. Our Corporate Management Team is accountable for the leadership of the organisation and is in turn accountable to the Cafcass Board. The Corporate Management Team is assisted by a range of internal boards and groups set out in the accountability section of this report on page 116.



² From July 2024 and following an internal restructure to increase resilience in our second tier of leaders, the complement of Directors reduced to two, being a Director of Resources and a Director of National Operations. The post of Director of Strategy was deleted from the structure. The arrangements for two directorates were reconfigured to provide for increased deputising and a clear operational accountability through two Deputy Director posts each with responsibility for the effectiveness of practice in four of the eight national Cafcass regions. An Assistant Director for Performance and Quality and the Principal Social Worker positions were also created reporting directly to the National Director of Operations and enabling our intention to reduce regional practice and performance variation, increase the visibility of practice improvement priorities and progress, target training and development to improvement programmes and secure clearer expectations and feedback about the professional environment in which the social work with children and families is undertaken. The responsibilities previously assigned to the Director of Strategy have been reallocated within the resources directorate with a pending review of the policy and strategy function that currently reports to the Director of Resources.

¹ Inspecting Cafcass: framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Our vision and ambition for children: Strategic planning and reporting progress

In 2023, we set out a renewed ambition for children, their families and carers who find themselves in family court proceedings. Expressed as a vision, our hope is that every child, in any engagement with Cafcass, has an exceptional experience, every time and in every place that we offer help.

Our strategic plan, ‘[Ambitious for children 2023 – 2026](#)’, described how we intended to succeed through nine important programme priorities.

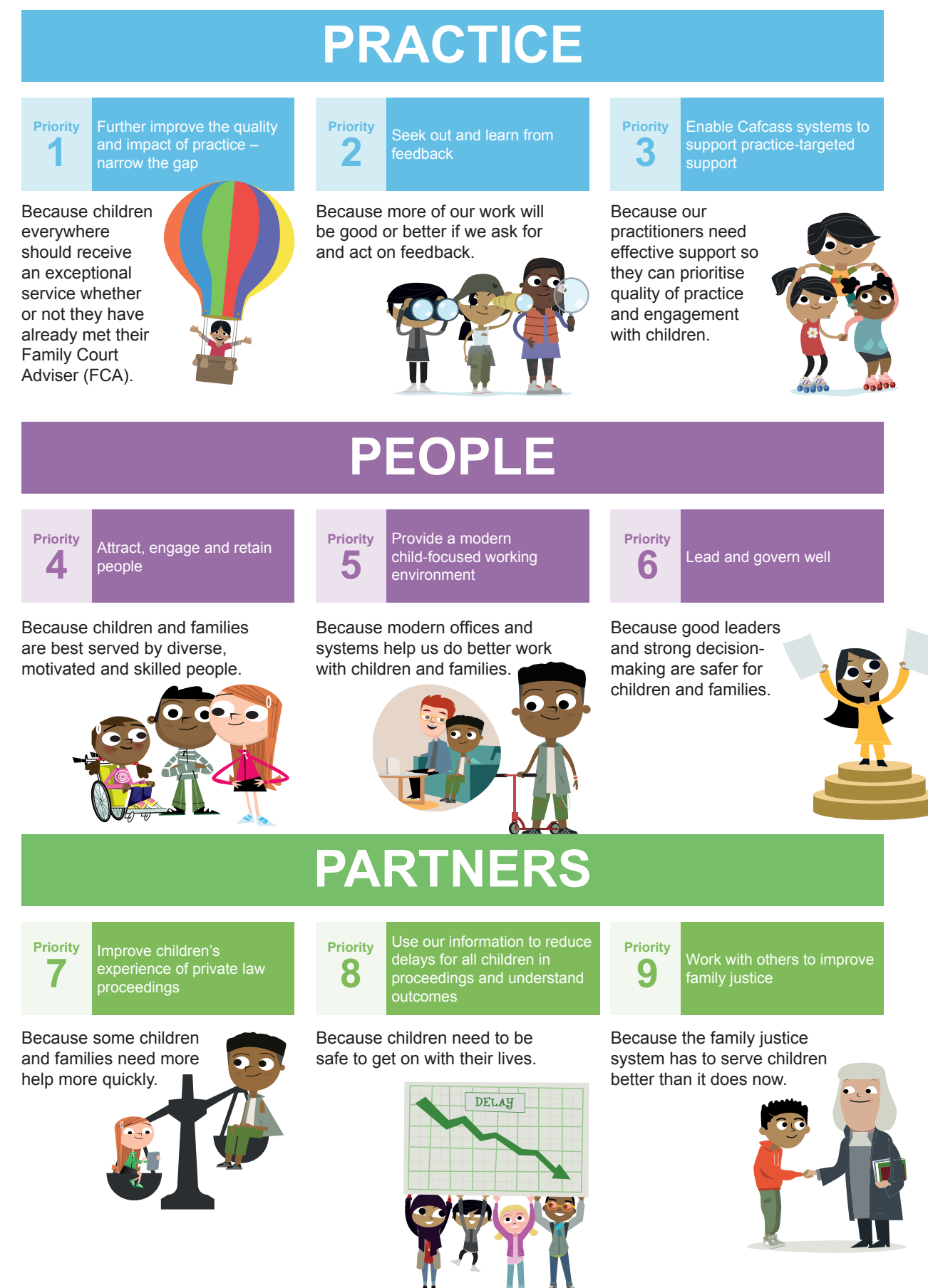
At this two-year point, we have reviewed our progress and published a [mid-way report](#), setting out achievements to date and our intentions for the third and final year of this current strategy.

In our practice and engagements with families, we have continued to prioritise our relationships, making sure they are respectful and focused directly on understanding what life is like for every child. We have been focusing on strengthening the assessments of harm and risk that family court advisers and children’s guardians undertake, making sure that they set out clear reasons for the advice to the court as well as explaining and sharing their reasoning and intended recommendations with children and families. **At the very centre of our leadership and all our strategic programmes supporting social work practice, is a commitment that our Family Court Advisers and children’s guardians, appointed independently by the court, will act as the strongest representatives of children’s uniqueness, welfare, safety and best interests. Cafcass’ statutory responsibilities require that this is the case and each**

year, the evidence presented in this report to parliament and to Ofsted is our account of performance against this very significant and privileged public duty.

In respect of our people priorities, we have continued to work hard this year on attracting, retaining and supporting social workers. We are doing well in that we are an employer of choice, though we want to continue to prioritise offering an even better work environment that sustains people and protects them when they experience aggression and threats from those they try to help. We are working to improve the activities that regularly connect people in person, providing opportunities for professional growth and development, balancing the need for work and life to be manageable. It remains our ambition that everyone who works at Cafcass says they are well led and supported, that our priorities for children are the right ones, that they understand how they are held accountable for the highest of professional standards and that this is prioritised in kind and consistent teams.

Figure 1: Our Practice, People and Partners priorities



Our annual colleague survey (described on pages 166 and 167) describes how we try to take and respond to regular feedback about how it feels to work at Cafcass.

Being ambitious for children in family court proceedings and offering exceptional experiences isn't something we can achieve alone. Our strategy sets out that with our partners, we will collaborate, continue to work on system recovery (with the effects of the pandemic still being felt) and very specifically share in the responsibility for reducing delay for children and families as well as improving their experiences. In the year ahead, this means continuing to support the national programme that is driving consistency with the Public Law Outline requirement that proceedings conclude within 26 weeks. It also means continuing to test and implement new ways of working in private law proceedings such as the Pathfinder courts in Dorset, in Birmingham and in West Yorkshire, where the needs of children are assessed much earlier, decisions are intended to be made by the court in a single hearing, and the impact on children of the conflict between their parents is the central focus of FCAs and the court.

Since our strategy was published in June 2023 and especially during this reporting year, our commitment to improve the experiences of child and adult victims in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor has continued as we learn from feedback and practice. Almost two thirds of private law proceedings where work is ordered to Cafcass, require the harm children have experienced as victims of domestic abuse to be assessed and advice given accordingly to the court. Both they and their protective adults need ever more thought and understanding about the impact of this violence on them. The arrangements for children to spend time with family members need to be safe, they need to be in their best interests and proceedings need to be ceased when they are being used as means of further control and harm. We have continued to be in strong partnership with SafeLives – the national charity supporting survivors of domestic abuse, whose specialist expertise we both need and utilise to set out further practice improvement priorities. Pages 64-65 report on the progress we have made and that is evidenced in our annual domestic abuse audit. Our improvement priorities are included in the adjusted national improvement plan priorities on page 117 to 119.

In October of this reporting year and then again in January³, we published a new domestic abuse [practice policy](#) which sets out clear requirements for practitioners and managers in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.



³ The policy was reissued on 28 January 2025 in response to feedback including from internal practitioners and managers; judges, legal professionals; and children and adults with lived experience of domestic abuse. Changes were made to provide clarity about the need for an assessment of harm and risk that sets out in every case, the impact for children, specifically as victims of domestic abuse. Additionally, the importance of assessing risk as significant when an adult is applying for or having contact with a child and they are an adult with a conviction for, have served a prison sentence for, or are known to the police in respect of a violent or sexual offence. The purpose and use of 16A risk reports to court and referrals to local authority children's services were more clearly described.

Our clear intention in developing the policy and requiring it to be considered in all the work that is undertaken, is to consolidate the strongest practice and to reduce regional variations where families have a less effective experience – in some cases, this being inadequate in respect of the safety and best interests of the children. In the year ahead, we plan to evaluate the impact of the policy and in order to supplement the evidence we secure in feedback from families and other professionals, we plan to continue with the targeted auditing of practice where domestic abuse is a factor, reporting next year again specifically on progress.

Figure two on pages 14-19 that follow, set out what we have achieved in this reporting year, building on year one of our strategic plan in 2023-24. The narrative is set out against each of the three domains of the strategic plan: Practice, People and Partners and describes what we have been prioritising and why. It also specifically provides evidence in summary about what has changed for children as a result of progress against our ambitions for them.



Figure 2: Our progress on Practice, People and Partners



- The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it
- Introduced a private law improvement programme and private law practice quality standards – to provide clear expectations about practice effectiveness and professional standards.
 - Established a Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group and introduced a new Domestic Abuse Practice policy – to further improve our work with children and families where domestic abuse is a factor.
 - Introduced and reviewed our management oversight and supervision arrangements – so there are clearer expectations about when the advice of a manager should be sought and recorded.
 - Increased the proportion of children receiving a personalised introduction and goodbye letter – so the work with children is relationship-led and they are able to describe their experiences and feel safer to do so.

- Increased opportunities for children and families to provide feedback through QR codes, online surveys and in local audits – so children and families can tell us about their experiences and we learn alongside.
 - Established a new Complaints and Correspondence function and appointed a dedicated Children's Complaints Manager – to encourage feedback from children, to respond to them quickly, to learn from them and to listen to everyone's experiences more carefully when they complain.
 - Introduced a new learning framework – to formalise how we learn and change our practice, when children are harmed or killed and have been or are involved in family law proceedings.

- Introduced improvement plans for each Operational Service Area with progress reviewed every six months and annually through performance boards – so we have assurance that every team in every area is prioritising ways of working that help us to offer exceptional experiences to children and families.
 - Initiated a case progression and closure programme – to reduce delay for children and ensure they remain involved with Cafcass for only as long as they need to be.
 - Developed our Ofsted inspection improvement plan – *Listening to children – lighting the way* – to build on the improvements we have made in the last three years and continue to narrow the gap between the best performers and those falling behind on our 'best for children' measures.



PEOPLE

Year one and year two progress

Priority
4

Attract, engage and retain people

Because children and families are best served by diverse, motivated and skilled people.



Priority
5

Provide a modern child-focused working environment

Because modern offices and systems help us do better work with children and families.



Priority
6

Lead and govern well

Because good leaders and strong decision-making are safer for children and families.



The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it

- **Developed career and learning pathways** – to retain colleagues and improve personal and professional development. Specifically, we have introduced new roles of consultant family court advisers, assistant service managers and senior service managers.
- **Hosted our second and third annual colleague surveys** – to engage our people, to take their feedback on how well we are doing as an employer and to prioritise what makes for a happier and more productive place where we can support children and their families.
- **For our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, we have continued to host the Brilliant Leaders programmes** – to promote and support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues in their leadership and management development.
- **Opened our third regional child and family hub, our London Gray's Inn office** – to provide a modern, effective and safe work environment for colleagues so that the best work can go on in child-centred family rooms and in a place where children feel looked after and secure.
- **Continued improvement of our case management system, ChildFirst** – to enable good access and accurate recording of children's records.
- **Launched the new Cafcass website** – to make it easier for children, adults and professionals to access information about Cafcass and our services.
- **Reviewed and relaunched the induction process** – so that new colleagues feel well supported and equipped to fulfil their roles.
- **Introduced new Management Quality Standards** – to provide clear expectations about how leaders and managers are expected to work and requiring an annual self-assessment against the standards to support personal objectives and development.
- **Updated our Performance and Learning Review system** – to support effective conversations between managers and colleagues about their wellbeing, their effectiveness, work objectives and development opportunities.
- **Reviewed and reissued our performance and accountability framework** – with a new local accountability cycle to strengthen the local leadership and reporting of learning, improving and leading well. The Cafcass recovery board now also oversees improvement progress regionally as well as nationally.

PEOPLE: Year one and year two progress

Priority
4

Attract, engage and retain people

Priority
5

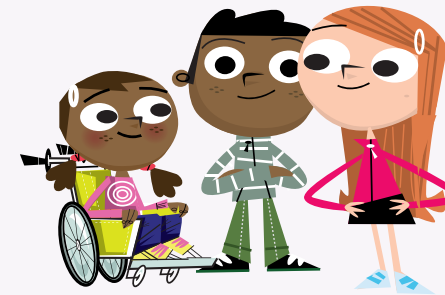
Provide a modern child-focused working environment

Priority
6

Lead and govern well

What has changed for children?

- **12-month turnover for social work professionals has stabilised nationally** – 15.1% compared to 13.9% for the local authority children's social work workforce, though some areas of the country remain under pressure because they cannot recruit. This means directly that children will wait longer to meet their family court adviser.
- **Corporate and professional 12-month turnover has increased by 1.9% to 9.8%**. This indicates a slight rise compared to last year and highlights the need for continued focus on supporting people who help provide an environment for the best social work to happen to be retained longer so children can benefit alongside.
- **35 colleagues have taken part in the Brilliant Leaders Programme since its inception in May 2023**. Children are benefitting from stronger understanding about their uniqueness that is being clearly reported to the court.
- **High-quality rooms for children and families to engage with Cafcass colleagues** – children say they love them! We have also improved the working environment to support colleagues to connect together and for leaders to be visible and available.
- **Improvements in recording, case management and oversight** – we have a much greater range of insight and management information into how well children are doing in proceedings and the quality and effectiveness of practice, including capturing reason for delay, and the inclusion of child(ren)'s diversity information on the Child's Plan.
- **Clearer information for parents, in particular, at a very stressful time in their lives** as well as easier access for everyone to our published policies and statistics.
- **Induction mandatory requirements are clear and feedback from new starters is good**. This means children benefit from well-equipped and motivated staff.
- **Managers are clear about what is expected, their work and the consistency with which this is undertaken is improving.**
- **Performance and Learning Reviews are completed in 98.5% of instances where they are required** and objectives are clearer – including the follow up about work that has been found to be inadequate for children.
- **Mid and end year reviews of progress clearly describe improvement that is formally reported**. Corporate Management Team reviews on a quarterly basis, operational service area progress with improvement plans and priorities.



PARTNERS

Year one and year two progress

Priority 7 Improve children's experience of private law proceedings

Because some children and families need more help more quickly.



Priority 8 Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes

Because children need to be safe to get on with their lives.



Priority 9 Work with others to improve family justice

Because the family justice system has to serve children better than it does now.



The work we have been doing and why we have been doing it

- **Established with partners, a new private law Pathfinder site in Birmingham** – to continue trialling a model for strengthening children's voices and providing earlier advice to the court and offering more support to adult and child victims of domestic abuse in private law proceedings.
- **Contributed to the external evaluation of the Dorset private law Pathfinder court** – to understand benefits and areas for improvement of seeing children earlier in private law proceedings.
- **Commenced the national implementation of a new practice model in private law where a Rule 16.4 guardian is appointed for children** – to reduce delay in the most complex private law proceedings.
- **Revised the terms of reference for the internal Recovery and Improvement Board** – to enable closer oversight by senior leaders of regional variation, improvement priorities and operational service areas where prioritisation is activated.
- **Completed a review of the children who are subject to deprivation of liberty orders** – to support policy and practice discussions with Ofsted and the Department of Education about the experiences of and provision for these children.
- **Regular monitoring of our progress against six national commitments to support the relaunch of the Public Law Outline** – to renew focus on the legal requirement to conclude proceedings for children in 26 weeks.
- **Published a second animation in our 'Taking me seriously' film series, developed in collaboration with members of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)** – to help children understand what recommendations are and why it is important they are clearly understood.
- **Developed a new partners strategy** – to enable more consistent engagement with our strategic priorities.
- **Developed a new success measures framework aligned to the national family justice board priorities** – to support timely outcomes and improved experiences for children and families in the family justice system.

PARTNERS: Year one and year two progress

Priority 7 Improve children's experience of private law proceedings

Priority 8 Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes

Priority 9 Work with others to improve family justice

What has changed for children?

- **Proceedings are shorter under the Pathfinder pilot** – early evidence based on a small number of cases indicates that for the Pathfinder court in Birmingham, it took an average of 14.9 weeks to reach a final decision for children where Cafcass filed a Child Impact Report in private law cases closed in Q4 2024-25. In comparison, for the same period it took an average of 55 weeks nationally in cases where Cafcass is ordered to do work after the first hearing under the Child Arrangements Programme model.
- **Changes to the recovery board have been made at the end of year two of this plan** and so it is too early to report progress. Data domains are now clearer with reports taken on operations and the resources functions so that the whole organisation's commitment to improvement is overseen.
- **Analysis of 180 children subject to deprivation of liberty applications** showed that many of the children had significant childhood trauma, and additional needs, very specifically those relating to autistic spectrum disorders. The report influenced the children and school's wellbeing bill in respect of prospective accommodation provision.
- **32.9% S31 (care and supervision) proceedings closed in 26 weeks or less for Q4 2024-25** – an improvement of 5% compared to the same quarter in 2023-24. Alongside this, there is a reduction in the number of children in long running public and private law proceedings over 100 weeks – 2,195 children at the end of March 2025 compared to 3,384 children at the end of March 2024.
- **The 'Taking me seriously' film series is a central part of our commitment to improving information and engagement with children and young people** so that they can influence and be less intimidated by their own court proceedings.
- **Our engagement with partners is improving and we are able to ask on behalf of children, what difference an initiative or a change will make for them.** It is becoming more important that we represent their voices and experiences in national system change and specifically the voices of children and their protective adults who are victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
- **Data is published quarterly in the Cafcass open public Board, reporting on our contribution to the national family justice priorities. In addition, we provide a quarterly detailed report on progress against Public Law Outline commitments at the Family Justice Board.**



This summary of progress across the first two years of our 2023-26 strategy is key for Cafcass' accountability to Ministers and Parliament. It necessarily sits alongside the contribution we make to the wider family justice system. The Family Justice Board, led by Ministers at the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education, have agreed six national priorities, with Cafcass' contribution to these set out in Figure nine on pages 28-38 of this report.

Performance and impact report



2.1

Our year in numbers: National performance comparisons for 2024-25 against 2023-24 and national family justice system success measures



How many children?

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 we worked with a total of **132,416 children and young people**, a decrease of 4,931 children (-3.6%) compared with the previous year. Approximately **one third (43,003) of the children with whom we worked were in public law proceedings and two thirds (89,413) were in private law proceedings.**

Of the 132,416 children with whom we worked in 2024-25, **85,272 children (55,377 children's cases) or 64.4% were new cases in this reporting year.**

We worked on **16,195 (for 25,801 children) new public law cases** in this reporting year which is an increase of 0.7% compared to the previous year (117 more children's cases, but 151 fewer children on new cases). **68.3% (11,060 children's cases, 18,592 children) of these new public law cases included a lead application that was section 31 care** (where a child is looked after by a designated local authority).⁴

We worked on **39,182 new private law cases (for 59,471 children)**. This is a decrease of 0.7% when compared to the previous year (284 fewer children's cases and 689 fewer children on new cases). Of these new private law cases, **80.4% (31,494 children's cases, 48,185 children) contained a lead application relating to who the child lives or spends time with.**⁵

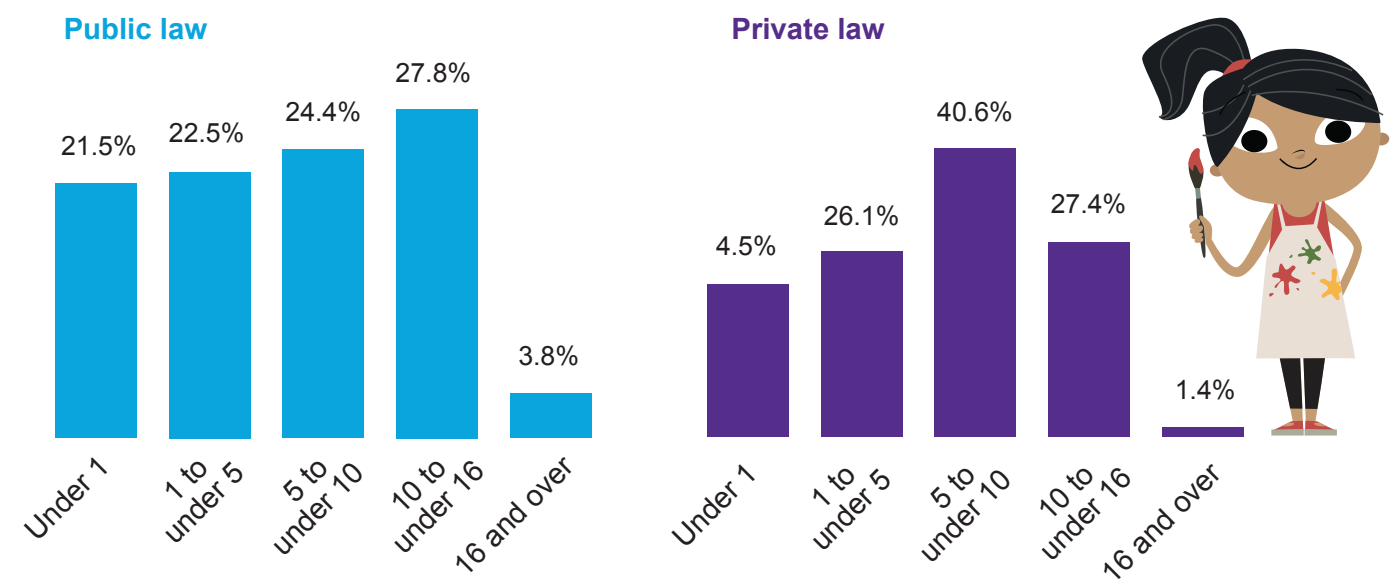
Who are the children?

The age profiles of children and young people in public and private proceedings are different within law types, as well as when compared to the age profile of all children in England. In general, children involved in public law proceedings are younger, with nearly half (44.0%) aged under five. More than one in five (21.5%) children involved in public law proceedings are infants under the age of one year. This proportion is similar to last year and is substantially higher than in private law proceedings (where just 4.5% are under the age of one year).

⁴ The next five application types by volume designated as public law were Supervision (s31), Placement (Guardian), Discharge of Care Order (CA(s39(1)), Deprivation of Liberty and Adoption Non-Agency (RO).

⁵ The next five application types by volume designated as private law were Prohibited Steps (s8), Enforcement Order, Parental Order (s54 HF&E), Parental Responsibility (s4).

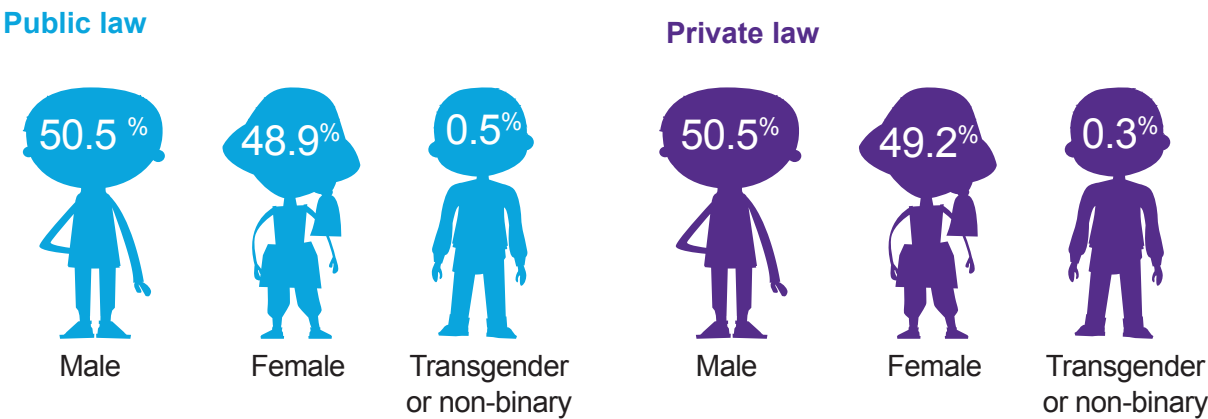
Figure 3: Age profile (in years) of all children with whom we worked in 2024-25, by type of proceedings



Children in both public and private law proceedings are slightly more likely to be boys than girls, which accords with the national population of children where the ratio of boys to girls is greater than 1:1 for ages up to 25.

The children with whom we work have the option to tell us if they prefer to identify as gender neutral, non-binary, or transgender in addition to preferring not to say. 0.5% of children in public law and 0.3% of children in private law preferred to describe themselves as transgender or non-binary, which is similar to last year.

Figure 4: Gender identity of children with whom we worked in 2024-25, by type of proceedings



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and the degree of accuracy of decimals displayed.

We have continued to improve the way we ask children about their heritage and how this is recorded and assessed to inform our recommendations to the family court. As at 31 March 2025, known ethnicity was recorded for 94.3% of children in public law proceedings (compared to 94.1% in 2023-24), and 85.5% of children in private law proceedings (compared with 84.4% in 2023-24).

Figure 5: Heritage of all children with whom we worked in 2024-25, by type of proceedings and compared to the national population of children⁶

	Children in public law proceedings	Children in private law proceedings	All children in proceedings	National population comparison (Census data based on all children)
Total children with whom we worked	43,003	89,413	132,416	
Known ethnicity total	40,559 (94.3%)	76,444 (85.5%)	117,003 (88.4%)	
Asian/Asian British	1,645 (3.8%)	6,461 (7.2%)	8,106 (6.1%)	9.1%
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	2,350 (5.5%)	4,132 (4.6%)	6,482 (4.9%)	4.6%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group	4,716 (11.0%)	9,279 (10.4%)	13,995 (10.6%)	4.3%
White - All (British + Other)	31,268 (72.7%)	55,254 (61.8%)	86,522 (65.3%)	80.9%
- White - British	28,991 (67.4%)	50,443 (56.4%)	79,434 (60.0%)	
- White - Other (Including Eastern European)	2,277 (5.3%)	4,811 (5.4%)	7,088 (5.4%)	
Arab	218 (0.5%)	464 (0.5%)	682 (0.5%)	
Other ethnic group	362 (0.8%)	854 (1.0%)	1,216 (0.9%)	1.1%
Where ethnicity is not known total	2,444 (5.7%)	12,969 (14.5%)	15,413 (11.6%)	
Prefer not to say	17 (0.04%)	178 (0.2%)	195 (0.1%)	
Not known (including no record and refused)	2,427 (5.6%)	12,791 (14.3%)	15,218 (11.5%)	

⁶ Office for National Statistics. (n.d.). Census. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>

Children without a record are likely to be those in newer proceedings with whom we have not yet undertaken direct work and this is why recording levels tend to be lower for children in private law. Compared to the national population of children, those in family court proceedings are more likely to be of mixed/multiple ethnic background (10.6% compared with 4.3% nationally).

In public law proceedings, Black, African, Caribbean and Black British children are slightly over-represented compared to the national population of children (5.5% compared to 4.6%), while children of mixed/multiple heritage are the most over-represented (11.0% compared with 4.3% nationally). Asian children are underrepresented in public law proceedings (3.8% compared to 9.1%).

In private law proceedings, children of mixed/multiple heritage are the most over-represented compared to the national population (10.4% compared to 4.3% nationally). As is the case for children in public law proceedings, Asian children are also under-represented in private law proceedings (7.2% compared to 9.1%).

Of the 132,416 children with whom we worked in 2024-25,⁷ we have recorded information in respect of a disability or health condition for 102,389 children (77.3%). This figure includes children recorded as having no disability or health condition. For public law we have recorded information for 32,896 children (76.5%) and for private law 69,493 children (77.7%).

For those children with whom we worked where we have recorded information, **17,483 children (17.1%) in 2024-25 had at least one disability or health condition recorded; this is below the national average of 18.4%.**⁸ We set out the range of disabilities and health conditions reported in the table overleaf.⁹



Figure 6: Recording of longstanding health conditions or disability for children with whom we worked in 2024-25 by type of proceedings and compared to national data

	Children in public law proceedings	Children in private law proceedings	All children in proceedings	National comparison
Total children with whom we worked	43,003	89,413	132,416	
Number of children worked with for whom we have recorded information with respect to disability or condition (% of all children)	32,896 (76.5%)	69,493 (77.7%)	102,389 (77.3%)	9,092,073
Recorded condition(s)	5,880 (17.9%)	11,603 (16.7%)	17,483 (17.1%)	18.4%
Autistic spectrum disorder	2,330 (7.1%)	5,714 (8.2%)	8,044 (7.9%)	14.1%
Hearing impairment	132 (0.4%)	257 (0.4%)	389 (0.4%)	1.4%
Moderate learning difficulty	1,061 (3.2%)	1,543 (2.2%)	2,604 (2.5%)	12.8%
Physical disability	153 (0.5%)	214 (0.3%)	367 (0.4%)	2.2%
Social, emotional and mental health	670 (2.0%)	716 (1.0%)	1,386 (1.4%)	18.9%
Speech, language & communications	325 (1.0%)	517 (0.7%)	842 (0.8%)	22.1%
Visual impairment	90 (0.3%)	152 (0.2%)	242 (0.2%)	0.8%
Global Development Delay	816 (2.5%)	481 (0.7%)	1,297 (1.3%)	
Other difficulty/disability	1,894 (5.8%)	4,539 (6.5%)	6,433 (6.3%)	3.0%
Record shows no disability or condition	28,399 (86.3%)	64,449 (92.7%)	92,848 (90.7%)	81.6%
Number of children worked with for whom we have no recorded information with respect to disability or condition	10,107 (23.5%)	19,920 (22.3%)	30,027 (22.7%)	

⁷ These records are updated as part of on-going case recording; the fields are not mandatory or subject to any medical verification. On this basis, there may be some children's records where this detail is not included because we may not have been made aware.

⁸ Department for Education. (2024). Special educational needs in England: Academic year 2023-24. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>

⁹ The numbers for individual conditions add up to more than the total number of children with a recorded condition, as a child may have multiple recorded disabilities or conditions.

How busy was the year? April 2024 – March 2025

In this reporting year, as set out above, **overall demand for new children’s cases was 0.3% lower** compared to 2023-24, with a small increase in public law demand (0.7%) and a small reduction in private law demand (-0.7%). See Figures 7 and 8 below for trends over the past five years.

55,377 children’s cases were new in the reporting year featuring 85,272 children.

In private law proceedings during 2024-25, Cafcass received **18,187 requests for Section 7 reports¹⁰** (inclusive of 5,116 addendum reports), a decrease of 1,815 (-9.1%) reports compared to the last financial year.

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, **Rule 16.4 (R16.4)¹¹ appointments increased by 3.5%** compared to the previous year. R16.4 cases closing in the most recent reportable quarter (1 January – 31 March 2025), took on average **96 weeks** to

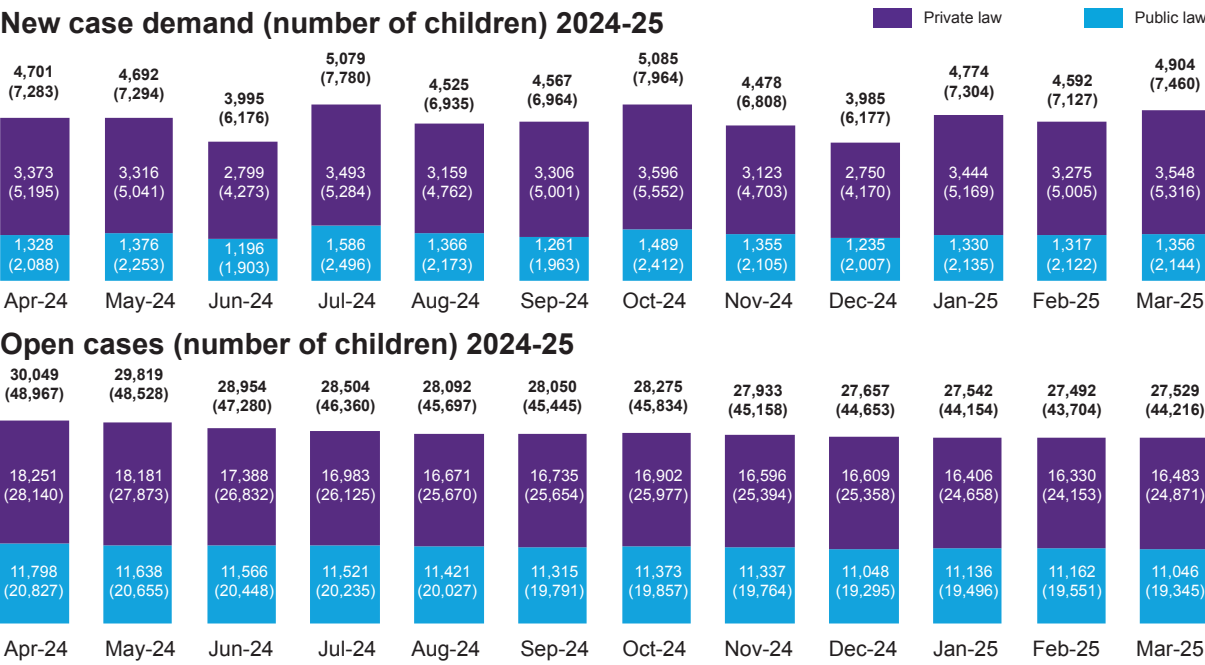
complete, which is eight weeks fewer (104 weeks) compared to the same period in 2023-24.

As at the end of March 2025, Cafcass was working with 27,529 open cases with future known work featuring 44,216 children. The number of open children’s cases reduced by 9.0% (2,725 fewer cases / 4,525 fewer children) when compared with 31 March 2024, with reductions set out visually in Figure 7.

As at March 2025, **the volume of public law cases with further work required was 11,046 (19,345 children), which is 7.0% lower** than the same period last year. Public law cases represent 40.1% of total cases with future known work.

As at March 2025 **the volume of open private law cases with future known work was 16,483 (24,871 children), which is 10.3% lower** than the same period last year. Private law cases represent 59.9% of total cases with future known work.

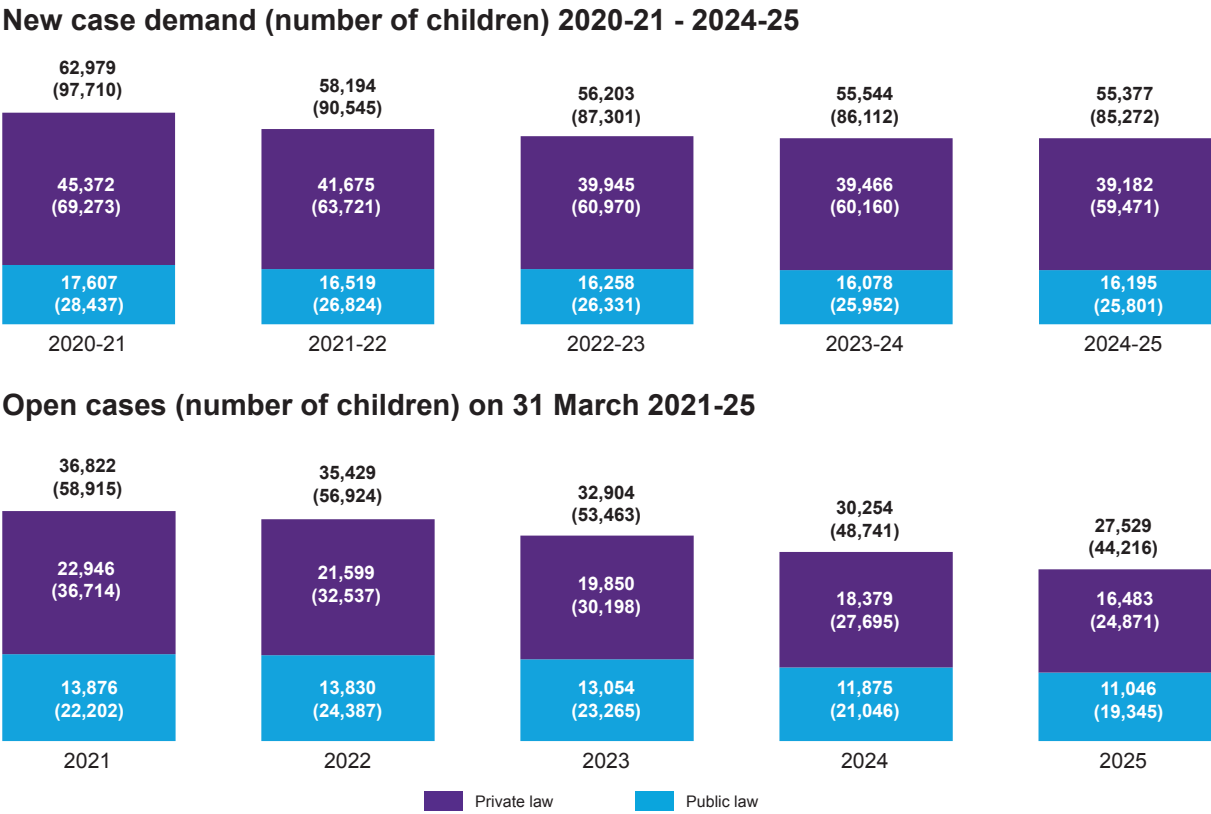
Figure 7: Demand shown through number of new and open children’s cases and the number of children



¹⁰ A more detailed assessment of the disputed issues ordered by the court to consider the welfare of the child and advise the court about what is safe and in the child’s best interests.

¹¹ Appointment of a children’s guardian in private law proceedings to conduct the proceedings on behalf of and in the interests of the child.

Figure 8: new demand and open cases 2021-25 compared by reporting year



In total 17.4% of Cafcass work has been open for longer than 52 weeks. In public law this is 12.7% (2,827 children) of children’s cases and in private law it is 20.5% (5,316 children) of children’s cases.

Care and Supervision Cases:¹² Average durations are **40 weeks** (Q4: 1 January – 31 March 2025). This is a reduction of four weeks compared to last year (Q4 2023-24). 32.9% of S31 applications are now completed within 26 weeks (Q4 2024-25); compared to 27.9% (Q4 2023-24).

Private law cases – work to first hearing: Average durations are **11 weeks** (Q4 2024-25) which is no change compared to last year (Q4 2023-24).

Private law cases – work after first hearing: Average durations are **55 weeks** (Q4 2024-25). This is a decrease of two weeks compared to last year (Q4 2023-24).

Average caseloads for long-term teams (FCAs and children’s guardians) have continued to reduce slightly to **18.2 national average** (adjusted for FTE) on 31 March 2025 compared to an average of 18.8 in March 2024.

Average caseloads for FCAs working in work to first hearing teams in private law have reduced to an average of **32.4** (adjusted for FTE); compared to the 37.0 in March 2024.

While the average number of cases recorded as allocated to frontline staff has steadily decreased, this belies significant individual and team variation which is reported and described in the Annual self-evaluation submitted to Ofsted. Reducing regional variation remains a key priority in all Cafcass improvement work.

¹² Cafcass measures the duration of its involvement with children on a quarterly basis by cases closed in that period. The most recent period is Q4 (1 January – 31 March 2025).

National family justice system success measures

There are three nationally agreed system-wide objectives managed by the ministerially led National Family Justice Board (FJB)¹³ as set out on pages 72 to 77 of this report. The FJB is led by Ministers and supported by all family justice system partners.

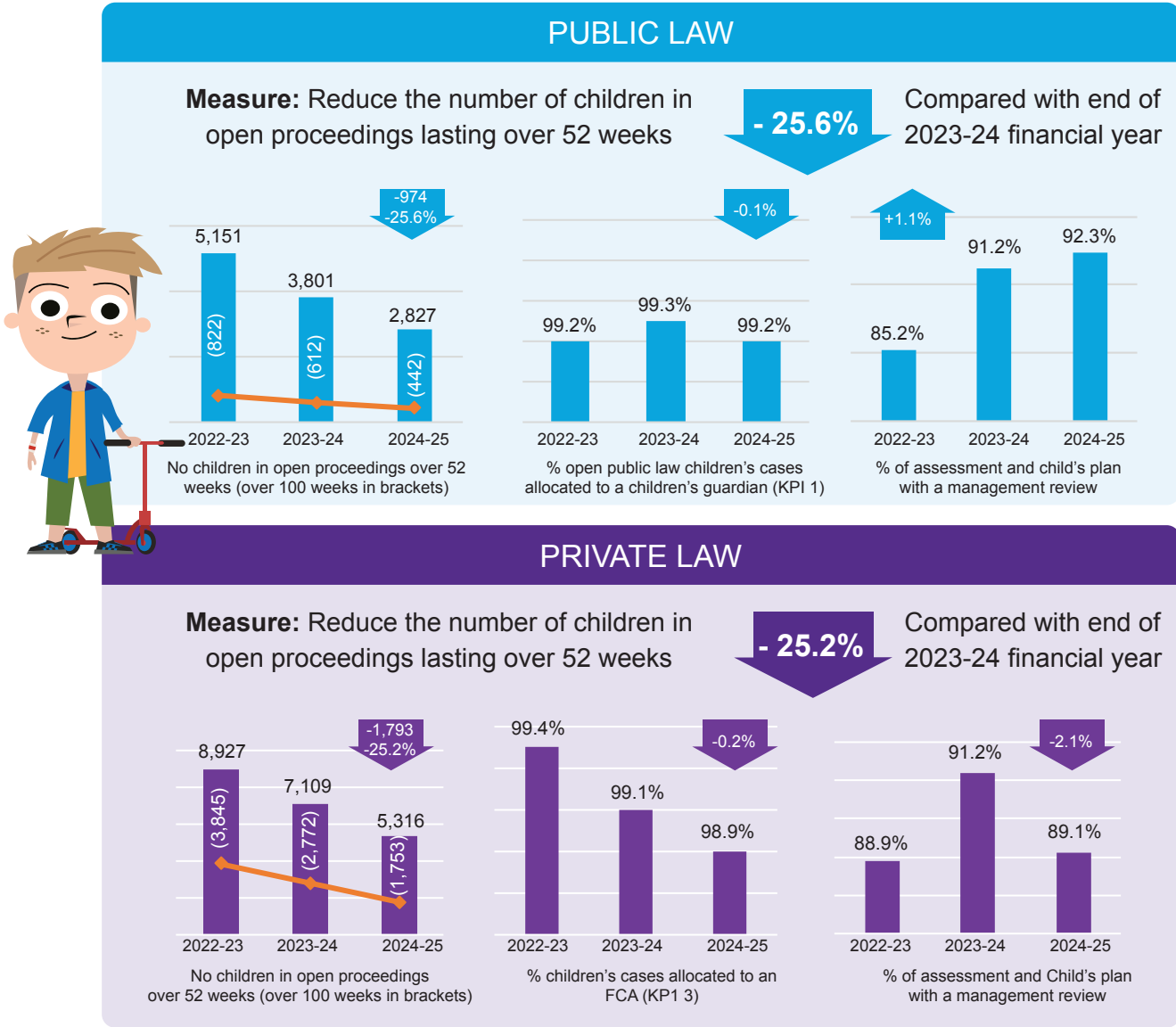
The visuals below describe Cafcass’ contribution to those objectives using our own supporting data across six priority areas of work. They include performance headlines for each objective as well as setting out our improvement and recovery intentions for the year ahead. Data is reported as at the end of the 2024-25 financial year.

Figure 9: Family Justice System (FJS) objectives mapped against Cafcass success measures

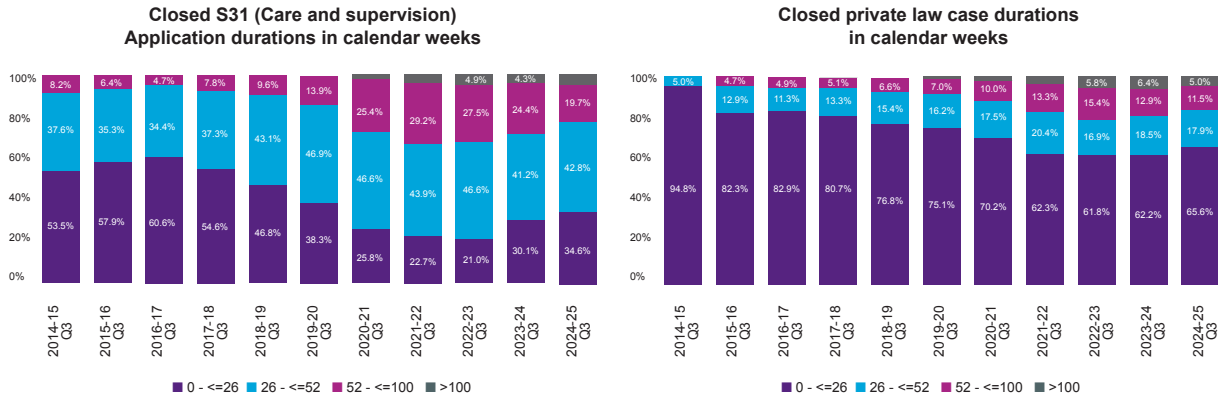
FJS objective: ensure children and families have timely outcomes

Cafcass supporting priority one: reduce number of children in long-running open proceedings

Lead: National Director of Operations



¹³ Ministry of Justice and Department for Education. (n.d.). Family Justice Board. GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/family-justice-board>



The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- For public law there are 2,827 children in open proceedings 52+ weeks (of whom 442 have been open 100+ weeks). This is a -25.6% reduction from 2023-24 (-27.8% reduction in children in open proceedings 100+ weeks).
- For private law there are 5,316 children in open proceedings for 52+ weeks (of whom 1,753 have been open 100+ weeks). This is a -25.2% reduction from 2023-24 (-36.8% reduction in children in open proceedings 100+ weeks). 23.7% (2,040 children) of these long-running private law cases are ‘court ready’ (Cafcass has filed a safeguarding letter or the section 7 report).
- The key performance indicator for timeliness in public and private law work has been met throughout the year.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

- Target specific regions and teams where the management review and oversight of assessment and child’s plans is not present for every child.

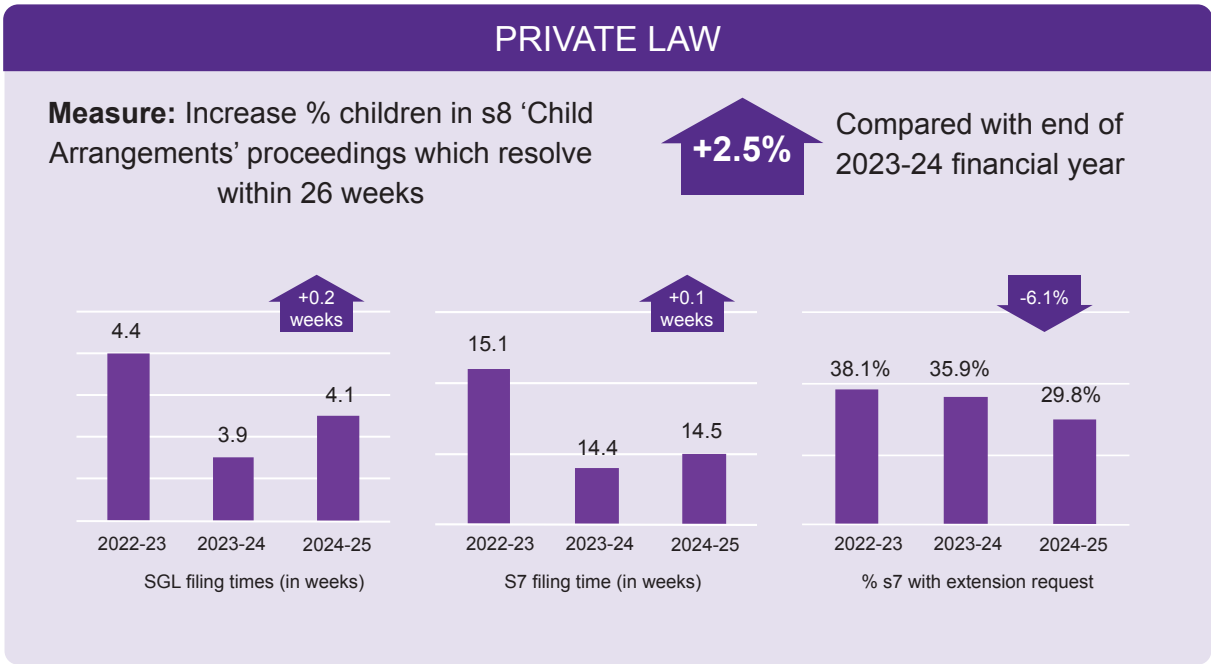
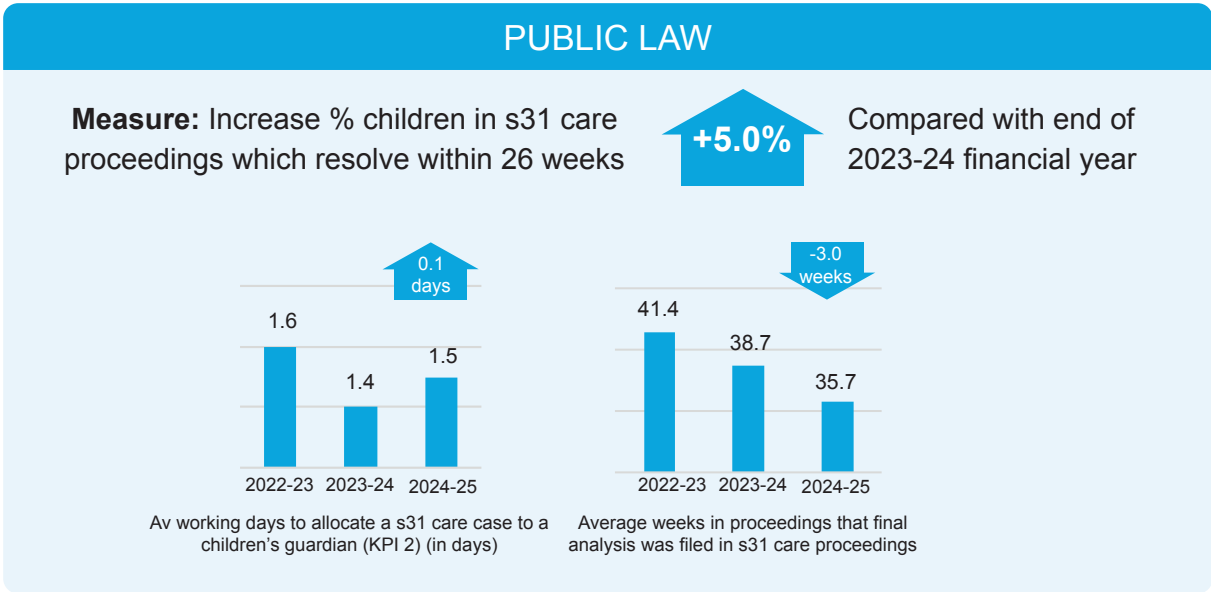
- Target specific regions and teams where case allocation is not achieved in nationally required timescales – including increased resourcing and oversight on cases where children are waiting to meet their FCA (this will only be in private law proceedings, since public law work cannot be allocated as waiting ‘on duty’).
- Continue to hold delay as a national improvement priority in all regions.
- Comply with national FJB measures regarding no new public law cases open for over 26 weeks and no public or private law over 100 weeks by the end of March 2026. This will require leaders to report on their contribution to Cafcass’ commitment to its six PLO measures¹⁴ and to introduce oversight of a timetable in all public and private law cases (specifically targeting R16.4 cases).
- Review progress against these measures in the internal recovery board, in the operational spotlight reporting and in annual regional performance boards.

¹⁴ Cafcass’ six commitments to support the PLO relaunch, include: 26 weeks - intervention to minimise delay, applying the no-order principle where this is in the child’s best interest and is safe for them, challenging and reviewing all advice for an additional expert, making sure the pre-proceedings work is well understood and considered in the advice to the family court (including asking why this order and why now, making sure the Guardian’s recommendations are shared with child whose responses are to be included in report and being proactive in steps to make every hearing count so that proceedings conclude as often as possible at the Issues Resolution Hearing (IRH)

FJS objective: ensure children and families have timely outcomes

Cafcass supporting priority two: increase % of proceedings which resolve within 26 weeks

Lead: National Director of Operations



The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- During Q4 2024-25, 32.9% of S31 (Care and supervision) applications were closed in 26 weeks (latest reportable quarter). This is a continued improvement when compared to the previous financial year, where the percentage of applications closing within 26 weeks was 27.9% (Q4 2023-24).

- Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 it took on average **1.5 working days** to allocate a s31 care case to a children's guardian (KPI 2), this trend was stable in comparison to the previous year with the organisation meeting its key performance indicator.

The average weeks in proceedings it took a children's guardian to file a final analysis report in s31 care proceedings reduced by 3.0 weeks to **35.7 weeks** in the reporting year.

- During Q4 2024-25, **62.6%** of private law cases were concluded within 26 weeks. This is a **2.5%** increase compared to the same quarter in 2023-24 where the percentage of cases closing within 26 weeks was 60.1%.
- In private law, cases between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 it took on average **4.1 weeks** for an FCA to file a safeguarding letter before the first hearing and dispute resolution appointment (FHDRA), compared to 3.9 weeks last year (**+0.2 weeks**). In the same period, FCAs filed Section 7 reports in an average of **14.5 weeks**, which is no change on the previous financial year.
- 29.8%** of Section 7 reports were extended between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. This is a **6.1%** reduction compared to the previous year. **5,515** reports were extended in the financial year.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

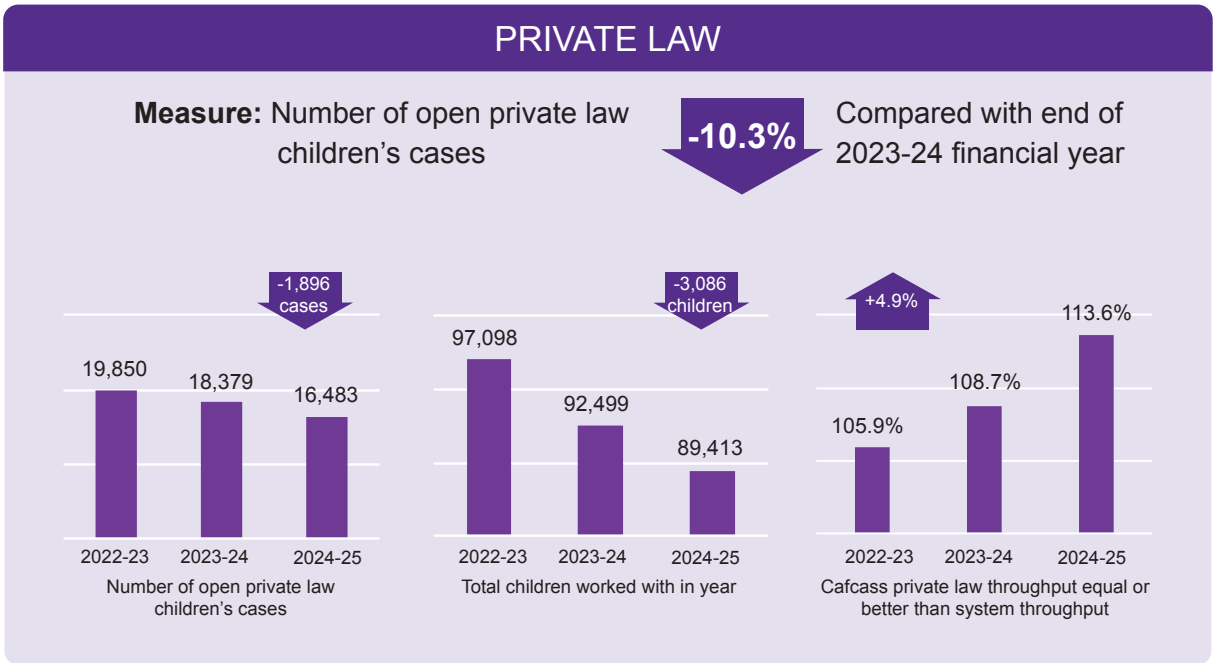
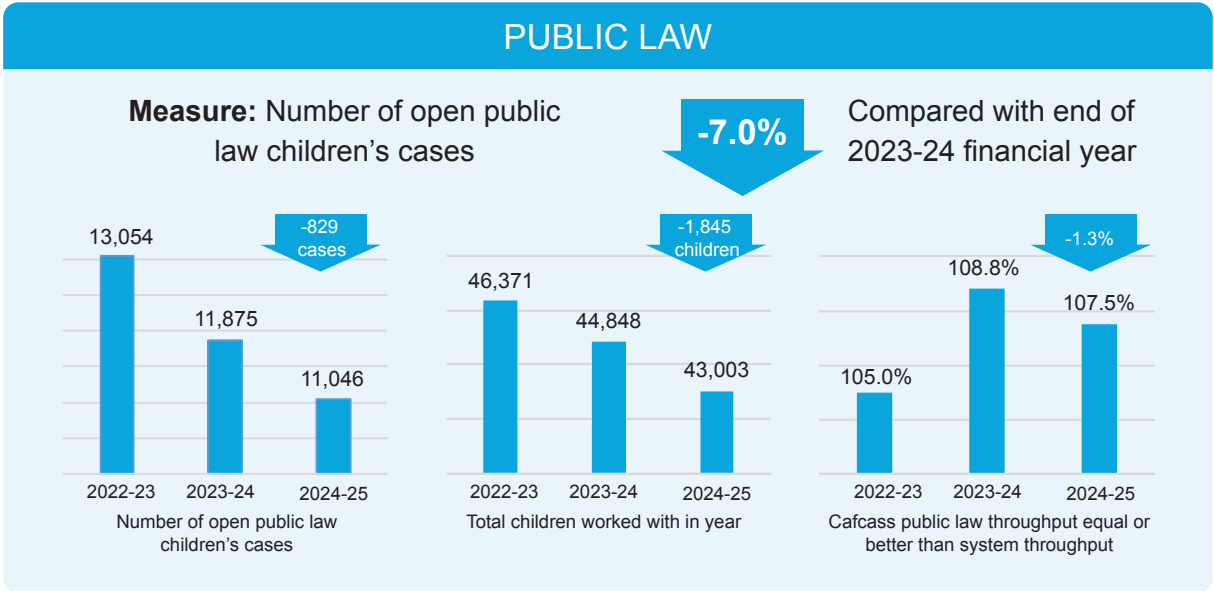
- Improve the timeliness of safeguarding letters to the court in all Operational Service Areas (OSAs), with none exceeding four weeks by end March 2026.
- Continue to implement the private law reforms (Pathfinder courts) that reduce delay for children and require a single child impact report to be filed with the court within eight working weeks and for a single decisions hearing to make the final order.
- Reduce extensions to below 25% across the country, requiring quarterly reports from operational teams on the reasons for extensions.
- In OSAs subject to prioritisation, to increase the oversight and reporting of timescales for case allocation and submission of the Section 7 report. At the same time, monitor the arrangements to ensure that no safeguarding letters are waiting allocation and that the four-week target is in place across all teams.



FJS objective: ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available

Cafcass supporting priority three: reduce the number of open children’s cases¹⁵

Lead: National Director of Operations



¹⁵ It is important to note that the volume of Cafcass open cases differs from that recorded nationally by HMCTS because they report on all applications (a % of which are not ordered for Cafcass involvement) and Wales is included. This differential is approximately 21,000 (129%) more children’s cases outstanding in the system than Cafcass’ open children’s cases.

The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- Open children’s case levels have continued to decrease because of continued improved system throughput and Cafcass use of post-assessment hubs to hold cases open where the Section 7 report has been filed.
- Open public law case levels have reduced by 7.0% (-829 children’s cases / -1,701 children) compared to the end of the 2023-24 financial year.
- Open private law cases have declined by 10.3% (-1,896 children’s cases / -2,824 children) compared to the end of the 2023-24 financial year.
- Throughput has been positively maintained for both public and private law since 31 March 2024; 107.5% for public law (-1.3%) and 113.6% (+4.9%) for private law.
- The regional case progression and throughput leads will develop effective and regular communications with local courts and HMCTS lead officers to arrange for orders to be dispatched quickly and consistently to Cafcass.
- Consistency in the number of children by OSA who are waiting to meet their FCA.
- To consider what can be implemented nationally prior to the national private law pathfinder programme in respect of the Cafcass screening and information team functions. This is an important development in terms of the oversight and timeliness of case allocation to FCAs and children’s guardians.
- Receipt of a monthly report to the internal Cafcass recovery board chaired by the Chief Executive.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

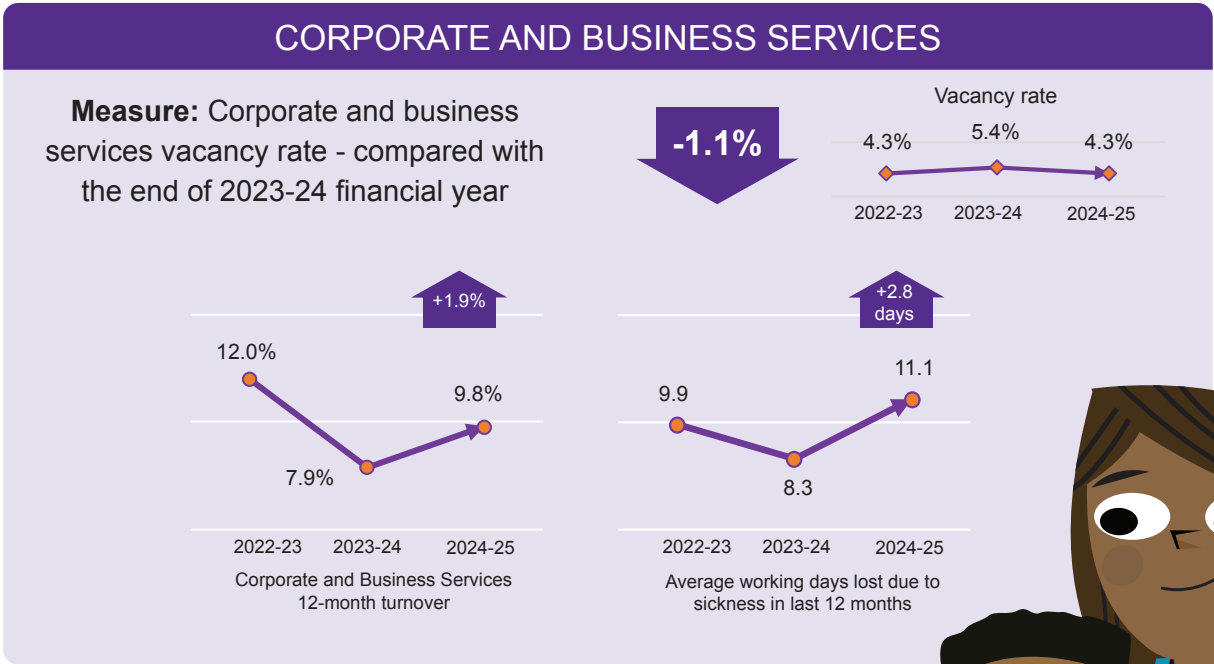
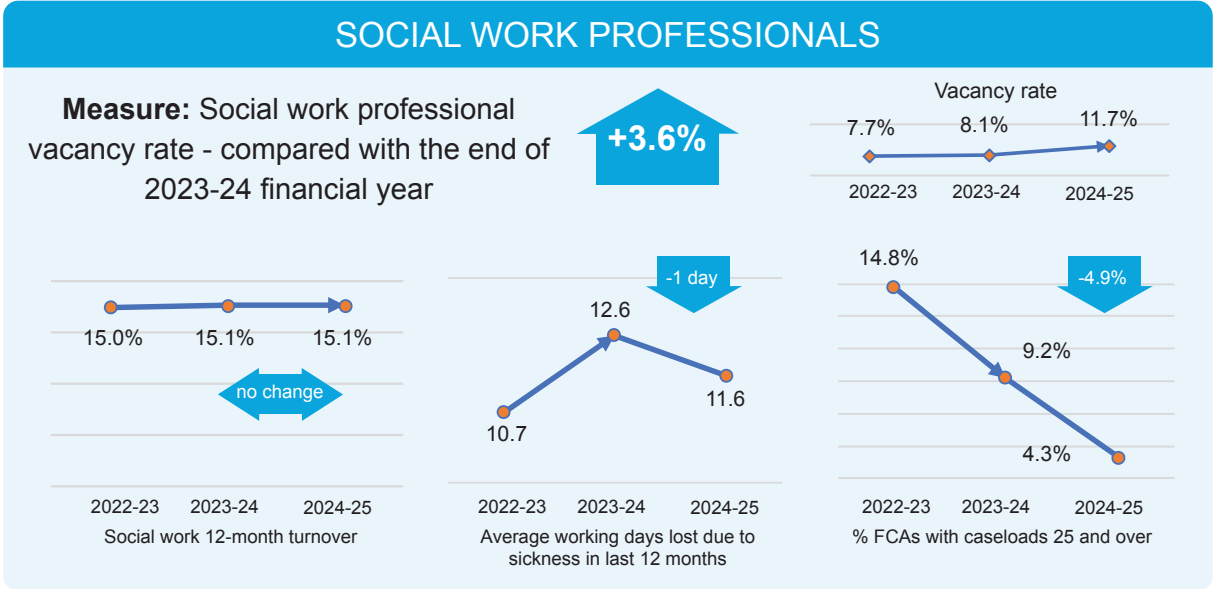
- To assign case progression and throughput capacity and internal leadership to each of the eight regions in order that allocations, filing and case closure are managed and reported consistently with targets set for operational service areas and teams that are falling behind agreed operating standards and national key performance indicators. This will also include a more regular and targeted collaboration between business services leaders handling work ordered to Cafcass at the national business centre and the processes associated with effective allocation and the safe flow of work for children.



FJS objective: ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available

Cafcass supporting priority four: increase capacity, especially in social work

Lead: National Director of Resources



The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, turnover was 15.1% for social workers, which is no change compared to the 2023-24 financial year. The latest comparable measure for the local authority children’s social workforce is 13.9%, -2.1% from previous year (DfE data 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024). For corporate and business services staff, turnover has increased in the latest 12-month period to 9.8% for April 2024 - March 2025, compared to 7.9% in 2023-24.
- As of 31 March 2025, the social work professional vacancy rate was 11.7% (approved ‘empty seat’ FTE vacancies) compared to 8.1% in 2023-24. For corporate and business services, the vacancy rate was 4.3%, a decrease compared to the previous year’s figure (5.4%).
- Sickness absence for social work professionals has reduced. The average working days lost (AWDL) for social work staff from 1 April 24 to 31 March 25 was 11.6 days compared to 12.6 days for the 2023-24 financial year.
- Where FTE working days lost to sickness in the period 1 April 24 to 31 March 25 are expressed as a percentage of available FTE working days in the period, this equates to a sickness absence rate of 5.4%. The latest comparable measure for the local authority children’s social workforce in England is 3.4%, -0.2% from the previous year (DfE data 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024). 12-month AWDL for corporate and professional staff (1 April 24 to 31 March 25) is 11.1 days, an increase from 8.3 days in 2023-24.

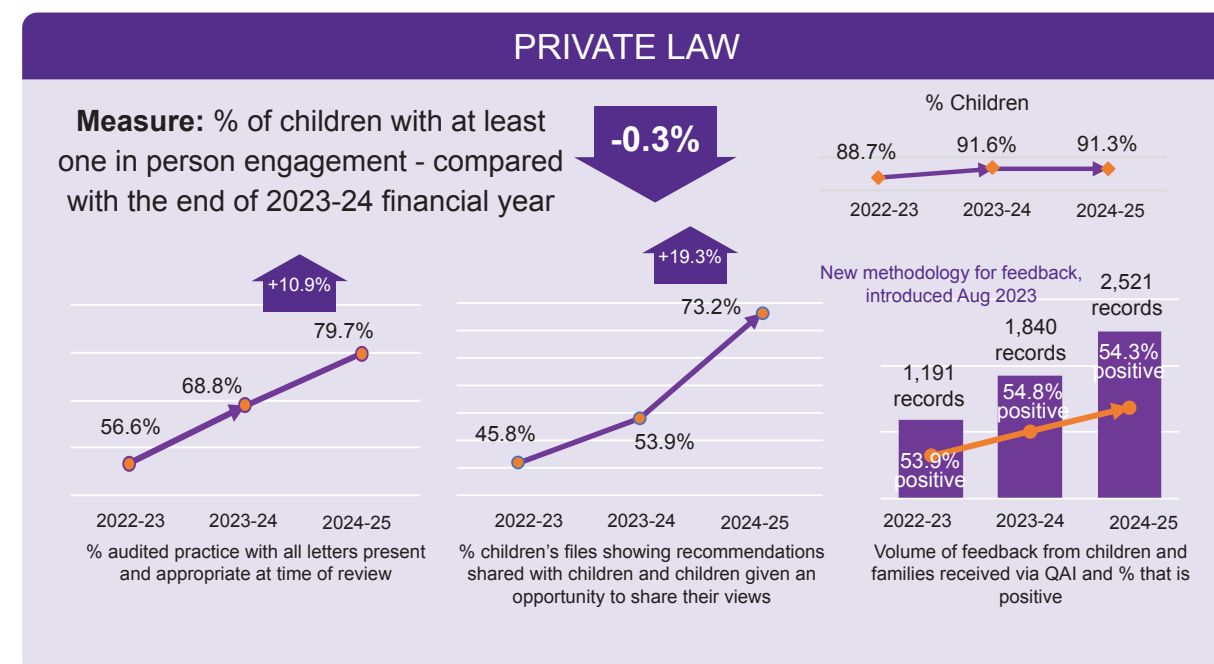
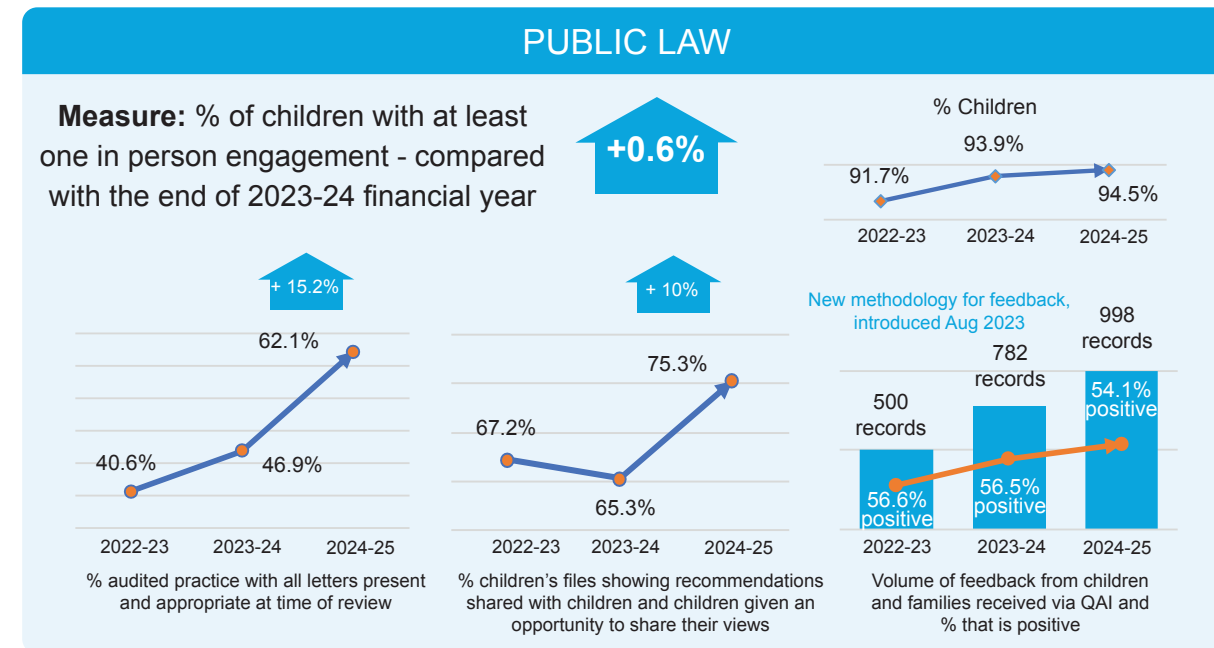
Our improvement and recovery focus is:

- A targeted programme to improve social work turnover in the OSA and regions where this is compromising capacity and progress with improvement. Directors and deputies will report quarterly to the internal recovery board against a range of measures including sickness absence and process, performance, staff engagement, wellbeing, turnover, workloads, quality of induction and external factors influencing pressure including demand and judicial/HMCTS capacity.
- A range of retention initiatives to target the most pressured areas losing the most social work practitioners and managers – currently London, Essex and the South West. This work to commence as a fully shared operational and HR services programme on 1 June 2025.
- A review of progress following the GIAA audit on managing sickness absence and the extent to which the actions are making a difference to the quantum of sickness absence.
- To develop a programme of management review workshops where the expectations for managers are assessed against the capacity and challenges for them and there is clarity about the pace and change of improvements that are both required and manageable.

FJS objective: improve the experience of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priority five: improve children's understanding and ability to engage in their proceedings

Lead: National Director of Operations



The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- On applicable¹⁶ children's open public law cases, 94.5% of children have at least one 'in person' engagement recorded. This is a +0.6% increase compared to the end of the 2023-24 financial year. On applicable children's open private law cases, 91.3% of children have at least one 'in person' engagement recorded. This is a -0.3% reduction when compared to the end of the 2023-24 financial year.
- The volume of feedback received from children and families has increased by 27.6% in public law proceedings and 37.0% for private law.
- For public law proceedings, 54.1% of feedback received was positive, this is a -2.4% decrease since 2023-24 and in private law, the proportion that was positive is also slightly lower compared to the previous year at 54.3% (-0.5%).¹⁷
- The proportion of children's case files audited which showed recommendations were shared with children has seen a sharp increase of 10% in public law and 19.3% in private law compared to the end of the 2023-24 financial year. For children's cases subject to a case file audit during 2024-25; 75.3% of public law children's cases and 73.2% of private law children's cases showed recommendations had been shared with children.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

- Maintain seeing and engaging with children as one of our national practice improvement priorities and develop guidance to support children being seen throughout their proceedings and in person. This will require a review of capacity and time available for FCAs and children's guardians.
- Continue to invest time and resources in seeking feedback from families and children and where this is positive to use it actively in operational service areas to bring all practice up to the level of the best.
- To invest more time in speaking to children who say their experience with Cafcass was less positive and follow up directly with them, explaining what has changed and why in response to their feedback.
- To clarify guidance for practitioners and managers so that children's responses to the recommendations that have been shared with them, are included in their own words in the report that is submitted to the court.
- Target the teams and operational service areas where sending letters at the start and end of proceedings is not habitual and does not happen in every child's case. Set clear targets so that all areas achieve 100% by end of March 2026.
- Undertake an internal evaluation about the experiences of children and families whose proceedings are heard in the Pathfinder courts.

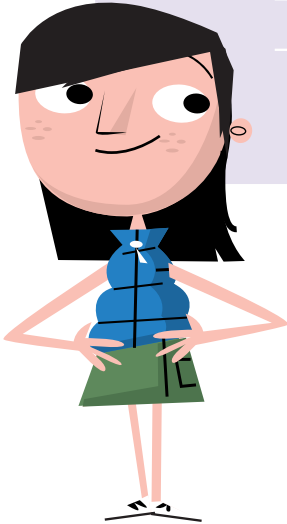
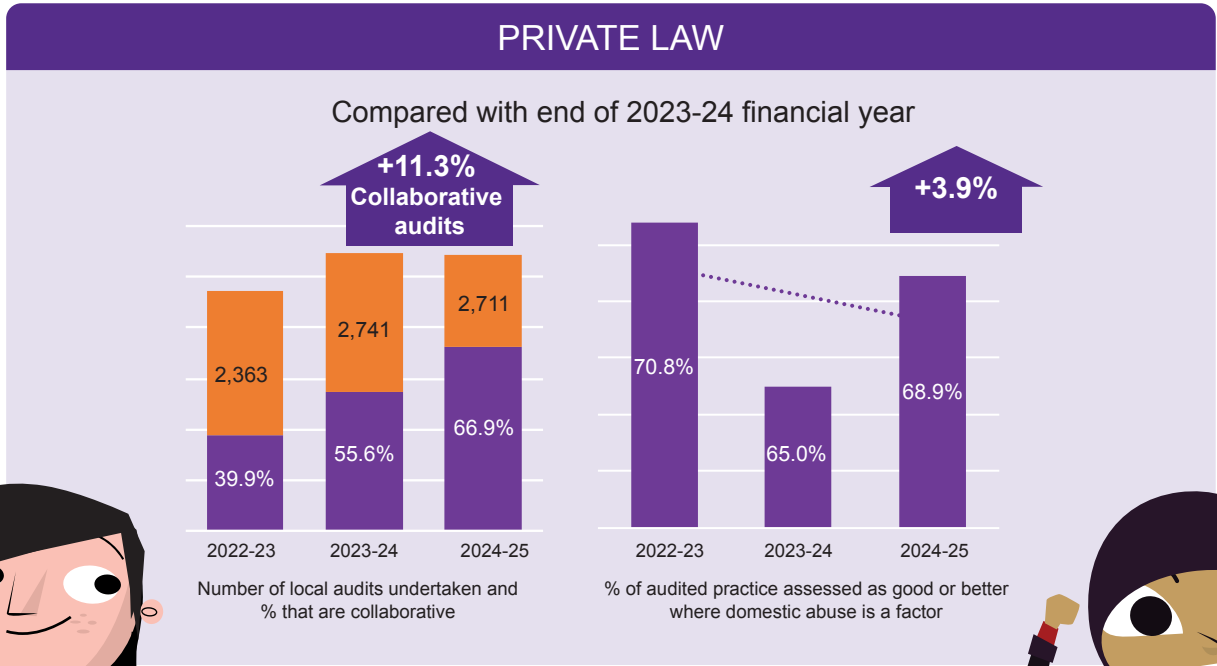
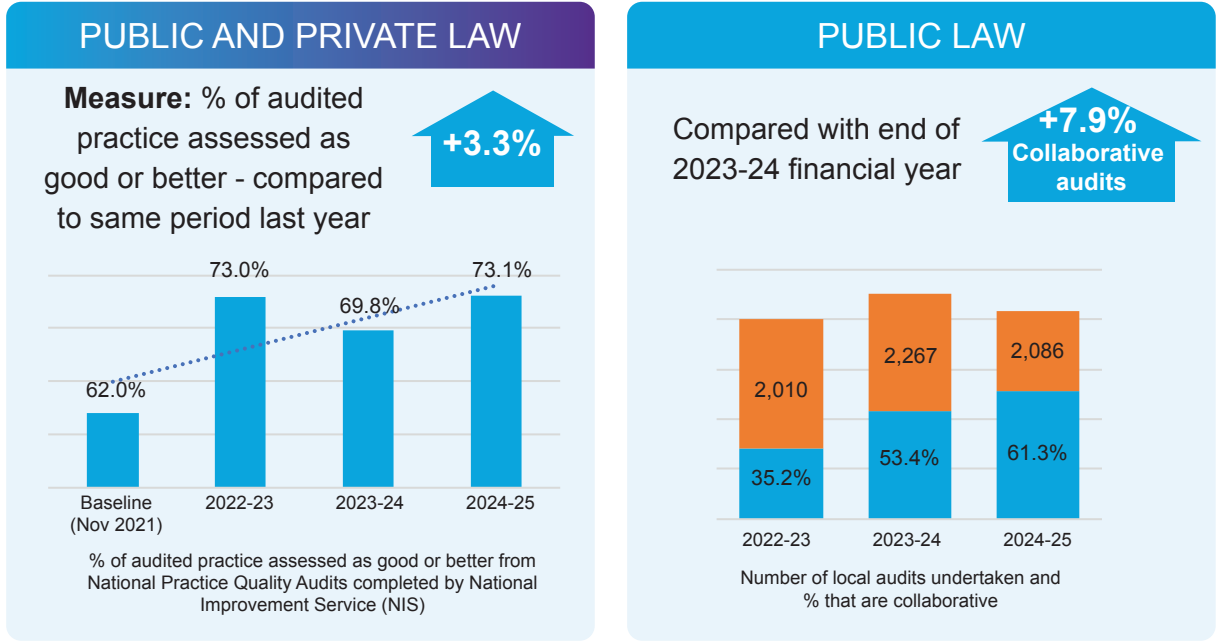
¹⁶ Child engagement is required on open public law 15 working days from first lead allocation. Child engagement is required on open private law cases, at least two weeks before filing the first s7 report.

¹⁷ Since August 2024, the methodology for calculating 'positive' feedback has been updated to match the Digital Feedback responses. This change, applied to previous years' data, shows a general reduction in positive feedback but comparison across previous years remains consistent with past trends.

FJS objective: improve the experience of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priority six: improve quality and consistency of practice

Lead: National Director of Operations



The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- The quality of practice assessed in all audits that are graded, has improved by 3.3% overall in this reporting year and now stands at 73.1% found to be good or better.
 - There has been a continued improvement in the proportion of local audits undertaken that are collaborative;¹⁸ 61.3% in public law and 66.9% of private law, representing a 7.9% and 11.3% increase compared to 2023-24.
 - The proportion of audited public law practice with an effective assessment of harm and risk of future harm was 93.5%, representing a significant increase of 14% compared to 2023-24 and for private law, 89% with an 18% improvement in this reporting year.
 - The proportion of audited private law practice where domestic abuse is a factor and that is judged to be good or better, is 68.9% (of 244 audits), representing a 3.9% increase compared to the 2023-24.
- Our improvement and recovery focus is:
- Retain the ten existing practice and leadership priorities in our national improvement plan (see figure 18), requiring the same of all local operational service area improvement plans but also supplementing with additional priorities and progressive targets where areas and teams are not performing at or above the national average.
 - Utilise the first regional suite of annual self-evaluations on the effectiveness of practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor and set out in each OSA, the key priorities and improvement targets to be monitored half yearly in a performance and learning Corporate Management Team meeting.
 - Develop and implement a new strengthened improvement programme focused on practice in areas that is judged to be inadequate or requiring improvement. The programme is to involve internal improvement practitioners and managers drawn from a pool whose work has been found to be good or outstanding and who will coach and develop those who work is not yet at the standard we expect and require for children.
 - Lead and implement year three of the Cafcass strategic plan, ‘Ambitious for children’, making sure that the practice improvement aspects are monitored and reported to the Cafcass Board at each meeting.
 - Targeting the use and understanding of the Cafcass practice and management quality standards in areas and teams where practice needs to improve significantly.
 - Use the new quarterly Practice and Performance Reviews progress reports to assess improvement in operational service areas and for all areas, include a specific requirement on securing 100% management oversight on all assessment and children’s plans.
 - Utilise formal improvement interventions with an independent assessment requirement in any operational service areas where the standard of practice and leadership does not promote the safety and welfare of children as its first priority.

¹⁸ Collaborative in this context means that the audit is undertaken with the practitioner or manager and the auditor. It is established as a learning and improvement observation with actions set and agreed as required

Commissioned services

Cafcass commissions and coordinates the delivery of court-ordered support services for families in private law cases on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. These include Planning Together for Children, Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA), and DNA paternity testing. These services help parents plan for their future family arrangements. Courts order DNA testing directly and Cafcass handles sample collections.

Before recommending a service,¹⁹ a Family Court Adviser (FCA) assesses the suitability in respect of the court application and what is known about the family in order that the outcome makes the most positive difference and is safe for the child or children.

Planning Together for Children – This course supports parents to focus on the needs of their children while they are working out how they can parent together during the process of separating and/or living apart. It involves online learning, group work, online support and the development of an optional parenting plan. The course can be mandated by the court or recommended by an FCA.

During this reporting year, 27% of private law applications included a recommendation or order to complete the course. This represents a reduction of 5% on the previous year.

Nearly one-third of these referrals were made by an FCA, while 70% came from court orders. In the same year, 18,131 parents (88.6% of referrals in the same period) completed the e-learning stage and 87.1% attended the group workshop (17,818). On average, parents took 14 days to finish the two hour e-learning and 30 days to attend the two and a half hour workshop.

During the year and in response to feedback and follow-up interviews, changes have been made to try to promote the use of and accessibility of the parenting plan. Launched in April 2023, the online parenting plan has been completed, in total, on 2,494 occasions, (1,280 in 2023-24 and 1,214 in 2024-25).

Over the past two years, we have been able to secure responses from 27,753 participants who have completed the online workshop. 90% (24,685) say that they have gained a clearer understanding of the impact of family conflict on their children, and 62% (17,271) feel more confident about building effective co-parenting relationships. More parents are able to access the course without waiting for court hearings or orders because FCAs are able to recommend this option directly.

The lead provider contacts parents six to eight weeks after they complete the course, with prior consent. In 2023-24, 13% of parents participated in follow-up calls. This increased to 24.6% in 2024-25. 78% of those called in this reporting year were able to give examples of different approaches to parenting and conflict since completing the course. Course completion times are improving as a result of determined efforts by Cafcass colleagues and providers. The e-learning module is now completed on average within 14.2 days, down from 17.8 days and if parents attend the workshop, they are taking 9 days fewer to do so (30.3 days) when compared to last year.

On average, 1,500 participants attend a group workshop each month.

In the year ahead, a child's version of the parenting plan is expected to launch, enabling children to hear about their parent's intentions in respect of their care and supervision despite separation or disagreement about arrangements for them.

Improving Child and Family

Arrangements (ICFA) helps families agree on beneficial and sustainable family time arrangements when they have not been able to make these happen on their own.

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, ICFA received 1,549 referrals (3.8% of all private law applications), a 17% decrease compared to the same period in 2023-24. ICFA usually supports families over six to eight weeks.

Feedback in the reporting year, shows that 60% of families report improved communication after using the service and 53% said it helped them agree on a parenting plan.

91.5% of all families referred to either ICFA or Planning Together for Children have not made a return application to court.

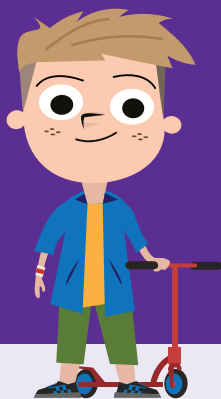
Current contracts commissioned by Cafcass on behalf of the Ministry of Justice are due to end in November 2025. The new service model and specification have been developed collaboratively with Cafcass practitioners and managers, the FJYPB, Cafcass' Family Forum, Ministry of Justice, National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) and current providers. Following the publication of the [Private Law Pathfinder Pilot evaluation and financial analysis](#) on the 27 March 2025, we are currently planning further review of the service provision in order that it aligns with Pathfinder court timescales for concluding proceedings and does not contribute to delay for children.

DNA testing – in the reporting year, 281 orders for DNA testing were made by the courts in private law cases. This is consistent with the previous financial year (283). DNA Legal, the contracted provider, has processed an average of 23 court orders per month. The results of the DNA tests are submitted directly to the courts and currently have a compliance rate of 96.5% being filed on time.

In November 2024, the court guidance for testing was updated as a result of feedback from the FJYPB and the Cafcass Family Forum, whose views were that the information needed to be much more accessible to those ordered to test.

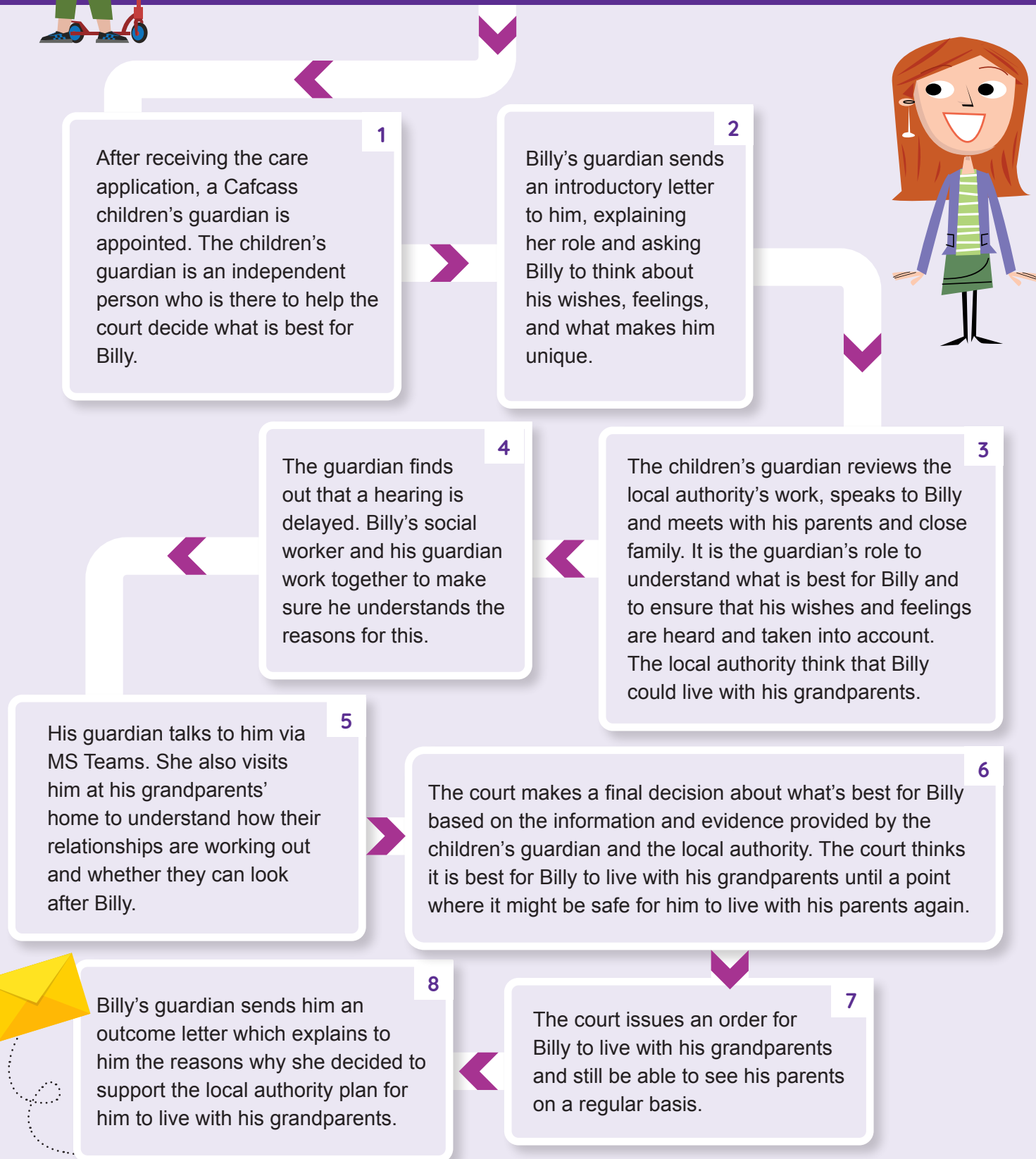


¹⁹ Excluding the paternity testing service.



A child and family journey through public law

*Billy is 10 and lives with his mum and dad. The local authority has judged that Billy cannot be kept safe with his parents and have made a care application for him to be looked after by the local authority.

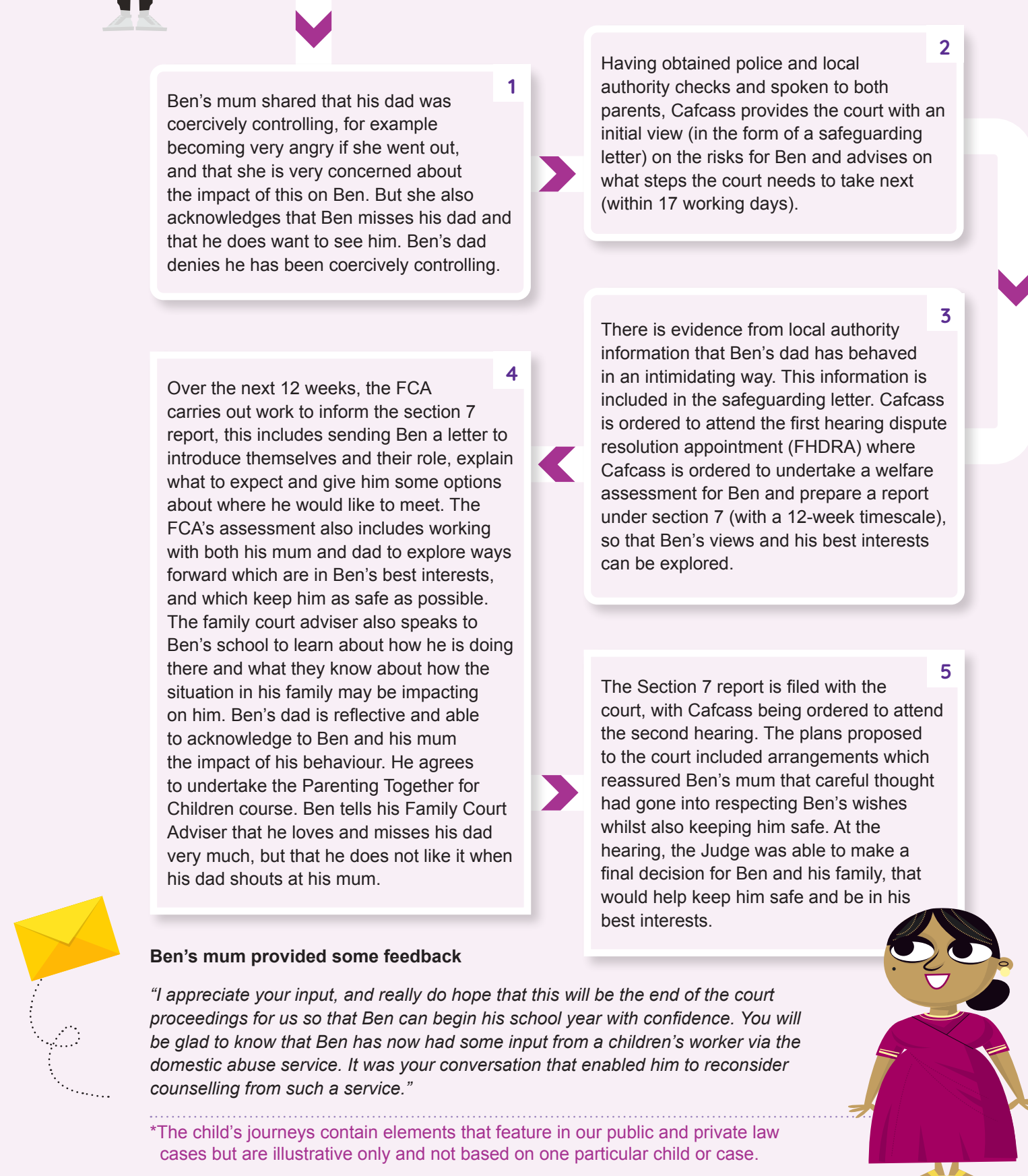


*The child's journeys contain elements that feature in our public and private law cases but are illustrative only and not based on one particular child or case.



A child and family journey through private law - working to the Child Arrangements Programme (2014) (current practice in private law)

*Ben is 12 years old and lives with his mum. His dad has applied for a child arrangements order because he has not seen Ben since their separation three months ago. He has asked the court to make an order for Ben to spend alternate weekends with him because Ben has said to him that this is what he wants.



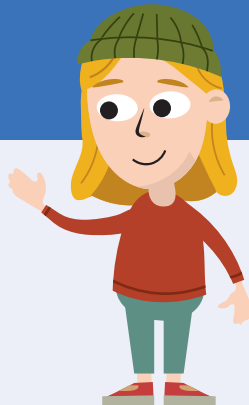
Ben's mum provided some feedback

"I appreciate your input, and really do hope that this will be the end of the court proceedings for us so that Ben can begin his school year with confidence. You will be glad to know that Ben has now had some input from a children's worker via the domestic abuse service. It was your conversation that enabled him to reconsider counselling from such a service."

*The child's journeys contain elements that feature in our public and private law cases but are illustrative only and not based on one particular child or case.



*Tamara is 10 years old and lives with her mum. Her dad has applied for a child arrangements order because he has not seen Tamara since the separation from her mum three months ago. He has asked the court to make an order for Tamara to spend alternate weekends with him because she has said to him that this is what she wants.



What is the ‘Pathfinder’ pilot?

The Pathfinder courts were established in response to the Government report, ‘Assessing the Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children’s Cases Report 2020’. The report concluded that adversarial court processes in private law proceedings contribute to delay, retraumatise victims of domestic abuse and cause distress to children. The purpose of the Pathfinder court is to try to conclude proceedings earlier, with fewer hearings and with less delay through earlier engagement of children with an FCA before the first (and proposed only) decisions hearing. Currently, section 7 reports – currently required where there are welfare issues for the court to consider – are ordered by the court following the First Hearing Dispute Resolutions Appointment (FHDR). Instead, in the Pathfinder courts, a child impact report is ordered to Cafcass, who make a determination as to whether to undertake an assessment of the child’s welfare and safety or to advise the court that the family can be signposted to support that will enable them to resolve their arrangements away from the court. There is intentional strengthening of the requirement for a Mediation Information Assessment Meeting (MIAM) for families or a clearer account to the court as to why an exemption is to be applied. The pilot courts deploy a multi-agency approach, with the court engaging and developing positive working relationships with key local partners such as mediators, local authorities and domestic abuse support providers. A central objective to these revised arrangements supported by a new practice direction, is improved experiences of adult and child victims of domestic abuse. The full evaluation of the pilot is currently awaited.

The arrangements described here show how a different approach through the private law pathfinder might impact the hypothetical case of Tamara and her family.



1
The Court reviews the application, contacts Children’s Social Care to see if Tamara has a Social Worker or had one in the last three months, as they will complete the report in these circumstances. Tamara does not have a social worker and so the Court orders Cafcass to provide a Child Impact Report within 40 working days. This means that there is no safeguarding letter, FHDR or Section 7 Report.

2
Tamara’s mum shares that her dad was controlling, for example becoming very angry if she went out, and that she is very concerned about the impact of this on Tamara. But she also acknowledges that Tamara misses her dad and that she does want to see him. Tamara’s dad denies he has been coercively controlling towards Tamara’s mum.

4
The FCA is able to immediately begin work on the Child Impact Report. Having obtained checks from the police, local authority children’s social care services and having spoken to both parents, the FCA sends a letter to Tamara explaining what to expect and giving her options about where he would like to meet. Tamara tells her FCA that she loves and misses her dad very much, but that she does not like it when her dad shouts at her mum. The FCA supports Tamara to write a letter to the Judge setting out what she would like to happen next.

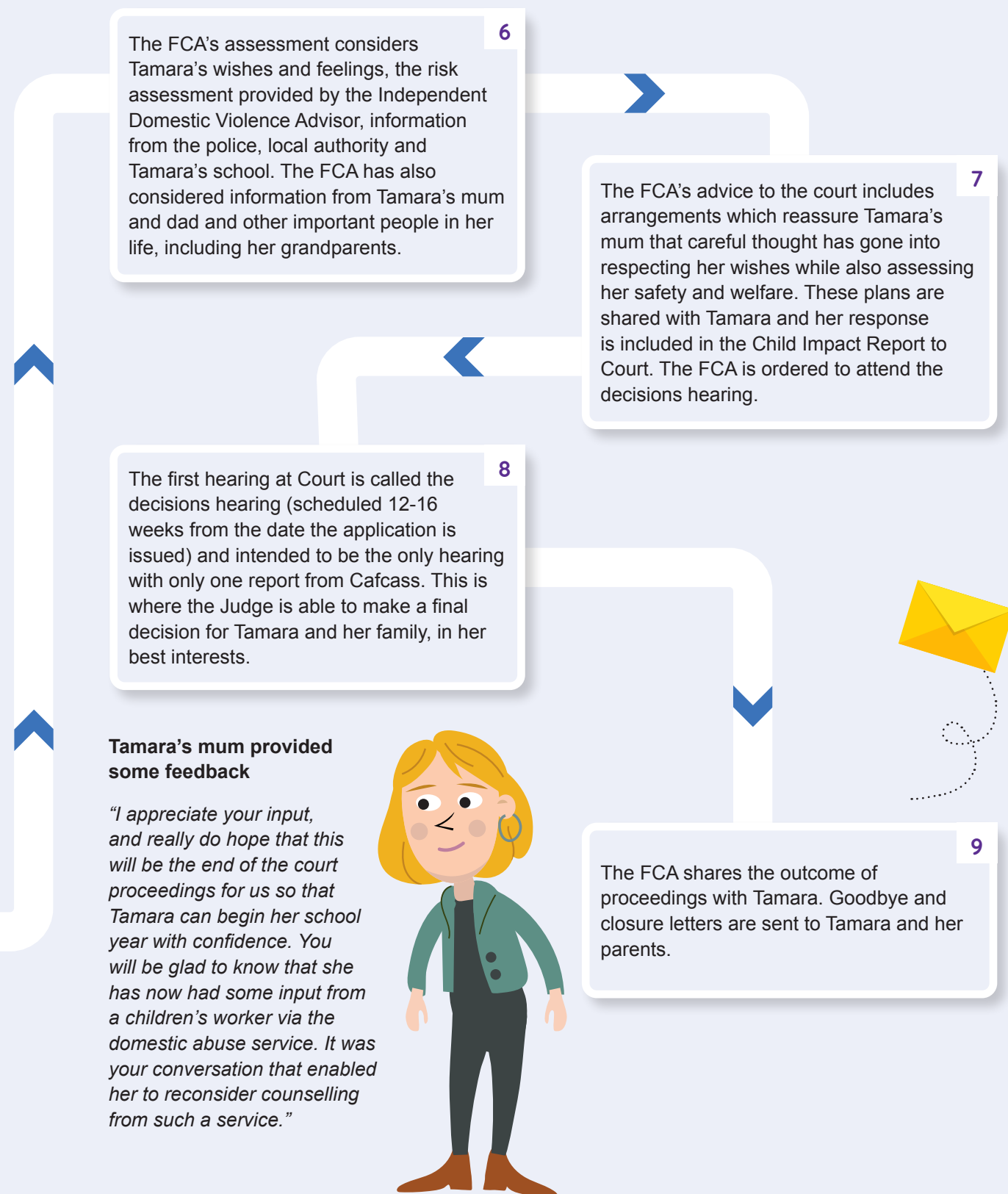
3
An information pack is sent to Tamara via his parents. With Tamara’s mum’s consent, the FCA also makes a referral to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) working in their local authority area. They complete a domestic abuse risk assessment and offer advice and support to Tamara’s mum.



5
The FCA meets with both parents individually. Tamara’s dad is reflective having heard what Tamara has said. He is able to acknowledge to Tamara and her mum, the impact of his behaviour.



*The child’s journeys contain elements that feature in our public and private law cases but are illustrative only and not based on one particular child or case.



2.2

Our year in effectiveness:

2.2 (i) Performance and accountability

Our Performance and Accountability Framework and the associated quality assurance and management oversight cycles are described in figures 10 and 11. They were first established formally in the 2021-22 business year and substantively reviewed in September 2024. The framework and associated arrangements set out our intention to maintain momentum in respect of improvement and performance oversight.

We expect all leaders in our now established two directorate structure of Operations and Resources to take full responsibility for understanding our strategic and improvement priorities, to deploy these mechanisms for holding to account, to adhere to the reporting schedules and to evidence explanations about progress, decline and unchanged performance. The local area requirements of these frameworks and changes to some national processes were an important development in the last reporting year with the reset in September establishing:

- 1. Revisions to the performance and accountability cycle** to include the new Resources Directorate and the expectation of two additional annual performance boards monitoring performance of those business and corporate services leaders against the directorate improvement priorities. See figure 10 overleaf.
- 2. Revisions to the content and format of annual regional performance boards for operations** such that there is increased scrutiny on leaders and managers in respect of casework that is judged to be less than good (including an expected action plan), evidence of Assistant Director follow up and action in respect of work judged to be inadequate (including learning and change plans for practitioners and managers as required,

as well as accounts of the audits undertaken by the Assistant Director and their observations on the effectiveness of practice), fuller reports on the quantum of any unallocated work and the associated management oversight, explicit reference to learning from significant incidents and practice alerts, a local assessment of how it feels to work in the region (including the impact of vacancies, maternity leave and sickness) and the impact of leaders on the same and more detailed accounts expected about team and operational service area variation in practice. In addition, regional leaders are required to give more evidence about learning and change in response to feedback from children and families – including complaints.

3. Revisions to the mid and end year review process, which now requires evidence and progress against workforce and wellbeing plans, specifically in respect of health, safety and security provisions for all colleagues and local priorities for improvement arising from the annual staff survey and social work health check. The end of year process now concludes with a formal self – evaluation for the region, submitted for clearance by the Assistant Director and Heads of Practice as part of the annual self-evaluation for Cafcass that is required by Ofsted.

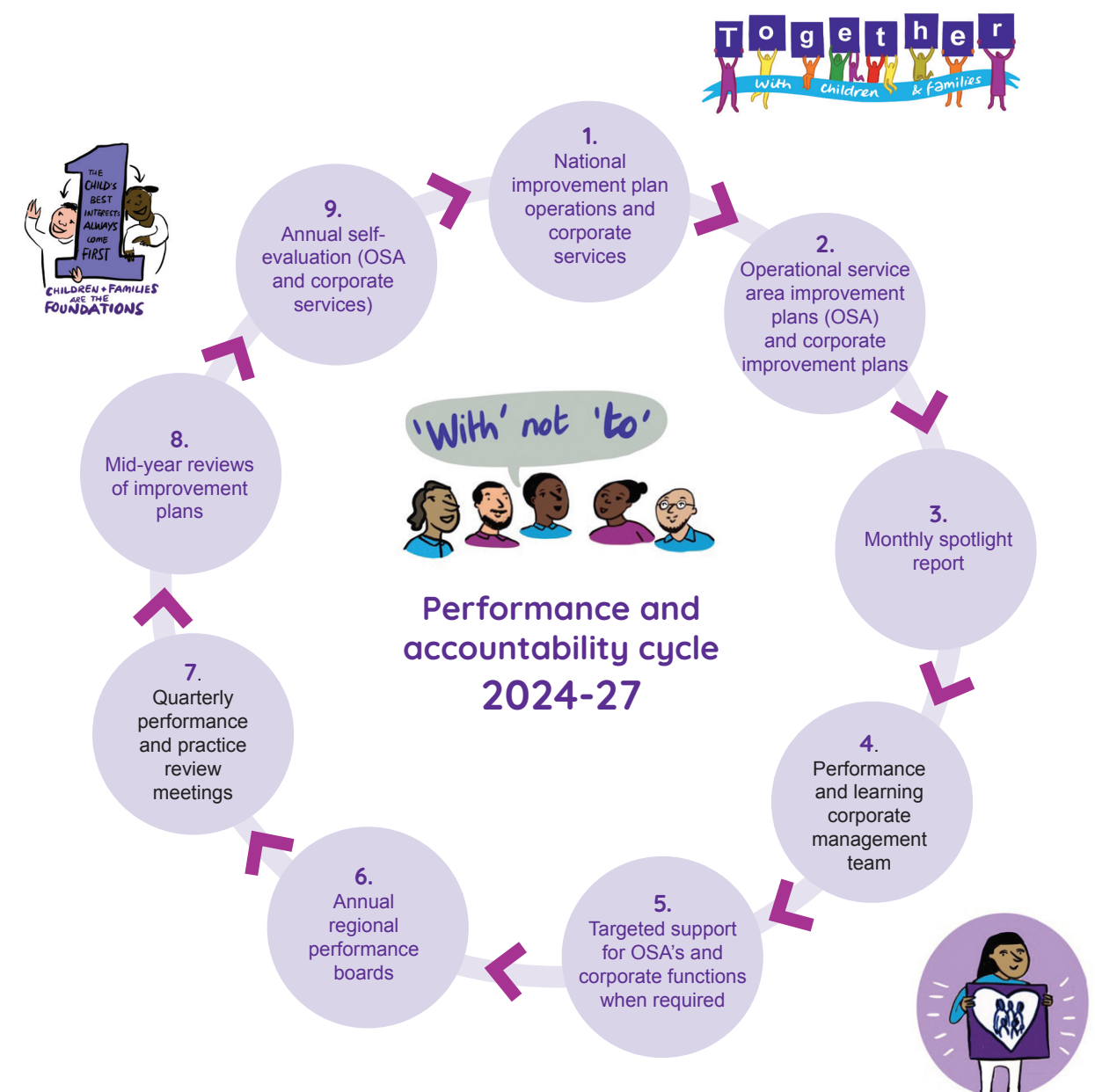
4. Performance and learning reviews (PLR), for operations, take place twice per year instead of three times. There is a personal development plan distinguishing between objectives and actions. These assessments of performance are now graded (developing/achieving/exceeding/underperforming) and a review to consider consistency is proposed for June this year. Actions following local quality audits of practice are now incorporated as well as those that arise from significant incident and learning reviews.

A new supervision agreement and self-assessment is integral to the changes that have been made. Professional supervision is recorded specifically and for any staff who are the subject of performance plans, or during their induction or on return from a long-term sickness absence, such supervision is required as a minimum on a monthly basis.

5. Performance and improvement quarterly reviews (Operations Directorate only). This new assurance function is expected to take place on a quarterly basis in support of the introduction in the year prior, of local operational service area improvement plans. The core intention is to evidence progress against our ‘Listening to children – lighting the way’ plan (the post inspection actions) and associated improvement priorities, using a suite of supporting indicators as well as to evidence progress where performance in the local area is out of line with national trends or a concern has been identified and action updates are required. The impact of this new assurance process is currently under review with early assessment identifying inconsistency in how managers understand and hold to account but also in respect of developing a much more targeted programme (aligned also with the regional improvement plan) of team improvement priorities based on evidence from data, audit and feedback.



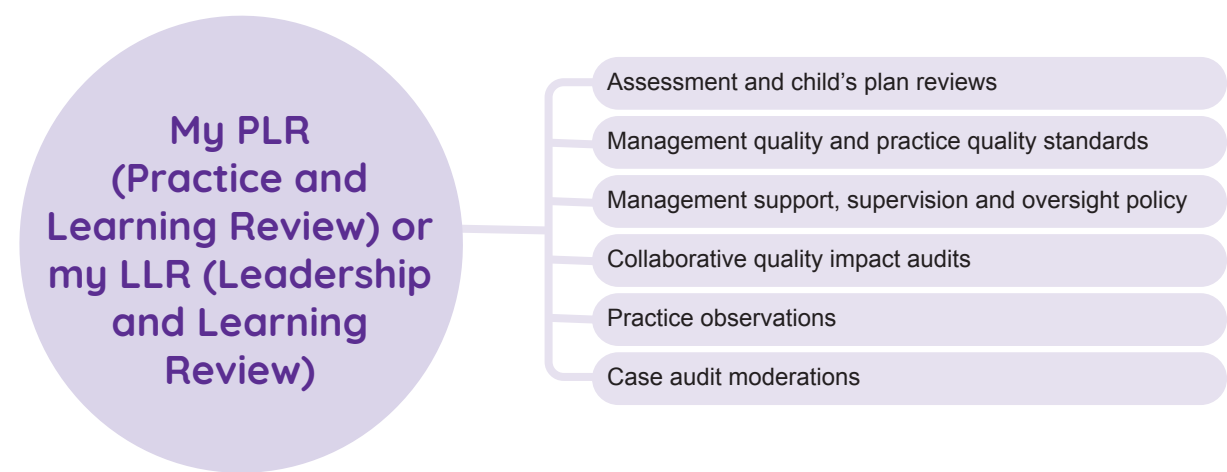
Figure 10: Cafcass performance and accountability cycle 2024-27²⁰



The Performance and accountability cycle continues to evolve in response to our learning as leaders about how to hold ourselves to account for the quality of our operational arrangements, the experiences of children and families and the range of professional functions that support all of the work we undertake. We remain committed to reporting a balance of achievements against shortfalls. Our evidence in the reporting year, shows that leaders invest significant time learning about the effectiveness of practice and evidencing the same in accordance with the formality of the cycle set out above. The scrutiny over the past year on local Operational Service Area performance has resulted in a better understanding for us about the nature and causes of regional variation. This will be a continued priority for the year ahead, specifically in more prescribed reporting and practice evidence at mid and end year reviews.

²⁰ The functions in the cycle above set out in black font apply only to the operations directorate.

Figure 11: Cafcass management support, supervision and oversight



Management oversight and supervision of practice is a fundamental safeguard for children and is a significant component of our performance and accountability framework. We have continued to require more consistent leadership in respect of the management oversight of children's plans (previously called case plans). This remains a priority, with oversight recorded at 90.8% this reporting year, a decrease of 0.9% compared to 2023-24.

Cafcass colleagues are appraised through a Performance Learning Review (PLR), twice a year. 2,652 such reviews were undertaken for eligible social work staff between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. In addition, practitioners and managers spent time in situational supervisions reflecting on casework and rationales for advice to be put to the court.

Our National Improvement Service (NIS) reporting on audits (both national and local) found that a record of supervision was present in 85% of children's casefiles where it should be expected (4,077 audits), representing an increase of 7% when compared with last year. There was clear evidence that supervision makes a difference, providing for reflective discussion, clarifying rationales and enabling FCAs and children's guardians

to be explicit about what is happening to children and thinking through for example the complex professional judgement that has to be advised to the court in public law proceedings when children return to live with their parents or remain in their care during proceedings.

One to one professional supervision at Cafcass is enhanced by the group supervision offer we make and these increased this year, with 75% of all practitioners attending, a rise from 65% in the previous year.

Quality assurance in respect of practice effectiveness is a critical mechanism through which leaders and managers understand whether practice is improving as well as the improvement priorities that need to be established. Case audits are vital to this assurance and if undertaken collaboratively with a practitioner, offer learning opportunities that improve practice even further. This year, 56.5% of all audits were undertaken collaboratively, an increase of 3% on the previous year. Practice observations add an additional view about effectiveness and 1,576 were undertaken this year.



The existing Quality Assurance and Impact audit system commenced in May 2022, with a commitment to increase the reflection and learning components of audit and to reduce the quantum. The number of audits for FCAs and children's guardians was reduced by 50% (from eight to four every year) in order to make way for time to discuss, collaborate and learn. At the same time, the requirement to grade the quality of practice in local teams was removed (with the exception of inadequate work), meaning the NIS has been the single 'grading' view in audit. While collaborative audits represent over the 50% we intended and the culture of auditing practice out of view and conversation has now significantly changed, managers are reporting that it is difficult to spot trends in practice – either positive or less so. In the year ahead therefore, we plan to review our approach and reconsider the requirement to provide a single grading for each audit undertaken. We will do this through strong engagement with practitioners and managers, debating the thresholds for judgements and the alignment with practice and management quality standards.

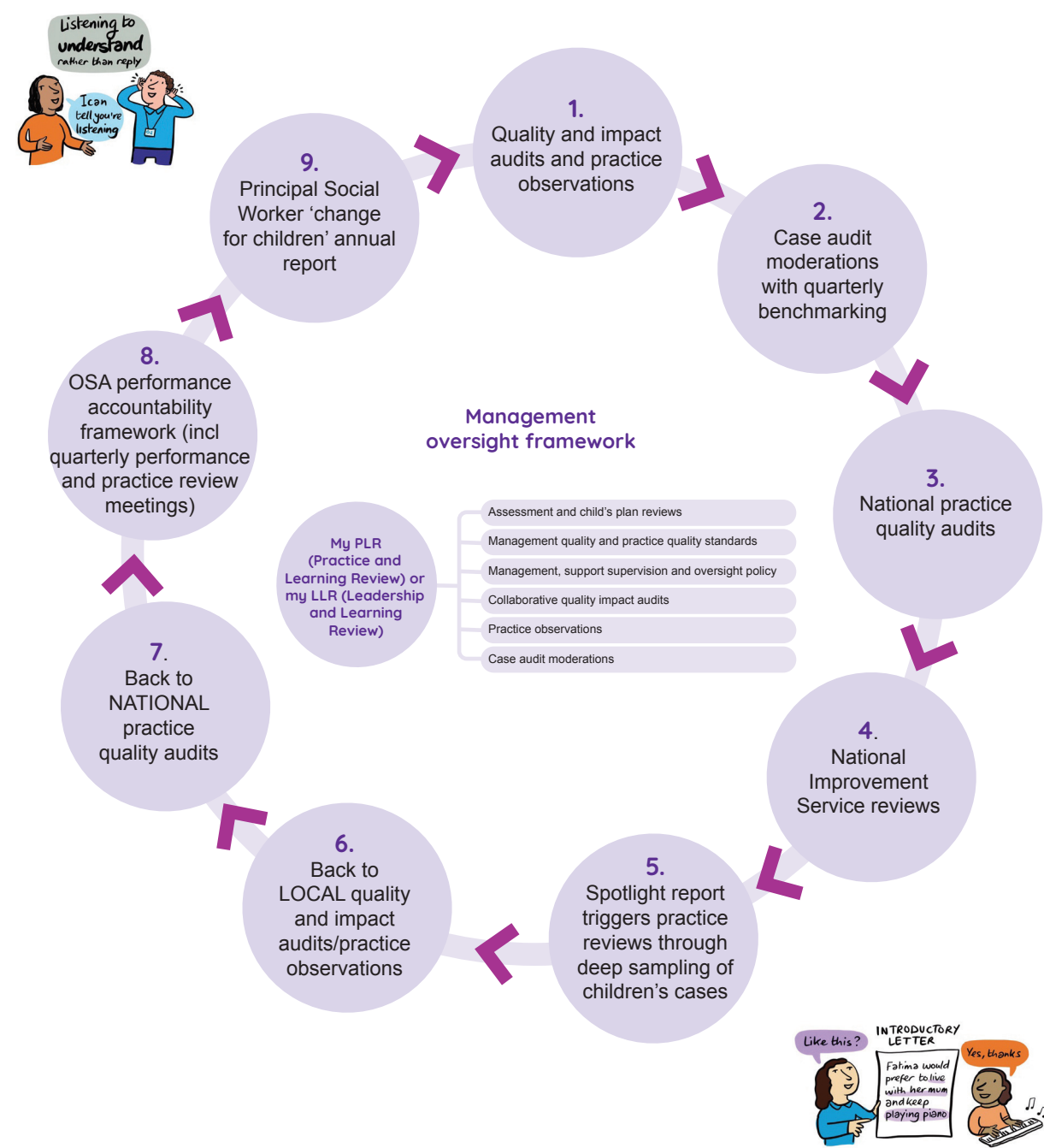
Further, we intend to develop at the same time, an 'ambitious for children collaborative practice' initiative. This will be designed with the FJYPB and with the explicit intention of targeting all practice that requires improvement or is judged to be inadequate. The spirit of the initiative is to release the potential of all managers and practitioners through coaching and dedicated learning time for up to 12 months and to work collaboratively, assessing improvement through a minimum of two additional audits per year for anyone whose work is judged to be less than good. The Corporate Management Team and Cafcass Board will be asked to sign off this initiative later in the summer of 2025 for launch at our 'annual ambitious for children practice week' in October.

We have continued this year to embed the use of our Practice Quality Standards (PQS) as the basis for FCA training, self-evaluation and audit and for discussion in practitioner performance and learning reviews. The PQS were developed to support guided reflection and self-evaluation.



2.2 (ii) Local quality assurance

Figure 12: Cafcass operational practice quality assurance framework



In this reporting year, 4,630 Quality and Impact audits²¹ were completed by managers and 12% (553) of these were subject to the required moderation. 56% were undertaken collaboratively, 6% above our required standard.

²¹ In respect of local quality and impact (QAI) audits, all Family Court Advisers (FCAs) should be supported by four audits in a 12-month period where at least half of these are expected to be undertaken collaboratively. Heads of Practice are required to moderate three audits each month.

Auditors confirmed an **Assessment and Child's Plan** to the required standard in 96.5% of cases audited and in 98%, **the assessment of harm and risk was well considered, decisions made were well-reasoned** and did not require further actions to safeguard the child. Moderations by Heads of Practice supported these judgements and if children were identified as living in or spending time in potentially unsafe situations, such as children connected to families involved in proceedings and where there is known harm or risk of further harm, these were followed up promptly.

93% of audits completed by managers demonstrated positive and impactful **engagement with children**, using observation, practice aids or other creative activities to engage children.

86% evidenced that **recommendations were shared with children** or someone known to them, and while this is really positive progress, significant work is needed to increase the reporting of the child's response to recommendations and to include this directly in reports to court. This was seen in only 32.5% of audits and is an important aspect of the social work assessment for the court to have in order that children's views, wishes and feelings have the best chance of influencing the outcome for them.

Audits show a 6% increase this year to 76% of cases with a personalised letter that has been sent to the children both at the start and end of their proceedings. Our ambition is for every child to understand who is visiting them, why, and to have an explanation about what happened at court. Therefore, improving consistency and the frequency in **sending letters** remains a priority for the year ahead.

Auditors find that Family Court Advisers (FCAs) show understanding of a child's **unique circumstances, characteristics,**

and experiences in 96% of audits and nearly three quarters showed evidence that they consider the impact of these characteristics within recommendations made to the court.

Quality and compliance with local practice audits are reported monthly to the Operational Management Team, led by the National Director of Operations. Heads of Practice and Assistant Directors have access to immediate reporting from audit and are required to report to the Deputy Director of Operations bi-monthly on how they are leading improvements on findings from audit. The triangulation of findings from auditing, performance data, and feedback informs the Performance Boards, mid and end year reviews of improvement plans, and this annual self-evaluation.

Collaborative auditing is our preferred means of supporting learning through a practice discussion between the manager and practitioner because the auditor is able to engage in conversation with the practitioner and elicit a more detailed account of what was done and why than is possible in a paper-based audit. In addition, the collaboration is designed to offer a learning experience rather than one of judgement from a distance that can feel more like monitoring. This type of audit also includes feedback from children and families. Managers follow up agreed actions, as well as reviewing the findings of national audits in team meetings, individual general meetings, and individual Practice and Learning Reviews (PLR). Heads of Practice use moderation and observations of PLRs for assurance on the quality of auditing being undertaken, as well undertaking benchmarking with their service area management group. Additionally, they meet four times a year with the National Improvement Service for benchmarking sessions to test the consistency and effectiveness of quality assurance.

Heads of Practice have been responsible in this reporting year for driving an increase in service managers seeking feedback as part of collaborative audits, challenging practice culture where necessary so that managers give time to this important commitment. Feedback has increased from 23% to 34.3% in collaborative audits and remains a priority for improvement in our national and local plans.

The overall quality of practice and the impact for most children continues to sustain at a high standard, with 73.1% of work being judged to be good or better.²²

In our most recent national audit, 91% of feedback received from parents, family members and professionals reported that they thought they were listened to, respected and understood by their FCA or children's guardian.

Learning from audit and feedback from children and families continues to improve practice including by:

- Including children's experiences and the impact of parental conflict on them in safeguarding letters and referencing the impact of delay in reports completed by FCAs and children's guardians.
- Improving the use of the assessment and child's plan, so that they provide both details about the assessments of harm and risk to children, they are more regularly and used to develop a rationale for advice to the court.

In the section that follows, the audits described are undertaken in local teams as opposed to the National Improvement Service. Unless the quality of work is judged to be inadequate during an audit (usually carried out collaboratively between a manager and a practitioner),

a grading judgement is not applied. Work that is found to be inadequate is required to be followed up by Assistant Directors for the regions, with expectations that the safety and the welfare of children is reviewed and action taken when they are not assured. In addition, a clear plan of action is required to support learning and a review of practice and leadership where this is necessary. A record is made on the casefile and in the Professional learning review for the practitioner.

Learning from local quality and impact audits in public law proceedings

In public law work audited locally during 2024-25, 97% of case records evidenced children's guardians balancing risk and safety to form well-reasoned decisions that are in the best interests of the children. This includes seeking information from other professionals (77.6%). Where work needed to improve, this generally related to the quality of assessments of harm and risk of harm to children in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor. Specifically, the impact of domestic abuse on the children needed to be clearer, considering them as victims as well as using Cafcass specialist practice aids to further evidence risk, harm and children's direct experiences.

98% of public law audits evidence children's guardians **working effectively in collaboration** with local authority colleagues, sharing information throughout proceedings and scrutinising, challenging local authority care plans for children as part of their advice to the family courts.

97% of audits find that **Assessments and Child's Plans** were in place, although in work considered to require improvement, the plans need to be clearer, more regularly updated and given oversight at the point of closure. 75% had a recorded **timetable for children** to complete proceedings at the time of the case audit.

Specifically, this remains a commitment and an improvement priority so that we remain attentive on durations and intervene if the 26-week timeline looks likely to extend.

In 83% of audits, there was recorded supervision where it was needed.

In cases where supervision was not considered effective or given as required, this was most commonly in respect of children being reunified to family members or remaining in the care of parents throughout proceedings. Cafcass policy requires that the advice for a child to remain or return to carers where there has been harm or risk of significant harm, is considered in supervision and a reflective conversation recorded about the rationale that is being put to the court. The requirement for this oversight remains a priority in the year ahead.

90% of audits recorded evidence that **recommendations to the court had either been shared directly** with children or with an adult known to them who could support the work of explaining what is happening for the child/ren. Children's guardians also met expectations about improving the experiences of children by supporting them in **sending letters** to either introduce, keep in touch or say goodbye in 94% of audits.

60% of collaborative audits received feedback from children, families or professionals that is generally positive.

"Zoe (Children's Guardian in public law) was great actually I really felt like she really listened to me".

"Nicky (Children's Guardian in public law) really drove things forward and ensured that the final hearing took place. Nicky was instrumental in finally concluding the proceedings. She was professional and available to talk to, was supportive yet honest, which we found refreshing".

Learning from local quality and impact audits in private law proceedings

96.3% of audits found that **Assessments and Child's Plans** were in place for children. In the small number requiring improvement, plans were not fully completed and the capacity to record the emerging analysis about the children's experiences and best interests was therefore limited. This important work remains a priority in the year ahead.

In audits where there was **direct work** with children, auditors found sensitive use of language to support children to share their wishes and feelings, including some writing directly to the judge in their case. Auditors reported FCAs using resources well, including observing children in 'spending time' arrangements and developing their assessments using the three houses tool or family storyboards to help them to understand what was happening. **Sharing recommendations** with children was identified in 75% of the work where it was expected and letters to children were seen in 86% of audits where they were expected – a 16% increase on the previous reporting year.

97% of audits recorded the FCA's **assessment of harm and risk being effective and decisions made that were well-reasoned as part of the advice to the court.**

²² All audits completed in year by the Cafcass National Improvement Service.

This included 91% demonstrating effective screening and analysis of risks to children associated with criminal and previous histories for adults making or responding to an application to live with or spend time with a child. Moderations by Heads of Practice supported the same findings.

88% of audits demonstrated that there was **recorded supervision** where it was needed.

Where auditors determined that improvement was required, it related in the main to FCAs needing to ask for supervision that would have made more of a difference to their practice and therefore the experience of the children. Again, this included the need for more consistent use of the mandatory supervision triggers.

96% of audits demonstrated FCAs showing understanding of a child's unique circumstances and experiences and where positive feedback was obtained from children and families, it related to them saying they felt listened to and understood.

Learning from local quality and impact audits in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

In this reporting year, we undertook additional and targeted auditing in order to establish a baseline for practice against the new Domestic Abuse Policy, issued in October 2024 and then reissued in January 2025. The audit addressed specifically:

- Analysis and use in the social work assessment of police information and known criminal histories of adults making or responding to family court applications to live or spend time with children.
- Use of information (including previously known and recorded safeguarding checks) and assessments from previous proceedings in new analyses and advice to the court and/or when a case transfers to a new practitioner.

- Management oversight of actions and known risks at the point of case transfer or allocation for assessment.
- The extent to which children are recognised as victims of domestic abuse and the clarity of understanding of harm and risk of future harm for them.
- The safety of existing arrangements for children when new applications are received and domestic abuse is a factor, including appropriate use of the Practice Direction 12J.
- Whether there is any evidence of domestic abuse being referred to as historical and thereby minimised in this or any other way.
- Whether the actual words of adult and child victims are used in reports to court and as an integral aspect of the social work assessment.
- The extent to which the wishes and feelings of the child are understood and clearly expressed in the court report.
- The information taken and used from other professionals and family members who know the child and the extent to which that is used appropriately in the advice to the court.
- Whether recommendations were shared with child/ren and both parents when it is safe to do so.
- The use of 16A risk assessments, including the actions and recommendations to the court regarding children's safety and welfare and whether there has been a referral to a local authority children's social care service and/or a recommendation for a Fact-Finding Hearing.
- Whether there was evidence of threatening or intimidating behaviour towards a Cafcass member of staff by an adult involved with the proceedings and the arrangements made to secure their safety.

789 audits were completed between September 2024 and February 2025. 147 audits were graded by auditors, as part of national performance and accountability work. Audits undertaken locally were not given an overall grading unless the work was judged to be inadequate. 71% (104 records) of those cases that were formally graded, were judged with practice being assessed as good or better.

In all the audited work associated with this targeted audit, 88% of cases showed no minimisation of abuse and in 95%, the child was clearly recognised as a victim. Further improvement is however needed to specifically evidence the harm, risk of harm and impact of the abuse on children's experiences. Where 16A risk assessments were used to report risks and the safety of children to the family court, the majority were judged to be a necessary and proportionate urgent action.

83% (551 records) evidenced that police information, including any criminal history, was both reviewed and discussed with the person concerned and formed part of the assessment about the best interests for the children.

Auditors were asked to consider evidence of Practice Direction 12J being applied to either stop, suspend, or recommend no contact in proceedings where there was known or reported harm or risk of further harm to a child and for this to be explicitly considered as part of the assessment and advice to the court. Auditors reported that in 92% (257 records) this provision was applied to safeguard children and in 95% (454 records) auditors considered that any arrangements for children to spend time with their parents/carers were safe. During audit, if any work is considered to be inadequate, the safety and welfare of children is always prioritised immediately and in every case, managers will be asked to assure themselves and to take action so that children are safe and protected.

The Cafcass domestic abuse policy is clear about the need to use the words that victims use to describe what life is like for them. This aspect was tested in audit and auditors found this to be in place 81% (442 records) of audited cases.

Improvement priorities that have been agreed specifically in respect of public law and proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor are set out on pages 120-121 in the adjusted national priorities. Private law improvement priorities are set out on page 124 with obvious correlation again to the national priorities.

The moderation of audits

Heads of Practice undertake moderations to provide additional assurance to the organisation about the quality of practice and performance in Operational Service Areas. Moderation has increased from 10% in 2023-24 to 12% this year of all audited work. The vast majority (85%) moderations support manager's assessments of strengths in practice and areas for improvement.

Heads of Practice moderations also help to evidence the impact that leaders and managers have on the work with children.

In this reporting year, we saw moderations findings in respect of both the quality of case recording and the quality of assessment in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, particularly for children connected with other children who are the subjects of proceedings. Heads of Practice intervened in some work following their moderation reviews, to require managers to follow through and to be more consistent with policy expectations such as required supervision and following up of actions to improve practice. When work is quality assured by the National Improvement Service, it is more often graded good or outstanding if there has been a Head of Practice moderation and typically they are developing practice by:

- Requiring consistent use of Management and Practice Quality Standards to support self-evaluation in audits and to build confidence in the use of performance improvement strategies and to bring challenge to reflective discussions about the quality of practice.
- Taking part in benchmarking to reduce regional variation and to improve the quality and impact of practice auditing.
- Improving the impact and consistency of audit moderation remains a priority in the year ahead.

Spotlight reporting

The report, considered monthly at the operational management team meeting, focuses leaders and managers on key areas of practice and performance improvement that require continued oversight and leadership.²³ In this reporting year, the following areas of practice have been in the spotlight:

- 1. Seeing and engaging with children:** For open children's cases on 31 March 2025, child engagement recording was at 97.4% against what is expected. There is management oversight of children not seen. 93.2% of the children seen, had been seen in person (at the same point last year, performance was 93.1%).
- 2. Delay for children:** At the end of March 2025, there were **1,408 public law children's cases (2,827 children) open in proceedings for 52 weeks or more of which 217 cases (442 children) had lasted for 100 weeks or more.** This compares with end of March 2024 when there were 1,893 public law cases (3,801 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 288 public law cases (612 children) beyond 100 weeks.

The number of children involved in long-running public law cases continues to slowly reduce.

At the end of March 2025, there were **3,382 private law children's cases (5,316 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more, of which 1,137 cases (1,753 children) had lasted beyond 100 weeks.** This compares to end of March 2024 when there were 4,556 private law children's cases (7,109 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 1,770 private law cases (2,772 children) beyond 100 weeks. We are continuing to see a slow reduction in the numbers of children in long-running private law cases.

- 3. Use of position statements in public law cases:** In 2023-24, 6.4% of public law cases had no case analysis at the point of case closure. In 2024-25, this figure was 4.4%. We are clear that despite system pressures and delay, all children must benefit from a minimum of one case analysis on every public law case, with best practice being that there is an initial and a final case analysis. This is because the court need to understand directly from the appointed children's guardian, their assessment and the rationale for their advice. We continue to hold this in the spotlight and to work alongside the courts to maintain this standard.



- 4. Percentage of FCAs holding more than 25 children's cases:** To support case allocation and to enable more effective work with children and families, we were able to adjust the upper limit of cases held by FCAs and children's guardians, from 25 to 20 this financial year. At the end of March 2025 63.3% of applicable FCAs (adjusted for FTE) held 20 children's cases or fewer. At the same point in time, just 4.3% of applicable FCAs held more than 25 cases (which was the upper limit set for the previous year), a reduction from 9.2% in the previous year. This remains an area of focus and priority, with a revised framework for a balanced workload (including productivity expectations) in development for 2025-26.

In this reporting year, the quality of practice judged through audit to be good or better is 73.1% (a total of 903 of children's cases). This is an increase of 3.3% when compared to the previous year. The quality of practice in 41 children's cases (4.5%) was judged to be inadequate, representing a decrease of 1.5% when compared to the previous year.

While the trend of more practice judged to be effective and less being judged in audit as inadequate confirms that our improvement priorities are the right ones, there is still more targeting and focus that is needed on the areas that are not improving as quickly as others. For children and families, this means that our ambition for every child to have an exceptional experience anywhere in the country where they engage with Cafcass is not yet realised.

The priorities for the final year of our three-year strategic plan, set out on pages 117-119 will require us to consider an even more targeted suite of improvement programmes to bring all Operational Service Areas up to the level of the best.

To this end, our quality assurance processes will, subject to Cafcass Board agreement, be directed to Operational Service Areas and teams where improvement has not kept pace with national progress and the quality and effectiveness of work for children is not at the standard required or expected. At the time of writing, there are 5 of 19 service areas where more targeted work is required.

2.2 (iii) National quality assurance

Learning from National Practice Quality Audits

Typically, four themed national Practice Quality Audits (PQA) are undertaken every year (800 children's cases):

- Public law and commitments to the Public Law Outline (June 2024)
- Public and private law proceedings (January 2025)
- Management Oversight & Supervision (March 2025)
- Domestic Abuse in public and private law proceedings (March 2025)

This quality assurance work undertaken by our National Improvement Service (NIS) is judged against four standards - Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate.

²³ Specifically these are areas of practice in operational areas and teams that show variation against a suite of 'best for children' measures).

The learning themes in this reporting year and for the four national audit programmes are set out below:

Public law and commitments to Public Law Outline 2024 (January)

The quality of practice in this audit was judged to be 76% good or outstanding, an improvement of 15% since 2023. Guardians are strong advocates for children, challenging local authority plans, communicating well with other professionals, and being persistent and creative in attempts to engage children, including sharing recommendations, use of storyboards, and keeping them informed about decision making during their proceedings. Feedback from parents was generally positive, being described in terms of the support they receive from guardians and the impact they have on decisions about their children.

Children also reported positively about being heard and understanding why a guardian was involved in their lives.

Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- Children being seen in person and being well engaged during their proceedings.
- More children receiving well written letters both at the start and end of their proceedings.
- Guardians spending time, getting to know children to understand what is unique and special about them so that recommendations recognise each child in the family as an individual.
- Guardians taking an active role in supporting proceedings to conclude in 26 weeks and using the Assessment and Child's plan to detail the harm that has happened and will happen again if nothing changes.

- Evidence of sensitive and trauma informed practice in the engagement with children and families.
- Close working with social workers and solicitors to understand children's needs, make well-reasoned recommendations, and drive forward the timetables in proceedings.
- Confident scrutiny and challenge to local authority plans which appropriately leads to changes in care plans where this is advised to the court as in the child's best interests.

What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- When children are reunified or the plan is for them to be reunified to adults with whom they have previously suffered harm or there has been a significant risk of harm to them, and/or their living arrangements change, they need to be seen by their guardian in the place where it is proposed they live and the guardian must seek timely supervision in accordance with the Cafcass management support, supervision and oversight policy. Rationales to the court for such reunifications need to be clearer in respect of why they are in the child's best interests, how their safety has been assured and the risks that have been considered in the advice.
- Guardians should record specific plans for children with a clear timetable to support final decisions, including evidence of their intervention when proceedings look to exceed the statutory 26 weeks.
- Clearer guidance is required for managers, directing their oversight and review of children's plans earlier in the 26 week timetable and recording details of their review, actions agreed, and follow up that will happen.

- All children need to receive personalised letters at the beginning and end of their proceedings.
- Children's responses to or the responses of their carers (for very young children or children with additional needs) to recommendations must be included in the advice and report to the court.
- Guardians need to consistently record when and how they engage with parents involved in proceedings. This extends to independent reviewing officers (IROs) and the use of the new letters.
- Where Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) are part of the care planning for children, guardians need to clearly record their review/analysis of Disclosure and Barring Service and medical checks. They need to consistently complete independent enquiries regarding all proposed special guardians and adults living in the home where the child/ren will be living and be clear that they cannot endorse an SGO in their advice to court in the absence of these checks.

Public and private law 2025 (January) and Public law assurance audit March 2025

72.5% of cases in this audit were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% (12 records) graded inadequate. Although this represents a decrease of 1.5% (three records) in work being graded good or outstanding since the same national audit last year, the percentage of work judged to be inadequate has reduced from 7% (14 records) in the same period. If all cases audited are separated by law type, 75% of public law practice was judged as good or better (no change since the last reporting year) and 70% of work in private law proceedings was graded good or better – a reduction of 3% and confined to audited work before the first hearings.

In summary, the quality of practice has maintained, and improvement has been in respect of engagement with children, understanding their uniqueness, the analysis of known criminal histories, the quality of management oversight and supervision, children's responses to recommendations being seen in reports and the quality of children's letters and communication with local authorities. Regional variation in the quality and effectiveness of practice remains a priority because in some teams, the same improvement or sustained progress is not in evidence.

In December 2024, the Chief Executive commissioned a public law assurance audit to be carried out by an independent adviser. This decision was informed by four significant incidents in a short period regarding children in public law proceedings.

The adviser was asked to audit 200 cases, a mix of open and closed proceedings, nationally and locally audited cases and those that had been the subject of a significant incident.

The audit concluded in March 2025 and reported that in the majority of cases practice is at least good, evidenced by the child being at the heart of the guardian's practice with strong and balanced reporting to the family court. The report described a notable improvement over the year in the use of the child's plan and assessment as a means of reviewing and thinking about case progression.

There was evidence that where reunification was the plan for a child or if they remained at home with their family where risk had been identified, managers and guardians clearly articulate their concerns in the record of supervision. There is good discussion about how to approach and consider the local authority plan for the child.

Evidence was clear in showing good support and oversight by most managers and assurance was given that guardians are aware of risks to children, do not underestimate them, practice with caution and balance, approaching parents with an open mind. There was robust evidence of guardians using their influence for the good of the child, based on the evidence at the time, their experience, observation, skill and knowledge.

Areas where practice needs to strengthen further had already been identified through our own internal audit and quality assurance and are set out below. However, the independent adviser made two stronger recommendations which are set out here as additional areas for improvement and action.

- Children's plan updates need to be consistently completed so that any manager looking at a child's case is able to determine quickly what is happening for the child, specifically in respect of their safety and welfare.
- Leaders and managers must determine the response to non-compliance with policy and practice standards where this is in evidence. This must be a focus for practitioners and managers in the adjusted national improvement priorities.

Strong practice in the Cafcass practice quality audit was characterised by:

- Constructive and respectful work with professionals and family members in the best interests of children and fully recognising the impact and trauma of harm and conflict on them.
- Children being seen in person and in timescales, or where they weren't, evidence of supervision and reasoned judgement to support that decision. Practice was seen in audit with children being observed in the care of parents, including very young children.

- Effective assessments of harm and risk of further harm with a fundamental focus on children's safety, including analyses of the criminal histories of applicant adults on the risks presented for children and action being taken to protect them with the use of 16A reports to the court and appropriate referrals to children's social care services.
- Reflective supervision and management oversight, that was taking place in accordance with the Cafcass supervision policy and demonstrating deeper curiosity about the impact of proceedings.
- Timeliness and delays being actively managed in practice with assessment and child's plans being used to set timetables as well as to set down emerging rationales for advice to the court.

What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- Analysis of domestic abuse and the impact on the safety of children and connected children and when referrals are made to local authorities, following up the rationales for the decision they make about next steps, escalating this to the Director of Children's Services if the decision is considered to be unsafe for a child/ren.
- Seeing and engaging with children in the timescales they need to be seen as set out in the Cafcass seeing and engaging children policy.
- The quality of assessments and child's plans used to evidence emerging rationales and understanding of harm and risk of future harm – including setting out clear timetables to complete work so that decisions for children are not delayed.

- Sharing recommendations with children and documenting their responses (through their carers if necessary) and specifically with younger children.
- Seeking and using supervision when children are living at home or where the plan is for them to be reunified in public law proceedings.
- Using the information in previous proceedings (both police and local authority information as well as social work assessments) to present the court with advice about the cumulative harm for children involved in repeat proceedings who have not been protected.
- Action taken by leaders and manager to discuss in performance and learning reviews when practice has fallen below the standard required.
- Oversight and performance management of the arrangements to see children in timescales and throughout their proceedings.



Management oversight and supervision 2025 (March)

The recommendations from the 2023-24 management oversight and supervision audit, included, seeking more feedback from families during audits, applying the Cafcass management quality standards more consistently and requiring managers to self-assess against the standards as part of the annual performance and learning reviews. In this reporting year, the audit findings confirm that these recommendations have been implemented and are beginning to show a positive difference. This is seen in practice by an increased quantity and more effective management oversight and supervision; increased feedback from children and their families and audits that show how well practitioners have helped to protect children and make a positive difference in their lives and in the arrangements for them with their families.

Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- Auditing by service managers that further improved the quality of practice for children.
- Reflective supervision helping practitioners to think about and clearly express in reports what was happening for children, including clarity about their views, the risk of harm to them and the arrangements for their protection and safety.
- Effective interventions by Heads of Practice which are improving the quality of children's experiences and the outcomes for them.
- Clear accountability for practice learning and development being set down in performance and learning reviews.
- Local benchmarking and understanding about what 'good practice' looks like to increase consistency in the assurance about practice effectiveness.

What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- Managers need support to prioritise reflective supervision for practitioners so that there is clarity about what is happening for children, emerging rationales for advice to the court and the arrangements to be made for their safety.
- More targeted and mandatory benchmarking training with the National Improvement Service, to reduce regional variation and to secure the consistent application of the requirements of Cafcass practice policies.
- The oversight and review of assessment and child's plans needs to improve the reasoning and analysis about children's safety and welfare as well as the harm and risk of further harm that needs to be understood and reported to the court.
- Increased seeking of and using feedback to improve practice which is too variable across regions.
- The provision of more and better training for local areas on effective audit and quality assurance.

Domestic abuse in public and private law and the impact of Domestic Abuse Policy 2025 (March)

The national domestic abuse practice quality audit was undertaken in March this reporting year and followed the issue in September 2024 and reissue in January 2025 of the Cafcass Domestic Abuse policy.



70% (168 records) of all audited cases were graded good or outstanding and 5.4% (13 records) graded inadequate. Auditors saw evidence of practice aids (specialist Cafcass materials) and information gathered from professionals working with families that was used by practitioners to identify and understand domestic abuse and its impact on children. In good or better work, reports to the court were well-reasoned and led to safe recommendations for children that were in their best interests.

Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- Excellent child engagement, including visits to children and use of personalised letters, including keeping in touch letters, and creative direct work.
- FCAs and guardians strengthened their assessments by contacting professionals beyond the police and local authority services. This included schools, nurseries, and substance misuse services.
- FCAs and guardians applying the Domestic Abuse Practice policy and referring to domestic abuse with sensitivity, using language like she/he said/told me; rather than the language of claimed or alleged and using the direct words reported by child and adult victims of domestic abuse to describe their experiences.
- FCAs and guardians explained in their reports to court what life is like for the child and adult victims, detailing what had happened and setting out the wishes and feelings of the child to the court.
- Managers are starting to use the Domestic Abuse Practice policy to support learning and development in their teams and as an integral part of management oversight and supervision.

- Practice Direction 12J is being used more effectively to advise that children should not spend time with a parent or carer where there are known and assessed risks to them. Where necessary, 16A risk assessments are used to alert the court to new risks to children.

What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- FCAs and guardians must consider children not subject to proceedings (connected children) when making assessments of harm and risk of further harm in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor and refer any concerns about the risk of harm or actual harm to local authority children's services so that they can consider the needs of the children in accordance with their statutory responsibilities for providing early family help, child in need service and child protection.
- FCAs and guardians must include in their evidence to the court, how they have understood previous histories about adults in the proceedings, including reported and known criminal histories and police information.
- Assessments and Child's Plans should be strengthened with detail about what has happened that has harmed a child and what will happen if nothing changes. This information needs to be included in the advice to the court, particularly in public law proceedings.
- Recommendations for spending time should evidence the impact for children of that contact, including their views or the views of a protective adult (if they are too young to speak or have additional needs).

- Where recommendations are contrary to children's expressed wishes and feelings they must be supported to understand why and what will happen so that they are actively involved in the decisions made about them.
- In private law work, where safeguarding referrals were made, these needed to be more detailed about harm children were or could experience if nothing changed and explicit on what was being requested.
- In safeguarding interviews, recordings needed to be clear about what questions had been asked to support not just a disclosure of domestic abuse but also the context and language of what had happened to the victim.



Practice alerts

In this reporting year, (April 2024-March 2025), there were three practice alerts issued in connection with both private and public law proceedings. Practice alerts are issued with clear expectations for improvement and change in individual and collective professional practice at Cafcass. There were five major learning themes:

Understanding and responding to the impact of domestic abuse on adult and child victims. This alert required practitioners and managers to support and strengthen practice in respect of the steps that must be taken to facilitate meaningful engagement with adult and child victims, including understanding and respecting why they may take time to describe and share what has happened to them, the importance therefore of developing a trusting relationship and using their own reported language in court reports so that the impact on them is both clear to the court and visible in the assessment of harm and risk of further harm that is made.

Understanding children's experiences and listening to them. This alert emphasised the importance of practitioners and managers being sure that child protection action has been taken to secure a child's safety and welfare where this is necessary. Children's words, experiences, feelings, and fears, especially when they are describing harm and abuse are required to be included in assessments of harm and risk of further harm as well as in court advice, including the child's views on the future arrangements for them.

Assessment of current harm and risk of future harm that is informed by analysis of family history and the impact on children. When parents with known and/or reported violent histories are involved in the care of the children or have made an application relating to spending time or 'live with' arrangements, there must be a clear analysis in the advice to the court about how this history is likely in the judgement of the FCA or children's guardian to impact any child in contact but also the risks to them. The alert reminds practitioners to include how they have judged what is safe and in a child's best interests whether in current or future arrangements and explicitly addressing existing contact that the child may be having.



Use of 16a risk assessments. This alert set out to provide clarity on the use of 16a risk assessments following the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Policy in October 2024. It emphasised that the decision to deploy a 16a risk assessment is a matter of professional judgment for the FCA or children's guardian, with that decision being discussed in a reflective supervision with a manager. The alert was clear that a 16a report must be used to bring new information about harm or the risk of further harm to the attention of the court and not as a means of challenging the court's decision. The alert also emphasised the need to urgently consider whether action was needed to protect children in these circumstances and specifically in current arrangements for contact with adult members of their family.

Engagement with local authority professionals and rigour in the analysis of their planning for children. The alert reminded managers and children's guardians that the support or opposition to the local authority final care plan must be described clearly to both the local authority and the court. They should include the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's) views in the analysis and in instances of fundamental differences between the local authority social worker and the child's guardian, a new dispute protocol should be followed, including the use of the template to explain to the court the key points of difference and the reasons for such fundamentally opposing plans for the child/ren.



Our year in the difference we made: Regional performance and Family Justice Board success measures

Our performance and accountability cycle set out on page 49, describes the processes associated with the Operational Service Area (OSA) improvement plans and the mid and end year reviews that take place in October and March (reporting in April) each year.

The National Improvement Plan and associated priorities derives from our collective and accumulated learning throughout the business year about the quality and impact of practice and the effectiveness of our performance. This learning is taken from the scrutiny of local and national performance data, practice quality auditing, feedback from children and families, significant incidents, complaints, compliments, case record reviews and learning reviews. The National Improvement Plan sets out the in-year practice and leadership improvement priorities for the nineteen OSAs and is complemented by targeted improvement areas set out in three additional national programmes for public law, private law, and proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.



Practice improvement priorities

1. Seeing and engaging respectfully with every child;

2. Understanding the impact (harm and risk of harm) of domestic abuse on children (advice to court);

3. Understanding the impact of the child's uniqueness on their lives (advice to court);
4. Effective use of the Assessment and Child's Plan (analysis of harm and risk of harm/timetabling to minimise impact of delay); and

5. Reducing delay for children (understanding causes and impact on the child and taking action).

Leadership improvement priorities

1. Embedding the 'Together' practice framework values and use of materials in practice consistently;

2. Management support, supervision, and oversight (policy, practice, and leadership quality standards);

3. Seeking and learning from feedback (transferring learning into practice);
4. Understanding and evidencing the impact of leaders on the quality of practice; and

5. Demonstrating a detailed and accurate understanding of performance and practice quality.

The mid and end year reviews are a fundamental aspect of the Performance and Accountability framework and enable us to scrutinise progress and improvement in each of the 19 OSAs and the eight Assistant Director regions throughout the year. The aim is to reduce regional variation in practice so that we get closer to enabling an exceptional experience for every child, everywhere and every time they or their family engage with us.

The OSA improvement plans set out the baseline performance in the area and identify any outlier teams. They also provide a national comparator for performance across all areas and regions. Targeted support plans with additional practice and leadership review meetings are established for those OSAs where further progress is particularly challenging.

Two targeted support plans were in place in two south east OSAs from June 2023 to September 2024 in order to improve practice in private proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, to improve management support, supervision and oversight and the effective use of the Assessment and Child's plan. Additionally, the plans required stronger leadership of our intended practice culture, through the use of the Cafcass practice framework, 'Together with children and families'. The targeting of improvement support and focus in this way has led to some improvements in the quality and

effectiveness of practice, which is evidenced by better performance in the domestic abuse quality assurance audit, more practitioners attending the domestic abuse training and the proportion of work rated good or better improving (for both OSAs combined) from 53.4% in private law (April 2023) to 72.3% (February 2025). Additionally, there was significant improvement in the sharing of recommendations with children, rates of collaborative audits and the management reviews of children's plans. While the targeted work some two years ago improved practice in private law proceedings, in this reporting year, the quality of practice in one of the areas is again below the national average of work judged to be good or better (69%) with inadequate work judged in 4 cases for the February 2025 performance board audit and equating to 11% of the audit sample. This was attributable to one private law case and three in public law (two of which were cases held by the same practitioner). At the time of writing, there is further targeted improvement work in place including through the national improvement service, specifically with regard to developing the consistent use of the domestic abuse pathway in public law work and harder testing of progress against the public law improvement priorities. Workforce action plans are also in place in respect of individual practitioners and managers whose work fell below the required standard.

Summary of the self-evaluations

The mid-year reviews in October/November 2024 reported many aspects of practice and performance that were improving, however the progress was steadier than in the previous year, where there were significant performance improvements from a much lower starting point. The 'Best for Children' benchmarking across the country has been central to the 'gap narrowing' work and exists as an improvement and stretch ambition, the threshold for which becomes higher each year as the baseline is exceeded. This is the explicit intention.

There remain however some areas of practice where performance has declined or where the necessary progress was not made or maintained. These practice areas were established as improvement priorities at the mid year reviews for regional leaders to address, and at the time of reporting, improvement has been secured to the level expected. The detail is set out in the submissions to Ofsted as part of the annual self-evaluation required.

With the exception of one OSA, there were no significant new areas for improvement identified in the end year self-evaluations and our assessment is that the regional Assistant Directors and their senior teams have been effectively focused on the improvement priorities agreed at the start of the year, achieving progress and making the required practice changes.

The regional senior leadership teams have been able to demonstrate that they have an accurate understanding of the quality of practice and performance in their OSAs to the level of teams and individuals. They understand their strengths, impact, and achievements. They know their areas for development, they are taking steps to make further improvements and to rectify any slowing of the required change. All OSAs (bar the exception referred to above) have

made significant improvements in some or many aspects of the practice and leadership improvement priorities.

In respect of the one area that requires significant improvement, a more formal improvement process has been introduced for a period of twelve months with reports made to the Chief Executive and the Cafcass Board through an independently appointed Improvement Board Chair.

Improvement evidence in the national mid and end year reviews has included:

- Better engagement with children, seeing them in person in accordance with policy requirements, including reducing the time between visits to them where their proceedings are long-running, increasing the number of well written welcome and goodbye letters and sharing recommendations with them consistently.
- Reducing the length of public and private law proceedings, and improved intervention where there is delay.
- Improved leadership and oversight of performance with evidence of local grip and intervention to improve practice.
- Better Assessment and Child's Plans including setting out clear analyses of harm and risk of harm.
- Effective and meaningful letters to independent reviewing officers in public law proceedings.
- Increased group supervision.
- Evidence of learning from feedback and changing practice in response.

There remains, however, too much variation at a team level in all regions in both the strength and impact of the leadership and in the pace of progress. We expect more for children and so national and targeted improvement priorities will continue with the necessary regular reporting and oversight.

Targeted support plans for teams, managers and FCAs will be integrated directly into formal improvement reporting as part of the quality assurance framework and specifically through quarterly regional performance and improvement reviews and in annual performance boards for the regions as set out on pages 125-126.

Key priorities for improvement identified from the end year reviews include:

- To increase the use of practice materials so that the quality of assessment improves, particularly in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.
- To improve the consistency of practice for adult and child victims of domestic abuse by using the new policy and the requirements for practice and leadership that are specified.
- Regular and timely updating and management reviews of children's plans throughout proceedings.
- To improve the detail set out in Assessment and Child's Plan in respect of harm, risk, the changes needed and the rationales for advice to court.
- To reduce delays in achieving an outcome for children.
- To continue to improve the experience of children with all children being seen earlier in proceedings, receiving letters, and having recommendations shared with them – including being offered the opportunity every time to say to the court what they think about the advice.
- To improve the consistency and use of standard procedures to manage children who are waiting to meet their family court adviser, increasing management oversight and regular reporting on progress and challenges.

- To continue to evidence the importance of a child's uniqueness within assessments and recommendations.
- To improve the quantity of and response to feedback, showing changes in practice in response to both local and national learning.
- To reduce further regional, local area and team variation in performance, practice and compliance with required Cafcass policies and practice quality standards.
- To strengthen and reissue new practice and leadership operating standards in respect of the flow and allocation of work, devising a national framework²⁴ with timescales for all work to be allocated consistently, for escalation to the national director where this is not possible and to monitor timescales for the completion of casework and progression into the post – assessment hubs for the regions.

The end year reviews provide clear evidence of further progress and improvement in the wide range of performance measures for the quality and effectiveness of practice and leadership. The Best for Children (BfC) measures are rising for the majority of operational areas. The OSA improvement plans remain an effective mechanism for targeting further improvement and challenging regional variation. They also provide a means to set national priorities alongside local and targeted improvements that take account of performance variation across teams. The mid and end year reviews add significant value to the performance and accountability framework and the introduction of the quarterly performance and practice reviews will further strengthen this process, ensuring local areas and teams become a formal part of the accountability framework, required to report on performance and improvement.

²⁴ Additional data will be taken into fortnightly reporting at the internal Cafcass recovery and improvement board

The tables below combine an assessment of performance judged by our own Best for Children (BfC) measures and the success measures set by the national Family Justice Board and the Ministry of Justice for Cafcass.

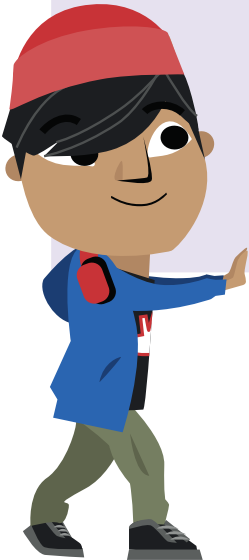
Figure 13: Impact and progress comparisons showing Family Justice System (FJS) success measures and year on year comparisons

FJS success measures with Cafcass supporting indicators

FJS Objective one: Timeliness

Ensure children and families have timely outcomes

FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
TIMELINESS: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes	TIMELINESS 1: Reduce number of children in long-running open proceedings	Number of children in open public law proceedings 52 weeks+ (100+ weeks shown separately)	2,827 children (52+ weeks) on long-running cases (31 Mar 2025) -974 children / -25.6% (31 Mar 2024: 3,801)	% open public law children's cases allocated to a children's guardian (KPI1)	99.2% -0.1%pts (2023-24: 99.3%)
			442 children (100+ weeks) on long-running cases (31 Mar 2025) -170 children / -27.8% (31 Mar 2024: 612)	% of public law Assessment & Child's Plan with a management review	92.3% (cases closed with at least one management review) +1.1%pts (2023-24: 91.2%)
		Number of children in open private law proceedings 52 weeks+ (100+ weeks shown separately)	5,316 children (52+ weeks) long-running cases (31 Mar 2025) -1,793 / -25.2% (31 Mar 2024: 7,109)	% open private law children's cases allocated to a Family Court Adviser (KPI3)	98.9% -0.2%pts (2023-24: 99.1%)
			1,753 children (100+ weeks) on long-running cases (31 Mar 2025) -1,019 / -36.8% (31 Mar 2024: 2,772)	% of private law Assessment & Child's Plan with a management review	89.1% (cases closed with at least one management review - excludes cases closed at FHDRA) -2.1%pts (2023-24: 91.2%)



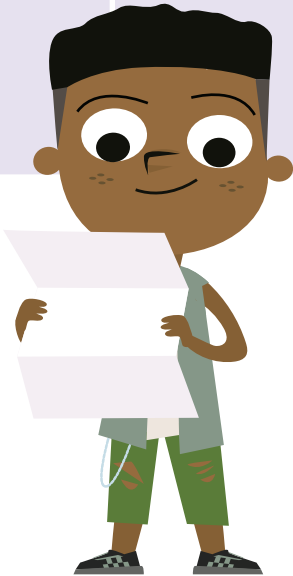
FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
TIMELINESS: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes	TIMELINESS 2: Increase % of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks	Increase percentage of section 31 care proceedings children's cases which resolve in 26 weeks (closed cases)	5.0%pt increase in S31 Care & Supervision cases closed in 26 weeks or less (32.9%) (1 January - 31 March 2025) (1 Jan - 31 Mar 2024: 27.9%)	Average working days to allocate a s31 care case to a children's guardian (KPI2)	1.5 days +0.1 days (2023-24: 1.4 days)
				Average weeks in proceedings that final analysis was filed in s31 care proceedings	35.7 Weeks (1 January to 31 March 2025) -3.0 weeks (1 Jan - 31 Mar 2024: 38.7 Weeks)
		Increase % of children in section 8 child arrangements private law proceedings which resolve in 26 weeks (closed cases)	2.5%pt increase in section 8 cases closed in 26 weeks or less (62.6%) (1 January - 31 March 2025) (1 Jan - 31 Mar 2024: 60.1%)	Average weeks to file private law safeguarding letter	4.1 working weeks +0.2 working weeks (2023-24: 3.9 working weeks)
				Average working weeks to file private law s7 report	14.5 working weeks no change (2023-24: 14.5 working weeks)
				% private law s7 reports with an extension request	29.8% -6.1%pts (2023-24: 35.9%)



FJS Objective two: Sufficiency

Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available

FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
SUFFICIENCY: Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available	SUFFICIENCY 1: Reduce number of open children's cases	No. open public law children's cases	11,046 (31 March 2025) -829 / -7.0% (31 March 2024: 11,875)	Total children worked with in year public law	43,003 children (25,801 on new cases, 17,202 on existing cases) -1,845 / -4.1% (2023-24: 44,848)
				Cafcass public law throughput (compared with system throughput)	107.5% (Cases opened / cases closed) -1.3%pts (2023-24: 108.8%)
				Total children worked with in year private law	89,413 children (59,471 on new cases, 29,942 on existing cases) -3,086 / -3.3% (2023-24: 92,499)
				Cafcass private law throughput (compared with system throughput)	113.6% (Cases opened / cases closed) +4.9%pts (2023-24: 108.7%)
		No. open private law children's cases	16,483 (31 March 2025) -1,896 / -10.3% (31 March 2024: 18,379)	Private law cases held on duty or in allocation hubs	1,650 children's cases (1,256 duty cases / 394 allocation hub cases) +176 / +11.9% (31 March 2024: 1,474)
				Private law children's cases waiting in post assessment hubs with no hearing in the next 6 weeks	441 cases with hearing in more than 6 weeks (or no next hearing type recorded) +18 cases / +4.3% (31 March 2024: 423)



FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
SUFFICIENCY: Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available	SUFFICIENCY 2: Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work	Social work professional vacancy rate	194.5 authorised 'empty seat' social work vacancies (31 March 2025) +61.7 / +46.5% (31 March 2024: 132.8 vacancies)	Social work 12-month turnover	15.1% - no change (31 March 2024: 15.1%)
				Average social work working days lost due to sickness in last 12 months	11.6 average working days lost -1.0 working day (31 March 2024: 12.6)
				% FCAs in long term teams with caseloads 25+	4.3% -4.9%pts (31 March 2024: 9.2%)
		Corporate and business services vacancy rate	23.8 authorised 'empty seat' vacancies (31 March 2025) -6.3 / -20.9% (31 March 2024: 30.1 vacancies)	Corporate & business services 12-month turnover	9.8% +1.9%pts (31 March 2024: 7.9%)
				Average corporate and business services working days lost due to sickness in last 12 months	11.1 average working days lost +2.8 working days (31 March 2024: 8.3)



FJS Objective three: Experience

Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings

FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
EXPERIENCE: Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings	EXPERIENCE 1: Improve children's understanding and ability to engage	% public law children with at least one in person engagement	94.5% (9 April 2025) +0.6%pts (April 2024: 93.9%)	% audited public law practice with all letters present and appropriate at time of review	62.1% (Case file audits completed - PP1 Audits showing use of all letters and well written) +15.2%pts (2023-24: 46.9%)
				% public law children's files showing recommendations shared with children and children given opportunity to share their view	75.3% (Case file audits completed - PP4 Audits showing sensitive sharing of recommendations with children) +10.0%pts (2023-24: 65.3%)
				Volume of feedback received from children & families and % that is positive	1,386 pieces of feedback via QAI audits and Digital Feedback, 761 (54.9%) being positive -2.2%pts (2023-24: 57.1%)
		% private law children with at least one in person engagement	91.3% (9 April 2025) -0.3%pts (April 2024: 91.6%)	% audited private law practice with all letters present and appropriate at time of review	79.7% (Case File Audits completed - PP1 Audits showing use of all letters and well written) +10.9%pts (2023-24: 68.8%)
				% private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children and children given opportunity to share their view	73.2% (Case file audits completed - PP4 Audits showing sensitive sharing of recommendations with children) +19.3%pts (2023-24: 53.9%)
				Volume of feedback received from children and families and % that is positive	5,211 pieces of feedback via QAI audits and Digital Feedback, 2,903 (55.7%) being positive +0.5%pts (2023-24: 55.2%)



FJS Objective	Cafcass supporting priority	Headline measure	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - unless indicated)
EXPERIENCE: Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings	EXPERIENCE 2: Improve the quality and consistency of practice	% all audited practice assessed as good or better	73.1% rated good or outstanding 2024-25 (NIS Practice Quality Audits) +3.3%pts 2023-24 (NIS Practice Quality Audits): 69.8%	No. public law local audits undertaken and % collaborative	2,086 undertaken (61.3% collaborative) Limited to non-NIS audits only +7.7%pts (2023-24: 2,270 undertaken / 53.6% collaborative)
				No. private law local audits undertaken and % collaborative	2,711 undertaken (66.9% collaborative) Limited to non-NIS audits only +14.2%pts (2023-24: 2,748 undertaken / 52.7% collaborative)
				% audited private law practice assessed as good or better where domestic abuse is identified	68.9% (Case file audits completed by NIS only) +3.9%pts (2023-24: 65.0%)
				Increase in volume of private law families worked with in Pathfinder Model/ equivalent	Measure to be developed



The quality and impact of business and corporate services

Our Cafcass Business Services function comprises 21 teams with circa 400 colleagues supporting an efficient and welcoming service to children and families. The work to and after first hearing and public law business service teams are responsible for developing and deploying processes and systems in support of social work practice for children and families involved in family court proceedings. This includes the processing of all child and family data and providing an in-person service to children and families in our local Cafcass offices.

The National Business Centre provides a critical and single point of contact for families and children at the start of their proceedings and **in the reporting year, managed on average 221 applications every working day**, initiating essential checks to safeguard children.

Other functions of the national business centre teams include:

- The Police National Computer team, providing police intelligence from the Police National Computer (PNC) system for private law applications.
- A digitised postal service and exceptions team, supporting the electronic receipt and immediate distribution of digitised post and information for children’s case records across the country.
- A national call centre providing a single point of access for all families and professionals to contact Cafcass as well as a bespoke feedback service (Hear to listen) to allow children to provide feedback in their own words.²⁵

- An IT trainer and Business Productivity Team to develop and quality assure effective business processes.
- A dedicated Business Services Team supporting Cafcass Associates who are self-employed contractors and qualified social workers undertaking work as independently appointed advisers to the family court and working to Cafcass managers.
- A dedicated team supporting our National Commissioning service in the progression of court ordered and other associated work such as Planning Together for Children and the Improving Child and Family Arrangements Programme (refer to page 40).

All teams work to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are monitored through formal performance systems and supported by standard operating procedures to provide for maximum national consistency. Business services take an active role in practice meetings, and annual regional performance boards to support frontline colleagues and managers.

²⁵ This service is not well used by children and we receive on average only one call per month. This is the subject of discussion and debate about action and next steps.

Figure 14: Cafcass corporate and business services functions

Business functions	
Cafcass Intake Team - manage receipt of private law applications into Cafcass	Total applications received in reporting year - 44,697
Public Law Intake Team - manage receipt of public law applications into Cafcass	Total applications received in reporting year - 27,632
Early Intervention Team - prepares the first safeguarding letter to court for the first hearing in a private law case	Total safeguarding letters filed - 35,216 <i>84% filed 3 days before first hearing</i>
Police National Computer Team - manage the police safeguarding checks	Level 1 checks processed - 96,297 Level 1 Cafcass Cymru checks processed - 6,572 Level 1 NYAS checks processed - 28 Level 2 checks processed - 6,016 Level 2 NYAS checks processed - 1
Commissioning services support unit	Planning Together referrals - 21,086 Improving child and family arrangements referrals - 1,549
Post Exceptions Team - receipt of court orders, Level 2 Police checks and local authority checks received by post and by email	Documents processed - 202,571
Call centre - linking all Cafcass local offices via smart phones to the call centre. One Cafcass number for all first contact families	Calls received - 205,261

The Cafcass National Estates and Health and Safety team are responsible for the maintenance, design, leases and associated budgets for all our properties where we meet with children and families. Their main objective is to make sure that our offices provide a welcoming child-focused, safe, and functional space to support the work. We use a standard design guide and the maintain robust health, safety and security standards.

In the reporting year, we have afforded greater strategic oversight to our new health, safety and security priority. The intention has been to:

- Provide greater support and management intervention if any Cafcass employee is threatened by adult parties and/or their family members in proceedings.
- Build a stronger commitment across the organisation to embed health, safety and security working practices into our everyday activities.
- Work closely with our external partners at HMCTS to develop an understanding of court security and procedures to improve our knowledge and understanding about the provisions made in family courts and what we can expect for our people.

We have made progress in respect of:

- Improved guidance and processes to support colleagues to report incidents through our incident management system, tracking incidents through to completion of all actions and improved analysis of trends.
- Delivery of mandatory information sessions for all managers to explain the changes to our management of significant incidents and their role in supporting with this.

- Updating guidance for managers to provide greater support to their staff when dealing with unacceptable behaviour, with clear expectations about reporting incidents within 24 hours and consideration of legal and protective actions such as cease and desist letters.

We have more to do to improve and stabilise which includes:

- Provide more training to increase awareness of updated processes and procedures to support staff safety. This will include the introduction of webinars and toolbox talks to focus on key health, safety and security matters and our updated Health, Safety and Security Policy.

- Engage external assessors to conduct an audit of health, safety and security arrangements, including fire safety, across all 33 core offices in the Cafcass estate.
- Support the HMCTS review of the Potentially Violent Persons Policy to improve information sharing between agencies about threats to court security.
- The introduction of a new Health, Safety and Security Manager role to lead the change and delivery priorities, such that we are visible as an organisation supporting colleagues to be able to do their best work in a safe and secure environment.

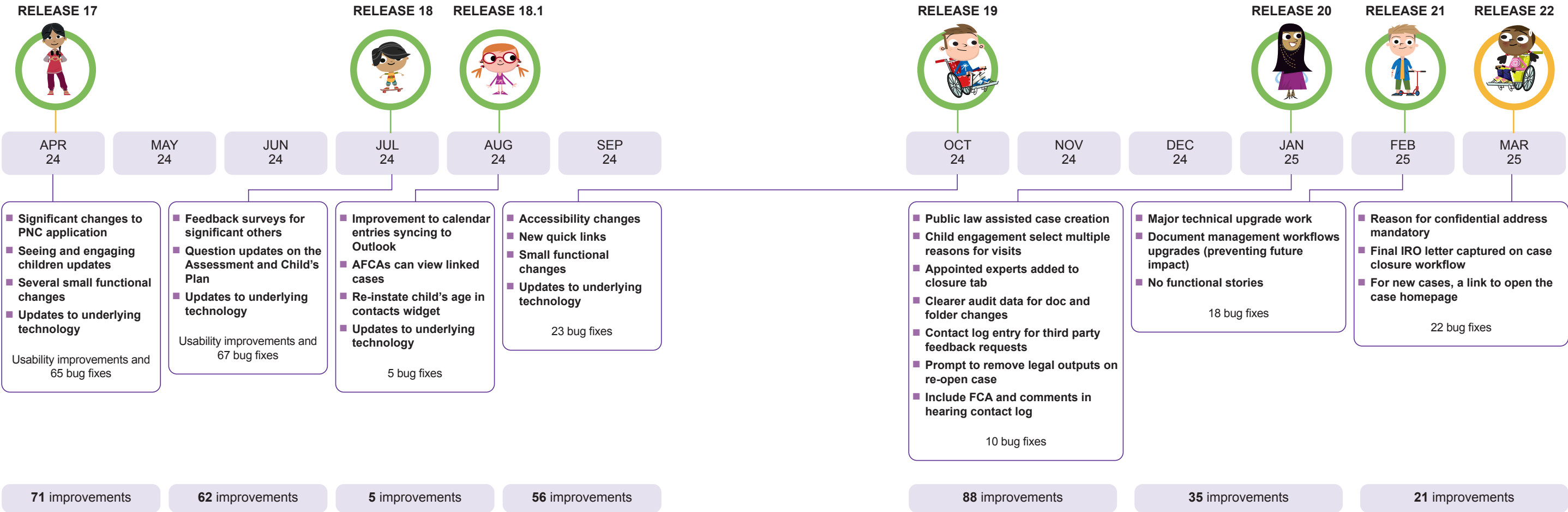
Our IT Team supports and leads the development of all our technology, including our ChildFirst case management system. They are a critical resource supporting the development of a case management

system that enables high quality recording of information about children’s experiences with supporting rationales about why and how the advice to the court is determined by FCAs and children’s guardians as well as generating management information and data as an integral aspect of our quality assurance framework. System updates and releases take place at least quarterly, all of which reflect our learning and improvement priorities.

The primary impacts in this reporting year are set out in figure 15 below. One such milestone this year, working in close partnership with HMCTS, is the delivery of technology that supports case creation where work has been ordered for Cafcass, as well as to automatically file practitioner-created reports into the HMCTS digital service. This year our IT team once again surveyed internally achieving a 95% satisfaction rate with the tools and services provided.

Figure 15: Updates to the ChildFirst system

ChildFirst financial year 2024-25



The influence of the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) work programme on Cafcass’ effectiveness

Content provided by members

Our 2024-25 work programme focused on supporting Cafcass’ ambition for children.

Key achievements include:

Voice of the Child (VOTC) Conference 2024

Titled ‘Childhood lasts a lifetime: Turning up the volume of the voices of children and young people who are or have been victims of domestic abuse and harmful parenting,’ this year’s event saw significant engagement. Attended by 499 family justice professionals, this marked an 18% increase on the previous year.

“It is always a pleasure to hear from the FJYPB. They always help me to recognise the impact that our actions have on the lives of children and young people, and why we should always be striving for continuous improvement in everything we do.”

Attendee

PSHE lesson for schools - family courts

Launched in September 2024, our Personal, Social, Health, and Economic education (PSHE) resource for key stage 3, created in collaboration with the PSHE association. It is freely available and has been shared with over 1,000 schools. Our goal is to raise awareness about family proceedings, providing clear explanations of the role of the courts and why they are involved in family disputes as well as signposting available support.



Safe Family Time resource

A Practitioner Guide for arranging [safe family time](#), sharing personal experiences and tips to help children feel safe when planning time with family members. The same guide was given to professionals attending the National Local Family Justice Board annual conference in December 2024. The Right Honourable Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division, referenced and shared the resource with the judiciary, encouraging its review when making orders. Additionally, we collaborated with the Family Mediation Trust to adapt the guide for family mediation and parenting plans. The guidance advises that professionals pay deep attention to enabling children to actively participate in decisions about their lives and to arrange family time that addresses children’s individual needs, safety and welfare.

Writing to children - a toolkit for judges

We collaborated with the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, judges, researchers, Cafcass guardians and family court advisers, social workers, clinical psychologists, and communication experts to develop a toolkit for judges. Its main objective is to help them decide whether and how to write to children involved in proceedings. The collaborative development and widespread promotion of the toolkit underscore its importance in supporting children and young people through their proceedings.

“I often think about how different things could have been if I’d had a letter from the judge who made that custody decision when I was eight years old. A letter that spelled out the truth... If I’d had that letter, I would have known who to trust... That letter would have given me certainty, a foundation to stand on when everything else felt shaky.”

FJYPB Member

Figure 16: Our work during 2024-25 with Cafcass

Workstream	FJYPB	Impact
Children’s complaints Cafcass priority 2: Seek out and learn from feedback	FJYPB conducts bi-annual reviews of all children’s complaints received. Together with Cafcass, we co-developed practice standards for responding to children’s complaints, improving clarity in language and enhancing the recording and evidence that is used to explain how children’s complaints have been considered	Children and young people participate in anonymised peer reviews of the complaints received, the processes undertaken by Cafcass and the responses shared with children. They help the team to learn about what is important to consider when a child has made a complaint or feels unhappy about what has happened to them.

Workstream	FJYPB	Impact
Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA) Cafcass priority 9: Working with other professionals to improve family justice	FJYPB members shared their views on the new ICFA service proposals. They advocated for feedback from children and young people who engaged with ICFA services about their experience of the contact.	Children and young people's voices and feedback has been directly considered as part of the new tendering process for the ICFA service.
Domestic abuse Cafcass priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice	FJYPB members have two seats on the Cafcass domestic abuse practice reference group. FJYPB members co-chaired the annual domestic abuse audit moderation	Involving older members of the FJYPB in this annual process is an important part of enabling us as a board to understand the strengths and areas for improvement.
Taking me seriously Cafcass priority 9: Work with others to improve family justice	A second 'Taking Me Seriously' animation titled Sharing Recommendations was launched in the year with members assisting in the creation of the script, highlighting the key messages and providing the voice over for the animated characters.	This animation explains how recommendations are made, emphasising the importance of children's understanding and influence on them. The video has received positive feedback from children and young people, who feel more informed and involved in the process.
Cafcass Ambitious for Children Strategy Cafcass priority 1: Further improve the quality and impact of practice	Members have assessed progress on the strategy, highlighting key priorities such as children receiving personalised introduction and goodbye letters. Additionally, 90% of children are seen in person and receive better explanations of their proceedings and the reasons behind them.	<p><i>"They might want (a letter) in a few years and get their carer/adult to read it for them. Or they might want it as an adult when they can use it to even just put dates and things together. (So that they can understand) what happened to them."</i> FJYPB Member</p> <p><i>"The Cafcass workers considering where, when and how visits should take place has gotten a lot better. So, for example, they've been a lot more considerate and a lot more focused on should it be at school or not (and when). So, it doesn't cause any distractions or any embarrassment."</i> FJYPB Member</p>

Workstream	FJYPB	Impact
Cafcass 'Ambitious for Children' practice week	Members helped the Senior Leadership Team to present a daily challenge to practitioners using the gifted Quentin Blake pictures.	This work helped Cafcass practitioners and managers to think about a challenge question everyday and to use it in their work. We are going to repeat this in 2025.

FJYPB 2025 – 2028 Priorities



FJYPB Priority One: Improving children and young people's participation in proceedings.

- **Seeing and Engaging with Children.** FJYPB to support the development of new technology and a new 'app' to replace 'How it looks to me' as well as working with Cafcass to develop the third animation in the 'Taking me seriously' film series. Driving further improvement in the quality and impact of planning alongside recommendations being effectively shared consistently.
- **Complaints.** 1. Reviewing learning, 2. Evaluating Language and 3. Feedback letters.
- **Safe Family Time Guidance.** Supporting how this guidance is embedded into practice, so that children's safety and welfare are central at all times in the arrangements that are made.
- **Cafcass annual regional performance boards.** Challenge each region and the senior team about what they understand of children's experiences, how and what they do in response.
- **Improving child and family arrangements service.** Promote the inclusion of children and young people in this work as it develops and include a review of the changes required for children whose proceedings are heard in a pathfinder court.

FJYPB Priority Two: Helping understand how domestic abuse affects children and making sure all types of abuse and harmful parenting are thought about.

- **The national Cafcass practice reference group.** Continue to co-chair and advocate for children and young people who experience domestic abuse, influencing Cafcass practice through lived children's experiences.
- **Practice materials.** Enhance the experiences of child victims through effective engagement and use by family court advisers and children's guardians of specialist materials that enable young people to communicate the impact of being a victim of domestic abuse

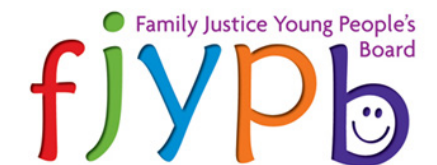
FJYPB Priority Three: Making sure children know their rights and keeping a focus on them growing up safe and happy.

- **Working with family justice professionals.** Continue to work with the family justice system - Cafcass, Cafcass Cymru, National Family Justice Board, Ministry of Justice, the judiciary and the Department for Education (DfE)
- **Independent reviewing officers (IROs).** In public law proceedings, support Cafcass to evaluate and further develop the letters to IROs, asking specifically how children have experienced them.
- **Uniqueness.** Support Cafcass in its national priority, making sure that every child's experience is well described in the context of their needs and what makes them special and unique.

FJYPB Priority Four: Keeping the focus on reducing delays across family courts because children need certainty and safe final decisions.

- **Challenging delay.** Enable children and young people to challenge senior family justice system leaders on the actions they are taking to reduce delay in the family courts. This includes considering timetables, care plans, and the necessity of other information for the court (addendum or expert reports) that may extend durations unnecessarily.
- **Evaluating Pathfinder reforms.** Involving members in the evaluation of this new way of working, making sure that timeliness does not take priority over the quality of children and families experiences and arrangements
- **Different experiences for children depending on where they live.** Work collaboratively with Cafcass leadership teams and regional partners to focus on the causes of variation and the actions to reduce this range of experiences for children and their families.

- **National Family Justice Board's priorities.** Continue to attend as members and to support the board in keeping the experiences of children at the centre of proceedings – including the impact of delay on them.
- **Child inclusive mediation.** Consider how to promote the involvement of children and young people in early resolutions to safe future arrangements with their families.



Sustainability report

Cafcass Disclosures under Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)

Cafcass reports on climate-related financial disclosures in accordance with HM Treasury’s TCFD aligned disclosure application guidance, as interpreted for the UK public sector. The 2024-25 annual report represents compliance with TCFD Phase two requirements. Cafcass considers climate to be a principal risk and has implemented the recommended disclosures for Governance, Risk Management, and Metrics and Targets as set out by TCFD. Where appropriate, the approach follows the “comply or explain” principle. Further recommended disclosures relating to strategy will be provided in future reporting periods, in line with the central government implementation timetable.

Governance: Recommended disclosures (a) and (b)

- **a) Board oversight:** The Cafcass Board receives an annual report containing information related to climate issues, particularly those associated with progress against the Greening Government Commitments. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) reviews and receives reports, including an assessment from the Government Internal Audit Agency on Cafcass’ Net Zero Reporting progress (latest received in June 2024). The Board also receives copies of updates to the Cafcass Sustainability Strategy (most recently updated April 2024). Through ARAC, the Board annually assesses arrangements for ensuring business continuity,

including risks to service delivery from a broad range of physical and digital disruptions.

- **b) Management role:** Cafcass’ Corporate Management Team is directly responsible for supporting the government’s strategic objectives and legal requirements, such as the 2050 net zero carbon emissions target and the 25 Year Environment Plan (2018). Cafcass leaders know sustainability is important to staff, the children and families with whom we work and the many partners and vendors with whom we collaborate in service design and delivery. Cafcass has established a Sustainability Steering Group which is chaired by the Director of Resources. This steering group oversees the delivery of the Sustainability Strategy. We also have a long-established Business Continuity Steering Group chaired by the Director of Resources with responsibility for identifying and assessing all risks. This steering group receives and responds to commissions through the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Risk management: Recommended disclosures a)–c)

- **a) / c) Processes for identifying and assessing climate-related risks:** Cafcass identifies and assesses climate-related risks through its Business Continuity Steering Group and Sustainability Steering Group. These groups evaluate current and emerging threats to service delivery, informed by the Greening Government Commitments, regulatory requirements, and guidance from parent government agencies, especially the Ministry of Justice.

- **b) Processes for managing climate-related risks:** Management is responsible for the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy, which includes mitigation and adaptation measures to manage climate-related risks. This encompasses both operational and strategic actions—ranging from reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving resource efficiency to ensuring resilience of digital and physical infrastructure against climate extremes.

The Business Continuity Steering Group ensures response protocols are in place for climate-related disruptions and tracks progress on risk remediation.

- **c) Integration with overall risk management:** Climate-related risk identification, assessment, and management are fully integrated into Cafcass’ broader risk management framework. The Board and ARAC regularly review all organisational risks, consider our overall risk appetite, prioritisation, and mitigation strategies.
- **Description of principal risk:** Cafcass considers climate to be a principal risk. Risks include disruptions to service delivery from extreme weather events, regulatory and policy changes, and reputational considerations relating to sustainability.

Metrics and Targets: Recommended Disclosures a)–c)

- **a) Disclosure of Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions:** Cafcass discloses Scope 1, Scope 2, and, where appropriate, Scope 3 GHG emissions, in alignment with central government reporting methodologies. These metrics are used to monitor progress towards net zero and inform operational decision-making.

- **b) Related risks and performance:** Risks associated with GHG emissions and energy use are identified and managed through both the Sustainability and Business Continuity Steering Groups. Performance is tracked against published targets, including those within the Greening Government Commitments framework.
- **c) Targets:** Cafcass is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in line with UK Government policy, and tracks interim performance through annual GHG emissions reporting and progress against the 25 Year Environment Plan objectives.

Future strategy disclosures

Cafcass will provide disclosures for the TCFD Strategy pillar in subsequent reporting periods, per the phased implementation timetable set by central government.

Conclusion

Cafcass’ 2024-25 annual report demonstrates compliance with the TCFD-aligned disclosure requirements for Governance, Risk Management, Metrics, and Targets, with climate risk recognised as a principal organisational risk. Ongoing improvement and transparency remain central to Cafcass’ sustainability reporting approach.

Scope of report

Cafcass is committed to reducing our impact on the natural world. We measure our impact on the environment and work to reduce our consumption of limited resources, emissions of greenhouse gases and unnecessary travel.

The data shows our position for 2024-25 using non-financial data available for the calendar year of 2024 up to and including December 2024 in line with the MoJ's approach to annual reporting. Please note our data recorded for 2023-24 in this report now shows non-financial data from the financial year 2023-24.

Financial data is reported from the financial year 2024-25. This is tracked against a 2017-18 baseline in line with the Greening Government Commitments (GGC) for the period 2021-25.

Cafcass currently has 36 office spaces the majority of which are in multi occupancy locations. Cafcass is unable to report data from locations where property owners are not obliged to provide this and therefore some data may be estimated due to the nature of our estate.

Cafcass has considered HM Treasury's guidance on applying the TCFD recommendations. Cafcass is required to follow this guidance by having met the criteria of employing more than 500 FTE staff across the 2024 to 2025 reporting period.

Requirement by 2025	2024-25 performance	RAG status	Explanation where not met
Reduce paper use by 50%	-70%		Poor water data records in the baseline year 2017-18 make this difficult to track. We also have a number of sites where we have historically had estimated readings for water consumption which makes this challenging to provide a year on year comparison. It is estimated that due to us now recording water consumption at additional sites that our additional consumption from the baseline year is 20%.
Reduce water consumption	+65%		

Key

Target met


Target not yet met

Overall GGC Performance 2024-25 against a 2017-18 baseline

Requirement by 2025	2024-25 performance	RAG status	Explanation where not met
<div><div>CO₂</div><div>Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 41%</div></div>	-51%		<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div>Reduce direct GHG emissions by 23%</div></div>	-46%		
<div><div></div><div>Reduce emissions from domestic business flights by 30%</div></div>	-39%		
<div><div></div><div>Reduce overall waste by 15%</div></div>	-30%		
<div><div></div><div>Landfill waste to be less than 5%</div></div>	BNA*		
<div><div></div><div>Increase recycling to at least 70%</div></div>	BNA*		

*Breakdown not available

	Indicator	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
GHG emissions from buildings and travel	Total Gross Scope 1 (Direct) emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	93.9	56	100	72	175
Non-financial indicators	Total Gross Scope 2 (Energy Indirect) emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	115.9	74	113	125	211
	Total Gross Scope 3 (official business travel emissions) (tonnes CO ₂ E)	1,038	380	957	589	2,210
GHG emissions from buildings and travel	Total Emissions (tonnes CO ₂ e)	1,248	510	1,171	785	2,595
Non-financial indicators	Electricity (MWh)	454	525	535	589	745
	Gas (MWh)	487	520	468	393	681
GHG emissions from buildings and travel	Other energy sources	0	0	0	0	0

Indicator		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Non-financial indicators						
	Total energy (MWh)	941	1,045	1,003	982	1,426
<p>Notes: We currently report Gas MWh figures at 9 offices - Bristol, Coventry, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, and Swindon.</p> <p>We currently report Electricity MWh figures at 13 offices – Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, Lincoln, Middlesbrough, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, Swindon.</p> <p>Note we have previously reported data on our Stafford office but this office has now moved and we are unable to report data at the current location.</p>						

Financial indicators		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Energy and travel costs	Total energy (£000s)	369	361	316	206	176
	Official business travel (£000s)	625	453	287	131	788
	Air travel (£000s)	9	6	5	2	7
	Total travel (£000s)	634	459	292	133	795
GHG emissions from buildings and travel	Number of domestic flights	29	32	30	6	103
	Domestic flights (KM)	23,496	28,452	26,580	4,128	38,676
GHG emissions from buildings and travel	Number of international flights	1	5	8	0	22
	International flights (KM)	2,308	6,910	11,676	0	116,186

Target Area One

Mitigating climate change: working towards Net Zero by 2050

We continue to achieve lower greenhouse gas emissions.

We continue to reduce travel-related emissions where possible, through our flexible working policy, our laptops with Microsoft Teams, video conferencing facilities in offices and our encouragement of staff to travel ‘sustainably smart’. Flexible working continues to be fully embedded by the whole organisation, and this has resulted in lower emissions within the working environment.

There has been a continued increase in business critical travel in Cafcass following travel restrictions easing following the Covid 19 pandemic however this is still below the 2017-18 baseline. Business travel is essential in Cafcass in order to meet with children and families and to attend court when ordered to do so. Cafcass has a small number of flights each year which are usually domestic. We had one international flight during this period which was short haul economy.

Cafcass has made a commitment to a Green Tariff – 100% clean / renewable for our electricity for sites where we are directly responsible for utilities.

Target Area 2		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Non-financial indicators (Tonnes)	Non-hazardous waste: landfill (tonnes)	0	0	0	0	0
	Non-hazardous waste: reused/ recycled (tonnes)	3.56	3.95	5.66	6.07	5.10
	Incinerated with energy from waste	0	0	0	1.11	0
	Incinerated without energy recovery	0	0	0	0	0
	Total waste (tonnes)	3.56	3.95	5.66	7.18	5.10
Financial indicators		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Waste management costs	Non-hazardous waste: landfill (£000s)	9	12.4	9.1	8.1	11
	Non-hazardous waste: reused/ recycled (£000s)	2.3	1.53	2.5	1.2	4
	Total disposal (£000s)	11.3	13.9	11.6	9.4	15

Target Area Two
Minimising waste and promoting resource efficiency

Waste




Our waste management data is currently limited due to diverse lease arrangements across our offices. We did not have any IT asset disposals during this 12 month period. Cafcass is in scope for the Simpler Recycling Legislation which came in to force from 31st March 2025, for businesses with 10 or more full-time employees. As an organisation we now must separate plastic, paper and card, glass, metals (cans, tins and foil) and food waste from general waste across our sites, saving valuable resources from going to waste and supporting the circular economy in the UK. Our Estates Team has been working to ensure that we comply with this legislation across our estate and we anticipate as a result that we will have improved data around our waste in the next financial year.

Single use plastics

The MoJ’s [single use plastics policy](#), published in January 2019, continues to drive our work to remove single-use plastics, ensuring single use plastics are only used in the Cafcass estate where no other viable alternatives are available.


Food waste

Cafcass does not procure food but in accordance with the Simpler Recycling legislation will have food waste bins available in our offices.

Indicator		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Water consumption Non-financial indicators	Total water consumption (m3)	1,248	1,018	1,297	128	752
Financial indicators		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Water costs  	Water supply and sewage (£000s)	9	7.9	11.3	29.3	7
Target by 2025		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Reduce paper usage by at least 50% 	Paper consumption (reams)	781	644	553	951	2,618

Target Area Three
Reducing our water use

Our use of water has remained steady over the last three years. We currently report on water data at the following sites: Bristol, Coventry, Lincoln, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Swindon, Worcester. We believe that the M3 consumption is higher than predicted in Bristol during quarter four due to a water leak. This was investigated by our estates team and issues remedied but this does mean that our overall consumption is slightly higher than expected.

Financial indicators		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Baseline 2017-18
Paper costs 	Paper (£000s)	3.8	2.7	4	5	7

Reduction of paper

We have met our target for paper reduction. Our use of paper has increased over the last two years which we will keep under review but is significantly below our baseline year. As Cafcass has now digitised the majority of its processes this makes it difficult to achieve further reductions.



Target Area Four

Procuring sustainable products and services

Cafcass is committed to meeting the Government Buying Standards (GBS) best practice specifications wherever possible which help deliver sustainable procurement to meet GGC targets.

Wherever possible we work collaboratively with other public bodies, particularly with our sponsor the MoJ and with the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), part of the Cabinet Office. **The majority of our procurement requirements are channelled through pre-existing public sector framework agreements set up by the CCS. Any requirements which are not covered by existing agreements will go through a competitive process with tenders in excess of £25,000 and will be open to the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) market.**

Emphasis has increased within the Procurement Cycle to consider Modern Slavery and Social Value with every procurement undertaken using the social value model with at least 10% of the evaluation criteria dedicated to social value.

Sustainable procurement: we have met the government target of 33% of procurement spending to reach SMEs; spend with SMEs for 2024-25 stands at 42.11% of our spend with suppliers. Please note that our system records SMEs when they are entered into the finance system, if their status subsequently changes this would not be recorded.

Target Area Five

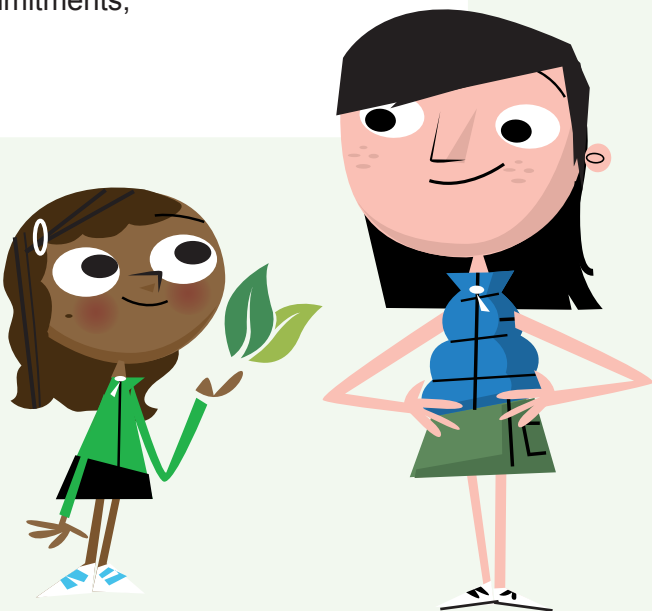
Nature recovery and biodiversity action planning

Nature recovery and biodiversity action planning is not currently relevant to the Cafcass estate as we do not own any open spaces; we consider climate change within the Sustainability Steering Group.

Target Area Six

Adapting to climate change

In response to the updated Greening Government Commitments, Cafcass will be considering the development of a climate change action plan.



Our work plan for 2024-26

Our plan of work will be monitored through our Sustainability Steering Group. We will share the strategy and work of the steering group through various channels including live events around key topics. The Sustainability Steering Group, chaired by the Director of Resources, monitors our progress and promotes sustainability values within Cafcass. The group is made up of a cross section of colleagues from all parts of the organisation. The aim of the group is to promote values of environmentally sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility in order to inform, inspire and find solutions to the challenges we all face in relation to climate change. The group is currently focused on a plan around embedding sustainability across the organisation.

Cafcass continues to be committed to sustainable practices which consider our environmental, economic and social output.

Goal	Description	Target date	Date
1	We will finalise and publish our Sustainability Strategy 2024-26	May 2024	Action completed
2	We will review and finalise the terms of reference for the Sustainability Steering Group	March 2024	Action completed
3	We will complete our annual self assessment against the Greening Finance expectations	March 2024	Action completed
4	We will recruit Sustainability Champions across the main areas of business	September 2024	We have recruited new members to the sustainability group in the last 12 months from teams across the organisation. We are also in the process of trialling Sustainability 'Green Advocates' across the organisation. We are currently in a pilot stage. If successful it is anticipated that further advocates will be recruited during 2025-26.
5	We will ask children and their families how well they think we are doing and in what ways we can improve our sustainable working practices	December 2024	We have not completed this to date, having made the decision to delay this to ensure that we engage with Children and Families in the best and most meaningful way around sustainability. We hope to complete this action in 2025-26
6	We will carbon baseline and cap our Estates portfolio	March 2025	We intend to cap our Estate from this baseline date

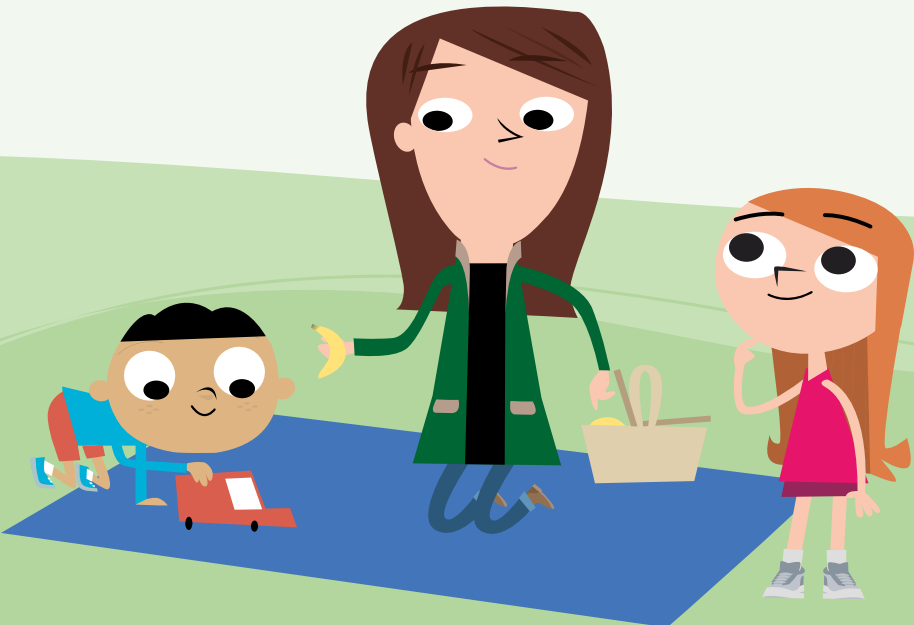
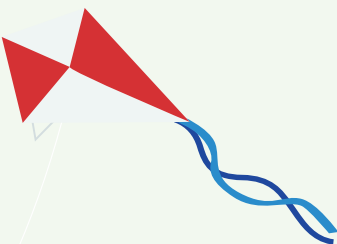
Future Targets

7	We will carbon baseline and cap Scope 1,2 and 3 emissions, including the impact of our pension scheme portfolio	September 2025
8	We will evaluate, baseline and set goals for progress against the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development	December 2025
9	We will refresh our Sustainability Strategy for 2026/2029	March 2026

Target Area Seven
Reducing environmental impacts from Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and digital

A number of IT activities have taken place this year to support sustainability.

- Activity continues to optimise cloud environments, ensuring footprints are kept to a minimum and resources only used when required.
- A new network design has been created for deployment into new offices which moves to a wireless first model, reducing the cabling and equipment required.
- Contract changes have taken place allowing a proportion of the laptop estate to stay in use for longer.



Financial commentary

In 2024-25 Cafcass received grant funding of £156.814m (2023-24: £152.540m) from the Ministry of Justice. Further to this, Cafcass also received additional non-cash budget to cover its £2.052m (2023-24: £2.790m) depreciation and amortisation cost.

We also drew down from the sponsor separate additional funding of £1.932m (2023-24: £1.996m) for child contact intervention services, which are commissioned and managed by Cafcass.

A summary of how we spent our budget is shown below and further details are provided within our 2024-25 Annual Accounts in section 5.

Total spend reported in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure (£000)		
Staff costs	124,252	79.1%
Self-employed contractors and agency staff	6,823	4.3%
Depreciation and amortisation	2,052	1.3%
Partnership costs	1,931	1.2%
Other charges	22,139	14.1%
Total spend reported	157,197	100%

The Cafcass Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2025 shows a net liability position of £19.191m (2023-24: £0.362m net asset position), including a net pension liability position of £17.376m (2023-24: £2.045m net asset position). The Statement of Financial Position net liability position includes liabilities falling due in future years which, to the extent that they are not to be met from Cafcass’ other sources of income, may only be met by future grants or grants-in-aid from Cafcass’

sponsorship department. This is because, under the normal conventions applying to Parliamentary control over income and expenditure, such grants may not be issued in advance of need.


The net pension liability position as at 31 March 2025 is due to the present value of funded obligations exceeding the fair value of pension plan assets, after adjustments for restrictions on surplus and minimum funding requirements. Further details explaining the movement in pensions are provided in Note 22 of the Annual Accounts.

The total of trade payables as at 31 March 2025 is £0.663m (£0.294m as at 31 March 2024).

Interest and late payment charges of £nil have been paid or claimed by creditors under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 (£nil in 2023-24).

Parliament has voted Grant-in-Aid to Cafcass for the 12 months following the Statement of Financial Position date. Therefore, Cafcass operates as a going concern.

It is expected that Cafcass will continue to be fully funded and operate as a going concern for the 12 months following the publication date of this Annual Report and Accounts.



Jacky Tiotto
Chief Executive and
Accounting Officer
Date: 8 December 2025



Feedback, learning and change



3.1

What are the experiences of children and families with Cafcass?

Our 'Ambitious for Children' strategy confirms our firm priority and intention to ask for and to learn from feedback from children, their families and carers. We consider feedback and the associated learning as a major driver of improvement and change, and it remains one of our five leadership improvement priorities in our national and operational service area improvement plans. We have a range of mechanisms to make sure their experiences can be heard including:

- **complaints and compliments** from children and families
- feedback sought through conversations with families when we undertake **collaborative audits**
- feedback through our **digital feedback** system with forms that are embedded in our letters to children and their families
- **listen and learn conversations** focusing on learning through a restorative conversation when an individual has had a less than good experience of our services and support; and
- seeking **feedback from partners as part of our annual regional performance boards**.

In addition, the FJYPB provides us with the child's experience and perspective. We have a Family Forum of twenty parents or family members with experience of the family court whose experience was not good enough. This is now in its fourth year and members share with us feedback on what worked for them and what did not. They provide advice on specific work programmes and have their own workplan where they set priorities for each year. The Family Voices group established in 2024, means parents who have served as members of the Family Forum can continue to work with us so their knowledge and expertise can continue to influence what we do. We ask them to help us implement change aimed at improving the experience of families in the future.



This year we have considered and provided responses for or received:

- 1,643 complaints received from adults with 577²⁶ investigated fully in accordance with our policy.
- Investigated 10 complaints from 12 children. The youngest child was 11 yrs and the oldest was 16 yrs, with most of the children who contacted us to make a complaint being 15 or 16 years old. This was 14 fewer complaints than in the previous year. In looking at the themes and learning in their complaints and in our feedback surveys, we are hearing fewer of them and more positive feedback about children saying they understand what is happening in their proceedings, the role of their Cafcass officer, and the recommendations that are made to the court.
- 108 MP enquiries as part of our correspondence function and responsibility. One complaint investigation was proposed by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman at the end of the financial year and remained open at the time of writing with no further information received. The Ombudsman made 27 enquiries of Cafcass during the year.

- Feedback from 3,080 people through digital feedback, 481 from children and 2,599 from adults.
- Feedback from 4,488 people during a collaborative audit as part of our quality assurance work, 3,116 adults and 449 children and 923 from other people who were significant to the child, including social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), other professionals and wider family members.
- 57.5% (4,330 people out of 7,551) of people who provided feedback said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences of Cafcass.



²⁶ Where an issue raised by an adult requires consideration independently of the local team, we have two routes for the complaint: early resolution or investigation. Complaints are progressed within the early resolution route where they are assessed as being possible to resolve more quickly through engagement with the complainant and the team working with the family. Investigations are undertaken in cases where the complaint requires a closer review of Cafcass work, with a longer period needed for completion. At the end of our complaints work, individuals can refer their complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, via an MP, if they are unhappy with how we have handled their complaint

3.2

What are we learning from complaints and serious incidents?

The Customer Service team and Complaints and Correspondence team work together to provide children, their families, and those who are supporting them, with responses to their complaints when they are not happy with their experience of Cafcass.

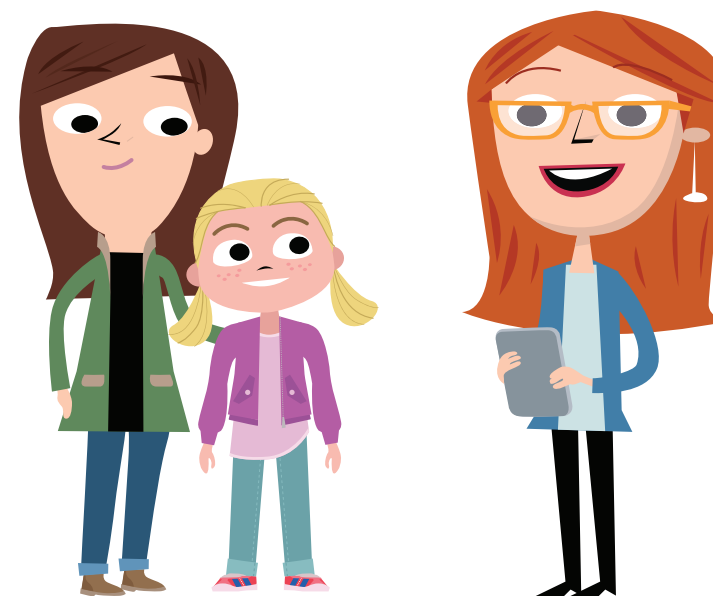
The receipt, assessment and initial recording of complaints happens within our customer service team, based at the National Business Centre. The team assesses which complaints need allocating to a caseworker or a complaints manager, based on the complexity and severity of concerns.

Our complaints policy encourages families to raise any concerns as soon as they arise, and the policy is clear that we expect all colleagues to try to resolve issues through everyday conversations wherever possible, with the manager contacting the complainant directly in the first place to try to resolve the issue.

Where an issue raised by an adult requires consideration independently of the local team, we have two routes for the complaint: early resolution or investigation. Complaints are progressed within the early resolution route where they are assessed as being possible to resolve more quickly through engagement with the complainant and the team working with the family. Investigations are undertaken in cases where the complaint requires a closer review of Cafcass work, with a longer period needed for completion. At the end of our complaints work, individuals can refer their complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, via an MP, if they are unhappy with how we have handled their complaint.

We aim to complete early resolutions within one working week and investigations of complaints within 20 working days. Our policy is to complete investigations of complaints from children within 10 working days, acknowledging them on the same working day that they are received.

For much of the year we have been operating a prioritisation process to help us manage the volume of adult complaints we are receiving against our target timescales. We prioritise complaints relating to live proceedings and this has affected our timeframes for investigating adult complaints as some are waiting up to eight weeks before we can allocate the work.



This meant that just under 19% of adult complaint investigations in the year were completed within 20 working days of receipt. Once allocated, the average number of working days taken to complete an investigation is 18. Complaints from children are always prioritised and do not wait to be allocated. All child complaint investigations in the year were completed within 10 working days, or within an alternative timescale agreed with the child or their representative (for example, to fit around an exam period).

Complaints data is reported quarterly to the Corporate Management Team. We reviewed our complaints policy in November 2024, making minor amendments to clarify aspects of the policy in response to family members and partner feedback. The new complaints policy published in April 2023 was positively received by partners and our wider community. Family members welcomed the two recognised routes for complaints and partners say it is more transparent. They have welcomed changes regarding the timescales for complaining and the emphasis on early conversations and resolving things as 'business as usual' where appropriate. We are in the process of implementing a quality assurance framework to monitor performance against our required standards and the new complaints policies.

The feedback received when we speak to families in a collaborative audit and through digital feedback is available to all managers to review. Digital feedback is emailed directly to the local team as it is received. A quarterly feedback summary report is shared with each operational service area leadership team quarterly and a national themes report is shared with senior leaders and the Corporate Management Team twice per year. A Feedback and Learning report is produced quarterly and brings

together learning themes from significant incidents, complaints and feedback. This report is shared with all leaders and to the Performance and Quality committee of the Cafcass Board. The report sets out our learning and feedback themes and proposed actions to implement change.

We connect learning and changes we need to see in practice through the Next Steps in National Learning Panel. The panel is chaired by the Assistant Director of the National Improvement Service, and meets six-weekly, to review learning from complaints, feedback and serious incidents. The themes from complaints and feedback are reported here and national learning actions designed and taken forward.

In this reporting year, the panel has considered practice learning from Significant Incident Responses and made changes to policy, for example clarity on the requirements in the Seeing and Engaging Children Policy to see children in public law proceedings within 10 days of allocation, and learning from a Listen and learn conversation with a parent regarding the use of consent orders when domestic abuse is a factor and strengthening the requirements in policy regarding management oversight and supervision for managers who may be case holding. The meeting identifies the key area of practice learning to share across the organisation in a Significant Incident and Learning Bulletin using case studies.



3.3

The action we have taken in response to feedback, learning, complaints and serious incidents

We identified 309 learning points²⁷ from our complaints this year, with learning themes about how we communicate with families and how we manage our work. Most common issues raised in complaints relate to professional behaviour, the quality and frequency of communication and the content of the assessment and advice to court.

Complaints raised by children continue to show us the importance of children feeling that they are informed about and prepared for our work with them, being given the time to be heard and understood, and seeing that FCAs and children's guardians tell the court about their hopes and wishes for the future even when the Cafcass officer may be making a recommendation that is different to what the child has said they want to happen.

The learning that we identified in complaints from children this year, included:

- The importance of making sure they understand our recommendations to the court, and why we are making them, especially if our recommendation is different to what they have said they want to happen. One child told us that their wishes and feelings were not taken into consideration and, while the children's guardian had met with them to share their recommendations, it was

unclear whether this was sufficiently communicated and explained. There were aspects of the recommendations and advice that the child had not understood, and that should have been explored with them.

- The importance of working with other professionals who are supporting children and families in their court proceedings. The learning from one child's complaint identified that the FCA should have worked more closely with the school who were to have a central role in supporting the child and their parents to implement the arrangements that had been made by the court.
- The importance of keeping children updated about what is happening next. One child didn't hear from their FCA for a period of months between the work with them in the summer, and the court's decision in December. We recognised through the complaint investigation that the FCA should have spoken with the child again during this period. Another child was not informed early enough when changes needed to be made to the Cafcass officer who was working with them, due to long-term absence.

²⁷ Learning points consider what has happened, against what should have happened, ensuring learning is recognised and implemented. They can be for an individual member of staff, a team, or can be national or thematic such as the need for a policy change.

We have heard children talk about how they trusted and liked their FCA and guardian, how they liked their honesty, explanations and listened to what they wanted. Some of the key themes from children's positive feedback this reporting year were:

- Receiving letters helps them to feel connected to their FCA who is representing them. They have an identified adult who they believe will advocate for them where their parents cannot. This reduces their anxiety. Having a picture of the FCA means they know who they will be meeting. When the FCA includes things about their interests or pictures of things, the child often feels special and held in the mind of the person working with them. Children say that letters are something to keep and refer to in the future.
- Understanding what is happening, what will happen next and how they will be informed is important to children and they tell us this regularly.
- Sharing recommendations, even when they are not what children have said they think is best for them, is very important to them. They need the explanation, so they understand what is likely to happen and why.
- The opportunity to write to the judge is something many children say makes a difference. They feel it amplifies their voice to the person who will ultimately make decisions about their life, and this really matters to them. They feel more empowered. Children will say they need to feel heard, and it is frustrating for them when they feel we haven't heard them.

In feedback we have received from adults, details of some of the things that make a difference include:

- Families appreciate FCAs showing kindness, accuracy in details, and building respectful relationships throughout the process. We have worked with the Cafcass Family Forum, and they have developed a series of videos to explore what a respectful relationship felt like to them.
- Adults find it stressful when FCA appointments are rescheduled at short notice or scheduled late when in their view, there have been many weeks to write the report. They seek clearer understanding of early-stage processes, such as initial telephone interviews and the focus of these meetings. When FCAs and guardians are consistent in doing what they say they will do and explain what is happening now and what will happen next, this makes a difference. The same is said of affording people the time and space to share their experiences at their pace, considering any additional support they need to fully participate. The court process is stressful so feeling rushed or dismissed is frustrating.
- Adults appreciate clear and timely communication to avoid surprises in court reports. When reports are sent in advance, people can read them and digest them; this is important. Also, when there is clarity about how they can challenge the content of the report in court, this is reassuring.



- Feedback highlights the importance of FCAs recognising domestic abuse, coercive control, and emotional abuse and reporting these experiences accurately. Ensuring language and reports align with lived experiences is of central importance. Understanding the abuse as experienced by the child is important in helping adult victims of domestic abuse keep the child safe.
- Adapting our direct work to the needs of the child so that their views are wholly understood and their unique needs recognised is important to parents as an integral part of making recommendations about who the child will live with and with whom they will spend time.
- Consistent and clear descriptions of alienating behaviours and their impact in reports are valued by families, including explanations about what has been considered and understood in respect of why a child may be refusing to spend time with a parent.

What have we changed in response to this feedback?

Last year we reviewed our initial letters for private law proceedings so that the work to first hearing stage is clearer for families. We now explain more clearly what will and will not happen in our telephone interviews. Since the launch of the letters last year, we have reviewed over 2,000 feedback entries from adults at the work to first hearing stage of proceedings this year. This has identified a set of clear themes that people felt they didn't understand, were not clear about or that didn't meet their expectations.

We have developed a briefing in consultation with practitioners, identifying the key themes in our feedback and the things that families say will help them. We describe the need to prepare, explain and describe next steps in safeguarding interviews. This guidance will be launched in July 2025 and will feature in our operating information and

training for new staff. The key message in feedback is that there is deep anxiety among adults about family court proceedings and in response our practitioners and managers need to explain very clearly what will happen and not assume because we have sent a letter that this has been understood at a very stressful time. This alongside the Family Forum videos about what a respectful relationship feels like are important materials for our people to use. This has been an important and targeted focus this year.

Feedback in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, shows that FCAs and managers make a difference for many people who have suffered and continue to suffer this harm and abuse. In feedback, many victims and survivors describe the support from their FCA or children's guardian as 'life-changing'. In this feedback, we hear that the Cafcass social worker was the first person to have really listened to their experience and that the advice to court kept them and their children safe. However, this is not the experience for everyone who has an experience with Cafcass. Auditing the work with five families where we had received negative feedback provided some clear themes in our learning, mainly addressed through the launch in January 2025 of a new Domestic Abuse Practice Policy. Complainants referred to poor and minimising language, the conflation of conflict and abuse and failing to understand the risk of abuse alongside other forms of harm. The need to engage with other professionals supporting the family and analysing all police check information were also themes that emerged. Domestic abuse was a factor in 82 complaints during the year, and we identified learning in 17 of those. This related in the main to the practitioners not using the specialist materials to support their harm and risk assessment and, in some cases, giving the court advice that did not attend to the safety of existing arrangements for children.

Learning from complaints and feedback is shared with the relevant manager and the learning point from complaints pulls through into the Performance Learning Review record for the member of staff. When feedback is provided where adults say that they felt unsafe or that the practitioners had not acted to keep the child safe, this is shared with the manager in the team and highlighted in the quarterly feedback reports for local leaders to consider. We have also held Listen and Learn conversations with adults in proceedings who are willing, in order to try and understand and learn from what went well and where improvement was required.

Our feedback on how practitioners consider a child's additional needs has been a strength this year. In previous complaints, we were told that we needed to improve our understanding and practice.

We developed a series of materials on neurodiversity and held webinars on working with deaf children and families. Cafcass diversity networks held learning sessions in practice week, and we launched a new practice aid called 'A day in my life', to enable a collective narrative about understanding the child's needs, additional support and routines that matter in making recommendations for a child's living arrangements. Feedback from many parents suggests that we are considerate in how we plan our work with children with additional needs to enable them to share with us their views and make recommendations accordingly.

Sharing recommendations with children and their families has been a priority in practice for the last four years. This was a prominent theme in complaints from children last year, however we have not seen this theme this year and feedback from children highlights this as a real strength and something they say we do well. In the feedback question – How well did we explain our recommendations and how well did you understand them – children scored this question on average 4.2/5. 36 children scored this question as 1 very unhappy or 2 unhappy (7%) where we had not shared our thinking clearly. In response, this remains a practice priority and we hope to see the data on whether we shared recommendations continue to improve.

In January 2025, we launched our guide to assessment: Understanding why a child does not want to spend time with a parent. This guidance was developed with the Family Forum and sets out a framework to explore the reasons for the child's wishes and feelings. The guidance sets out that Cafcass has not and does not use or refer to alienating behaviours as a condition or syndrome and that Cafcass does not focus on applying a label but on understanding the impact on each child of any behaviour which may be harmful to them. We are intending that in using this guidance, practitioners and managers will explain more clearly how they explore this with children as well as now being required to consider at all times during their assessment, whether the child is a victim of domestic abuse or any other form of harm.



The Family Forum Manager has completed two Listen and Learn conversations this year. It is now our expectation that there is at least one per quarter carried out in each region and by managers. We have developed a system to enable the central recording of these conversations and the subsequent learning. Managers are required to report emerging changes in practice as a result at their annual regional performance boards. The learning we have taken forward from the two conversations this year was in relation to the language we used in reports when describing and discussing domestic abuse and the use of consent orders and concluding proceedings / recommending spending time arrangements, when there is serious domestic abuse and ongoing police investigations. Changes in policy have been made.

Significant incidents

Cafcass operates a significant incident process to lead and manage the response to a child being seriously harmed or killed and who is or has been known in proceedings. The criteria for making a report also include cases where there is known or likely high press interest. The intention for the organisation when this happens, is to establish quickly what is known about the child/ren, whether they are safe at the time, and how their safety and welfare looked at the time of our involvement to practitioners and managers.

Additionally, the process enables coordination of internal responses to enquiries and investigations that are established, to support local authorities to protect the children in proceedings or any other connected children where this is necessary, to make sure that the welfare of our people is prioritised and to enable prompt and clear communication about what has happened to sponsor government departments, the Cafcass Board and Ofsted where required.

In accordance with our process, this requires immediate engagement with and oversight by the National or Deputy Directors of Operations. They consider the information in all notifications and will direct actions, including child record or learning reviews where these are required. The National Director determines which incidents are escalated to the Chief Executive. Where such escalations are made, consideration is given to preparation for press contact, notification to the Cafcass Board, government departments, Ofsted, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the judiciary where this is necessary.

In 2024-25, 101 significant incidents were raised in respect of children who had suffered serious harm either in proceedings or were children known in previous proceedings. 88% (89) related to public law proceedings in 53 different local authorities and 12% (12) to private law proceedings in 10 different local authorities.

12 children died where abuse and neglect were known to be a factor in their proceedings. 10 (85%) were involved in public law proceedings and two (15%) in private law proceedings. Each child was also known to the local authority responsible for the area where they lived, meaning the cases were known to 12 different local authorities. Five children were under the age of two, three children were 3-10 years old, and four children were 11-17 years old. Eight of the children died while they were living with or spending time with at least one of their parents and four of the children (boys aged 12-16) were shot or stabbed outside of their family home and died from these injuries.

An additional three children in the reporting year and who had been known at some stage in their lives to Cafcass in public law proceedings died because of suicide. Each child was also known to a different local authority area.

These 15 children known to Cafcass represent 9.2% of notifications relating to child death sent to the National Panel by local authorities. Cafcass participates where invited with local safeguarding partnership reviews, preparing learning and information submissions.

All significant incidents are the subject of further analysis to understand whether more could have been done to protect the children. In this reporting year, a new function has been created to support dedicated learning and analysis from significant incidents, helping the Cafcass Principal Social Worker and the Assistant Director for performance and improvement to direct and consider changes in practice and policy with the senior operational leadership team.

The learning themes in practice alerts associated with significant incidents in this reporting year are set out on 105 and 106.

3.4

Enhancing our direct engagement with people who have direct experience of proceedings: the work and contribution of the Family Forum



The Cafcass Family Forum was set up in 2021 and there are 20 members. The main objective of the Forum is for us to be able to learn from the experiences of adults in proceedings where the quality of our work has been less than good.

Forum members are involved in working out with us how we can improve and change in response to their feedback. Forum members meet quarterly as a whole group and monthly to progress specific priority workstreams.

The Forum Manager chairs the meetings, which are attended by the Principal Social Worker.

During this reporting year, the Forum has been working on:

- **Enhancing practitioner understanding of neurodiversity and its relevance for children in proceedings:** Family Forum members led regional reflective discussions with practitioners on the difficulties that neurodivergent parents have when navigating the family court system. Family Forum members contributed to partner guidance for mediators on how to best work with neurodivergent parents.
- **Contributing to ‘Leave to Remove’ knowledge bite:** Members with experience of international and internal relocation applications contributed to the revised ‘Remove to Leave’ knowledge bite and shared their key messages and experience during Practice Week 2024.
- **Contributing to research:** Public law members have contributed to research supporting the President of the Family Division’s public law working group / care proceedings reform group.
- **Local Family Justice Boards:** Members have presented at several local family justice boards across the country, to share their experiences with family justice professionals and seeking to improve the engagement of parents in family court proceedings as well as to reduce delay.

- **Co-producing group supervision resource for practitioners:** Forum members have produced a series of videos to support a new group supervision resource for practitioners with the focus being on ‘believing in respectful relationships’. The learning themes are based on Forum members’ experience, and these include working with survivors of domestic abuse, building a respectful relationship with parents in public law proceedings, building a respectful relationship with those who are important to the child, including wider family, and maintaining a respectful relationship with fathers.
- **Improving Child and Family Arrangements services:** Forum members have influenced the new contract specification which is aimed at supporting families to agree safe, beneficial and sustainable arrangements.
- **Review of practice:** Forum members reviewed a range of practice and completed a moderation exercise, with the focus on whether our decision-making is clear, reasoned and understood.
- Forum members continue to be involved in the **domestic abuse practice reference group** contributing their lived experience to our thinking and planning on practice improvement. They are involved in Cafcass private law reform work.

Improving our engagement with children and families

An important responsibility that Cafcass has for children who have an experience of family proceedings, is to enable them to access information that is recorded on the case management system. Children can request this information through the Subject Access Request (SAR) process set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

Number of Subject Access Request (SAR) applications in 2024-25

SAR Summary 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025	
Total number of SARs received	729
Total number of SARs requested by adults	638
Total number of SARs requested by adults in current proceedings	194
Total number of SARs requested by adults in closed proceedings	433
Total number of SARs requested by adults who were children in closed proceedings	79
Total number of SARs requested by children	8
Total number of SARs requested by children in current proceedings	2
Total number of SARs requested by children in closed proceedings	6

Feedback from children was that the process can be confusing and very difficult for them if they are seeing information about which they were not aware or they do not understand. They told us that we needed to improve how we provided them with access to information.

In April 2023, we launched ‘My Cafcass journey’ – the name for subject access requests. This is a service now offered to all children who ask, and it is tailored to their needs and circumstances. This year 87 children and young people have used the service in this way.



Leadership, culture, accountability and improvement priorities

As a large social work practice organisation, committed to learning and improving how we support children and their families in proceedings, we are constantly reviewing and adjusting both how we secure improvement and how we report on progress. This year has been no exception, with a strengthened end of year review process for operations, the introduction of a performance board process for business and corporate services and more formalised quarterly oversight by the corporate

management team of improvement plans and targeted improvement programmes for public and private law and proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor. In addition, and as set out on pages 14 to 19 we have reviewed progress at the mid-way point of our strategic plan, 'Ambitious for children' and adjusted our priorities accordingly. These are set out in the overleaf:



Figure 17: Cafcass Strategic Plan, 'Ambitious For Children' – Year 3 adjusted priorities

Priorities for Year Three of Ambitious for Children 2023–2026

Practice: What are we going to prioritise for year three of this strategic plan and why?

Priority 1

Further improve the quality and impact of practice – narrow the gap

Prioritise targeted improvement programmes for public and private law and further improving practice where domestic abuse is a factor in proceedings – including increased review of all previous proceedings, criminal histories and police information in advice and reports to the family court. Understanding harm and the risk of further harm to children and adults in the context of them as victims of domestic abuse

Review and protect family court adviser caseloads – so they can work effectively with children to reduce delays by progressing cases effectively and reviewing the arrangements for children who have yet to meet their family court adviser (duty and post assessment hub priorities)

Enhance the use of our Together practice framework materials and aids – so that our in-person work with children is well supported and innovative

Further increase the effectiveness of management oversight and supervision arrangements – targeting teams where this is less consistent, and revise the management quality standard, applying formal performance improvement action when practice and/or leadership is not at the required standard

Priority 2

Seek out and learn from feedback

Review and evaluate our strategy for learning from feedback – to enhance learning in operational service areas, to start a monthly 'listen and learn' conversation in all teams and to require annual 'evidence in a learning summary' at annual regional performance boards

Act on learning from complaints, compliments and significant incidents – by continuing to review learning from complaints and significant incidents alongside the practice alerts and changes we are requiring

Priority 3

Enable Cafcass systems to support practice – targeted support

Further embed the use and oversight of operational service area improvement plans, including those with targeted support – to prioritise consistent good practice and to do this by formalising twice yearly progress reports to corporate management team in addition to revised expectations at annual performance boards

Improve the efficiency of closing children's cases – by establishing a formal case progression programme and working with HMCTS to secure the swift and effective sharing of court orders

Embed the performance, accountability and quality assurance frameworks – by reviewing the implementation and effectiveness of the new local Performance and Practice quarterly reviews and extending performance boards to the National Improvement Service and corporate and business services functions

Earlier sections of this report (Pages 48-77, section 2.2 and 2.3) set out in detail the progress we have already made against our stated strategic and national improvement priorities. Taken together with learning from the end of year regional reviews of practice and performance and alongside the work of the internal recovery board, our adjusted national priorities for operations are set out in figure 18 overleaf.

Priorities for Year Three of Ambitious for Children 2023-2026

People: What are we going to prioritise for year three of this strategic plan and why?

Priority 4

Attract, engage and retain people

Prioritise wellbeing, reward and recognition – including strengthening the immediate support available to practitioners and managers affected by death or serious injury to children with whom they are working through a new wellbeing and reflective practice programme. Additionally, implement a revised process for reviewing and reducing sickness absence and embed our internal recognition programme to celebrate and notice success

Implement the next phase of the Cafcass social work academy – to increase the intake of newly qualified social workers and to work in partnership with the Judiciary and Social Work England to develop a new mandatory training module for Cafcass practitioners on domestic abuse in family court proceedings, specifically addressing the requirements of Practice Direction 12J

Develop a targeted attraction and retention offer for operational service areas where it is needed – to enable sustained allocation of all existing and new casework and a reduction in turnover of family court advisers, as well as developing a workforce readiness assessment in respect of the anticipated further implementation of private law reform associated with the pathfinder courts

Priority 5

Provide a modern child-focused working environment

Implement a new health, safety and security priority – to set out our response to and action that will be taken when colleagues are threatened by adult parties and/or their family members in proceedings, alongside guidance for managers on follow up actions, a management information report to catalogue trends and frequency of threats, and a quarterly report to the corporate management team and Cafcass Audit and Risk Committee

Continue with improvements to the ChildFirst case management system – to support effective recording and reporting of our work in children’s cases, including engagement and work with independent reviewing officers from local authorities and the facility to record and report the extent to which the courts accept the advice given in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

Further implement the Cafcass Estates strategy – to reinforce relationship-led practice in new or existing offices and reviewing all 33 existing Cafcass offices to determine the extent to which they enable the effective engagement with children and offer a safe, welcoming and secure space for our colleagues

Priority 6

Lead and govern well

Embed our leadership and management quality standards – adding a leadership development objective to be reviewed twice yearly in Performance and Learning Review meetings as well as continuing with the offer of an annual leadership conference for all managers

Revise our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy – including the commission of a new inclusive leaders programme, new insights into the heritage of adults in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor and seeking to achieve advanced accreditation as an employer supporting colleagues who are carers

Continue to review and plan for the succession of leaders with the Cafcass Board – and specifically to secure the appointment of a new National Director of Operations and an established senior team for operations

Priorities for Year Three of Ambitious for Children 2023-2026

Partners: What are we going to prioritise for year three of this strategic plan and why?

Priority 7

Improve children’s experiences of private law proceedings

Evaluate our learning from the private law pathfinder courts – and work with Ministry of Justice to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the reforms, to understand the caseload and throughput efficiencies for Cafcass when compared to the Child Arrangements Programme, the resourcing requirements associated with seeing all children in private law proceedings and the extent of improved experiences for adult and child victims in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

Determine the requirements of new commission for the Improving Child and Family Arrangements programme – in partnership with Ministry of Justice, prepare and tender for a new contract that prioritises support for parents to make and sustain safe family time arrangements that are in children’s best interests

Prioritise the partnership aspect of the targeted improvement programmes for private law and domestic abuse – in partnership with the Judiciary, the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, SafeLives and the Cafcass practice expert group, monitor and review the effective implementation of the new Domestic Abuse Practice policy specifically as it relates to the safety of family time arrangements for children as well as implementing new arrangements for r16.4 proceedings to reduce delay and prioritise the welfare and safety of children

Priority 8

Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes

Record and report on the extent to which Cafcass advice influences outcomes for children – to enable tracking and reporting of court order outcomes against Cafcass advice and recommendations through updates to our case management system, ChildFirst

Increase our understanding of and influence on regional variation in public and private law proceedings – to work with local family justice boards to improve regional consistency and compliance with the Public Law Outline for public law proceedings

Priority 9

Work with others to improve family justice

Continue to enhance our work with partners – working with Ministry of Justice, the Judiciary and the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to engage in strategic planning associated with private law reforms and to partner with SafeLives and the Cafcass Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group to improve practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

Further enable children to understand and participate in their proceedings – to continue to support and lead the practice principles and learning associated with the Department for Education pilot of a protocol before the first case management hearing. The key practice change is for children’s guardians and local authority social workers to agree a timetable and review care plans early so that this work does not take up valuable court hearing time

Continue to improve processes to share information efficiently and effectively – in partnership with HMCTS, support testing and implementation of the private law portal, and develop a timescale for inclusion on C100 application of information regarding heritage and faith

Figure 18: Adjusted national improvement priorities for operations for 2025 - 26

Practice improvement priorities
1. Seeing and engaging respectfully with every child
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ throughout their proceedings and as part of sharing recommendations with them✓ children’s responses to recommendations in reports to court✓ consistent and habitual use of letters to children✓ strengthen the engagement with children during the time their liberty is restricted, review timescales and exit plans regularly and present children’s experiences to the court at all hearings✓ when recommendations are made that do not accord with the child’s expressed wishes (or if they are non – verbal those expressed on their behalf), this must be explained to them and the rationale written into the report to court.
2. A detailed understanding of the nature and impact (harm and risk) on child victims of domestic abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ reflected in advice to the court and specifically addressing what has happened to the child and what remains a risk to them now✓ safeguarding interviews must set out clearly where there is a report of domestic abuse, what specifically has happened to the adult and child victims using their own words✓ consistent use of new policy in practice - specifically harm and risk assessment, review of existing arrangements and analysis of all safeguarding history and information from police checks – including making the rationale for any contact clear to the court✓ evidencing the impact or likely impact of contact for a child with a parent and seeking the views of the resident parent✓ improvement plans incorporated from self – evaluations (domestic abuse)✓ consider the safety and welfare of connected children and take appropriate and swift action if they are at risk of harm or have been harmed.
3. An understanding of the impact of a child’s uniqueness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ reflected in advice to the court and consistently visible in all assessments.
4. Effective use of the Assessment and Child’s Plan to analyse harm and risk to the child
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ continued focus on assessment and analysis in advice to court✓ clear rationales set out to explain what was considered and weighed in professional judgement to arrive at the advice and recommendations.

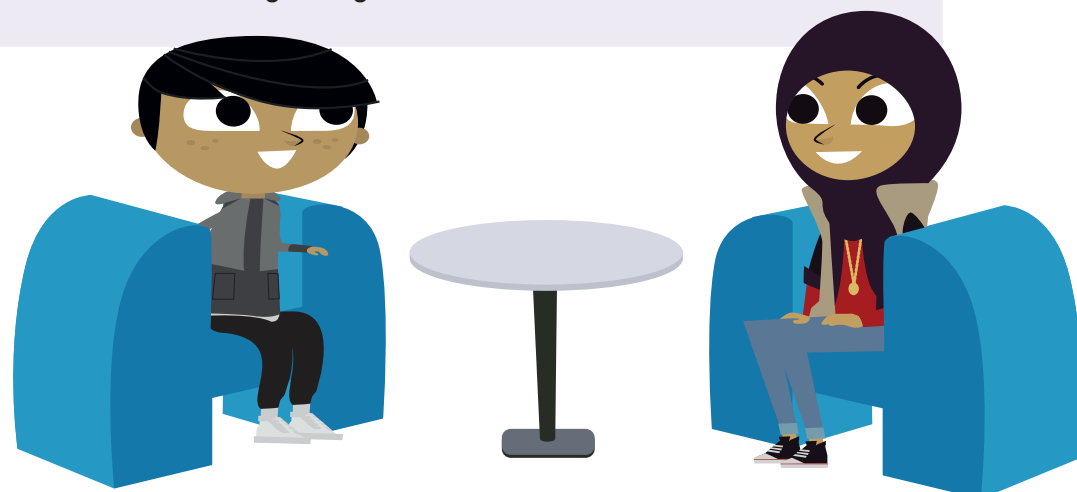
5. Reducing delay for children
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ understanding the causes and taking local and national action to secure a decision✓ Investigating local recommendations by guardians or support for the appointment of an expert and additional assessment✓ timetables - 26 weeks for all cases and for public law, adherence to the Public Law Outline✓ reduce to zero all proceedings in all law types over 100 weeks✓ reduce the number of children in proceedings over 52 weeks✓ all safeguarding letters written within four weeks and filed in accordance with child arrangements unless a local agreement is in place and signed off by the Deputy Director and the lead DFJ✓ short notice applications - review the impact on children’s experiences✓ working effectively with Independent reviewing officers during and at the end of proceedings.
Leadership improvement priorities
1. Compelling leadership in the consistent use of ‘Together with Children and Families’
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ including reports from leaders in annual regional and annual corporate performance boards on progress with holding our culture as a priority.
2. Effective management support, supervision, and oversight
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ 100% management oversight of assessment and child’s plans, including up to date recording so that children’s safety and welfare is clear at all times✓ continued targeting of situational supervision where children are to be or already have been reunified home✓ increased supervision of proceedings where the conclusion is delayed✓ target the use of management and practice quality standards to less than good practice and leadership✓ ability to give an account of visibility and connectivity in local teams, the operational service areas and the regions.
3. Evidence of actively seeking feedback, learning from feedback, and making adjustments to further improve practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ active leadership of all negative children’s feedback with clear responses reported✓ visible evidence of prioritised learning for each OSA from significant incidents, complaints and national learning from practice alerts.

4. Understanding and evidencing the positive impact of leaders on children, families, and carers

- ✓ visible evidence of feedback in use locally
- ✓ ‘strengthening practice – specialist support programme’ – releasing potential and raising the quality of work judged to be less than good.

5. Demonstrating a detailed and accurate understanding of performance and the quality of practice

- ✓ leadership of workflow – allocated work, inactive work and duty cases. New case progression resource in place and active and public law allocations to KPI in all OSAs
- ✓ reducing extensions to below 25% where in Cafcass control
- ✓ targeted improvement plans in 5 OSAs with visible and formal reporting - including formal notifications to Cafcass board where performance is not improving
- ✓ consistent leadership, evidenced follow up and clear expectations about intervention and action to secure compliance with policy, practice and management quality standards in all teams – including conduct discussions
- ✓ deputy Director and Assistant Director team to provide regular and effective evidence of follow through of required national and local leadership actions - with a system implemented to track and report progress and action closure (with an impact statement)
- ✓ local leadership and understanding of all performance accountability systems and associated reporting
- ✓ clear intervention and action that makes a difference when an Assistant Director oversees the follow up of inadequate practice
- ✓ regular and evidenced oversight of workforce requirements and changes in all teams within the region and Operational Service Area, showing prompt and consistent action to recruit, retain and to manage sickness absence (which also needs reducing in each local team) in close collaboration with the HR business partner
- ✓ rigour and practice challenge -strengthen the challenge of care plans in respect of the safety and best interests of children
- ✓ safeguarding referrals to local authority children’s services must be specific in the risk of harm or the harm that has already happened and should include detail of what the practitioner is worried about if nothing changes.



The National Improvement Plan is derived from our collective and accumulated learning about the quality and impact of practice and performance. The learning derives from the scrutiny of local and national performance data, practice quality auditing, feedback from children and families, significant incidents, complaints, and case record and learning reviews.

There are nineteen Operational Service Area (OSA) plans with the same ten priorities and with additional local ambitions and targets drawn from specific pressures and areas for improvement.

The senior leadership teams for each OSA have continuous access to performance data, audit results and feedback to enable them to monitor progress and improvement from their baselines and to make comparisons with national averages and ‘Best for Children’ measures.

In this reporting year, we supplemented datasets and baseline measures with regional self – evaluations on the effectiveness of proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor. This included the introduction of six new data measures, including, % of proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, % of work graded good or better where domestic abuse is a factor, % of staff in the area who have attested to the new domestic abuse policy, % of cases where the FCA advice was accepted by the court in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, % of 16A risk reports submitted to the court in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor and the % of moderated audits undertaken by heads of practice where domestic abuse is a factor.²⁸

As has been the case for the last two reporting years, during 2024-25, we continued to target additional scrutiny and oversight at specific aspects of private law requiring improvement and work in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor. We call these national targeted improvement programmes and they are subject to formal scrutiny by a Cafcass board sub-committee. The public law improvement subcommittee ceased in October of this reporting year. The improvement priorities are subsumed into the national improvement plan and reported to the performance and quality sub-committee of the Cafcass Board.

While the domestic abuse improvement programme work stands alone and reports to the Cafcass sub-committee also scrutinising private law improvement, the improvement priorities are subsumed for the purpose of this report into the adjusted national improvement plan set out on pages 120 to 122.

Private law improvement priorities specifically addressed in the national targeted plan are set out below, are the subject of quarterly scrutiny by the sub-committee and are reported to the performance and learning corporate management team by region and operational service area twice per year.



²⁸ The new measures are shown in the regional performance datasets that have been submitted to Ofsted as part of the national self – evaluation

Figure 19: Private law improvement priorities

1. Reduce delay for children in private law proceedings – including regional variation

2. Reduce the length of r16.4 proceedings

3. Review the quality of 16A Risk Assessments and child safeguarding referrals to local authority children’s services

4. Reduce the number of repeat assessments (section 7 reports) of children and families, including national variation

5. Make recommendations that provide opportunities for children to give their views to the court

6. Make consistent use of resources to support direct work with children and families

Local operational service area leadership teams are supported and challenged through the comprehensive performance and accountability cycle, including:

- supervisions with Deputy Directors;
- weekly meetings of the Assistant Director group;
- consideration of a key challenge spotlight report at the monthly meeting of the full Operational Management Team;
- the fortnightly meeting of the Cafcass internal recovery and improvement board;
- the eight-weekly performance and learning meeting of the Corporate Management Team;
- the eight annual regional performance boards;
- the mid and end year reviews of improvement plans in preparation for the annual self-evaluation.

Performance and progress are also scrutinised regularly throughout the year by the full Cafcass Board, through the three formal sub-committees (and the addition of the private law improvement programme committee) and by the Ministry of Justice at the quarterly business assurance meetings. These plans form the operational infrastructure of both our strategic and improvement plans.

In the year ahead however, we intend to make changes to some of the accountability arrangements because we need to increase the focus, grip and interventions that are available in weaker operational service areas and teams. In addition, we need to take more regular assurance in respect of progress in those areas as well as continue to check in on any performance or quality changes in all areas. A summary of these intentions is set out in figure 20 overleaf.

The national performance dataset has been amended to incorporate ‘Best for Children’ measures as well as six core measures relating to proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor.

The recovery and improvement board reporting arrangements have been made more specific. There are 10 domains against which assurance is taken on a monthly or quarterly basis (see figure 20 overleaf), depending on the criticality of any change.

Outlier reporting is expected for any operational service area that is working outside national average performance and where necessary, formal submissions will be requested.

All assistant directors and both Deputy Directors are expected to account for progress where there is outlier performance at both the annual performance board for the region and at a quarterly progress update to the corporate management team.

Figure 20: Cafcass internal recovery and improvement board reporting domains

Track	Report section	Domain lead	Frequency
N/A	Comprehensive Recovery and Improvement Board Data Pack	Head of Business Analysis	Monthly
Track A - Operational Performance	Domain 1: Demand	Head of Business Analysis	Monthly
	Domain 2: Vital Signs (Operations)	Domain Leads: Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement	Monthly
	Domain 3: Throughput	Domain Leads: Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement	Monthly
	Domain 4: Management oversight, supervision and support	Domain Leads: Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement, Assistant Director for Performance and Quality Improvement, Principal Social Worker	Monthly
Track B - Resources Directorate Performance	Domain 5: Vital Signs (Corporate)	Domain Lead: Director of Resources	Headlines monthly / Other data quarterly
	Domain 6: People	Domain 6: Head of People	Monthly
	Domain 7: Feedback and Learning	Domain Leads: Assistant Director Performance and Quality Assurance, Principal Social Worker, Head of Complaints & Correspondence	Headlines monthly / Other data quarterly

Track	Report section	Domain lead	Frequency
Track C: Productivity and Change	Domain 8: Productivity and Change: Prioritisation	Domain Leads: Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement	Headlines monthly / Other data quarterly
	Domain 9: Productivity and Efficiency	Domain Leads: Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement	Headlines monthly / Other data quarterly
	Domain 10: Productivity and Change: Pathfinder	Domain Lead: Deputy Director (Special Projects), Assistant Director Strategic Programme Development	Headlines monthly / Other data quarterly
	Domain 11: CMT and Cafcass Board Escalations	Domain Lead: Chief Executive Officer	Monthly

Figure 21: Corporate Management Team actions to strengthen local operational performance and grip

Corporate Management Team additional assurance intentions 2025–26

1. Develop a revised national system for managing workflow and allocation of work – including revisions to the national operating procedure

2. Revise the regional annual performance board process, taking account of:

- ✓ follow up of inadequate work with evidence reported
- ✓ the submission of an OSA and regional workforce plan
- ✓ compliance with basic operating processes to manage work
- ✓ the culture and sense of team in a region
- ✓ the quality and rigour of Performance Learning Reviews (PLR)
- ✓ the leadership and action planning following the board, including the submission of a plan to address actions and follow up in performance and learning corporate management team meetings
- ✓ securing the boards as part of the leadership of a region and not a one-off scrutiny event.

Corporate Management Team additional assurance intentions 2025–26

3. Secure Corporate Management Team sign off on operational arrangements to be locally varied through the national director as opposed to those that require national sign off and board scrutiny

4. Formalise the sign off by senior operational managers of submissions to end and mid year reviews and the associated follow up actions and monitoring such that there is improved alignment with the annual report and self-evaluation process

5. Formalise the process for sign off of targeted team improvement plans such that the terms of reference for improvement are clear, progress milestones are set out and exit from the plan is agreed by the corporate management team on the recommendation of the national director

6. Review the arrangements for the provision of safeguarding letters in all regions to secure resilience and consistency with filing timescales and the quality of checks and advice

7. Agree the terms of reference for a review of flexible working arrangements, the requirements for cover and the process to be applied for each case – including review

8. In the business services review, phase two, implement a protocol securing support to operational colleagues for end-to-end caseflow, monitoring of unallocated work within the standard operating protocol (to be revised), reporting levels of inactive work and generally better connectivity between business service leaders and those for operations

9. Develop a standardised service area meeting agenda to cover the improvement minimum every month in communications and leadership and a sign off and oversight mechanism from Deputy Directors

10. Secure compliance with and reporting on self-assessments of management and quality practice standards

Corporate Management Team (CMT) additional assurance intentions 2025–26

11. Strengthen and clarify the workforce expectations and responsibilities for all leaders including the provision of a monthly report to the national director of operations setting out:

- ✓ vacancies and turnover (including forecast leavers)
- ✓ performance plans, grievances, disciplinarys and sickness absence management with timescales observed
- ✓ confirmation meetings scheduled or completed by Assistant Directors (with 100% as the baseline)
- ✓ compliance with mandatory training and expiration of certificated training
- ✓ proportion of flexible working arrangements and confirming cover arrangements for holidays and peak days of working week
- ✓ visibility of managers and leaders for the OSAs in the region.

NOTE: This same report needs to be submitted for each regional annual performance board

12. Devise a reporting mechanism for CMT to have assurance that all senior manager PLRs have been completed and objectives established in accordance with both strategic and improvement priorities

In this reporting year, we have continued to monitor and report against the success measures agreed with the Ministry of Justice for Cafcass. These reports also provide our progress against the priorities of the National Family Justice Board, led by the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education. Together with core partners, including Cafcass, Cafcass Cymru, the judiciary, HMCTS and local authority family justice leads, the Family Justice Board has set out its priorities to target delay and to improve the experiences for children and their families in family court proceedings. Pages 72-77 show the reporting data and further improvement intentions. These are overseen and managed in our fortnightly internal recovery and improvement board and reported to our Cafcass Board and in our quarterly Business Assurance Meetings with the Ministry of Justice.

In March 2025, we established a resources directorate improvement plan to secure clear support for our strategic priorities and to formalise the associated accountability processes. A summary of progress is set out at figure 22 overleaf.

Leadership and oversight of progress for the directorate is through the Director of Resources and Heads of Profession who are accountable for the quality of practice and performance within their corporate service areas (CSA) and for the implementation of our practice framework, *‘Together with Children and Families’*. Together they work as the Resources Directorate Management Team (RDMT), responsible for ensuring equitable and consistent corporate services nationally.

RDMT is a key component of the broader governance and oversight framework for Cafcass and as such facilitates engagement, challenge, accountability and reporting in support of delivering corporate priorities in year and shaping future direction. The group meets monthly for a half day.

Membership includes:

- Chief Information Officer
- Head of Legal Services
- Assistant Director of Policy
- Chief People Officer
- Heads of Profession across all corporate services
- Directorate Business Manager.

Figure 22: Resources Directorate, Corporate and Business Services improvement priorities

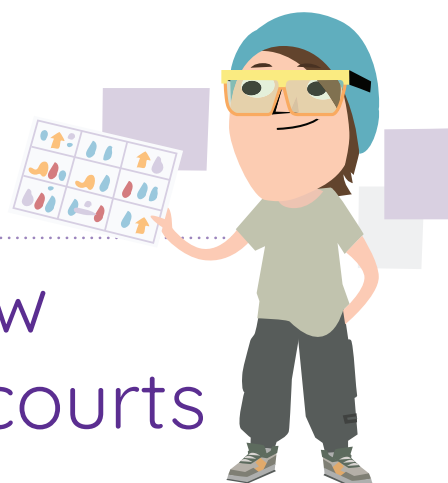
Our corporate culture and mission		The progress we have made
1.	Corporate and Business Services leaders will develop and submit a self-assessment with improvement priorities that have been agreed with their team by end October 2024.	Partially met: Of the 11 teams required to submit a self-assessment, 10 of these completed self-assessments at the end of March 2025. One remains outstanding.
2.	All corporate and business services managers will assess themselves against each of the management standards by end May 2024.	Partially met: Reporting on this self-assessment is not yet available (as reported through Vital Signs (Corporate) as the Recovery and Improvement Board)
3.	Equality, diversity and inclusion priorities will be published in June 2024.	Met: Priorities agreed and shared in Leadership Live event – included in this report also
4.	Local staff survey action plans for each Operational Service Area and for Corporate and Business Services teams will be submitted by May 2024 and all actions progressed by Mar 2025.	Partially met: Some corporate teams are still to discuss directorate level results. But work in progress to take forward national actions.
5.	CMT will progress and develop the minimum expectations for in person work and visible leadership by October 2024.	Not met: Connectivity paper still to be finalised. Head of Business Services has set out plans for staffing key offices throughout week which will form part of the proposal.
6.	New induction programme launched in May 2024, and the first in-person programmes took place in Autumn.	Met: Revisions made to virtual induction events and two in person induction events now hosted through London office.

Our corporate culture and mission		The progress we have made
7.	Priorities for innovation will be identified through the mid year review process.	Partially met: Technology innovation managed through Innovate Programme (and within quarterly CMT reporting). Self-assessments act as starting point for service area innovation priorities. Efficiency target set within 2025-26 budget allocations. Separate review of business services underway.
8.	New private law arrangements and learning materials will be in place from the launch of the Birmingham Pathfinder in May 2024.	Met: Materials in place for go live, available to support go live in A5.
9.	Clear policy, guidance, leadership and engagement with staff in the development of the work under the health and safety priority (by September 2024) to support our statutory employer duties, embed the culture of not tolerating abusive or harassing behaviour from families in proceedings and in support of the interests of all Cafcass staff.	Partially met: Programme of work in hand. Consolidated as priority project within the People Pillar. Quarterly updates to CEO and progress reported through CMT.
10.	We will develop and improve our policies and leadership in respect of sickness absence to support all managers to give a priority to employee wellbeing.	Partially met: Stronger set of measures in place for management of absence, tracked through Recovery and Improvement Board.



3.6

Learning from private law reform – the Pathfinder courts



Since 2022, we have been working in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the judiciary, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, and local authority children's social care services to test a new model in the family courts to resolve private law proceedings.

This has become commonly known as the private law 'Pathfinder'. The intentions of the new ways of working include:

- Minimising trauma for survivors of domestic abuse who find themselves in proceedings about who their children will live or spend time with.
- Improving child and family experiences of child arrangements disputes.
- Centralising the proceedings on children and making strong assessments of the impact of harm and risk on them.
- Resolving proceedings earlier and with fewer hearings and with Cafcass seeing all children before the first and single decision-making hearing.
- Enhancing the work that agencies do together in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor (specifically domestic abuse support services) and making sure that where local authority children's services have knowledge of and relationships with families and children that they undertake the assessments ordered by the family court.

Family Courts participating in the Pathfinder, operate under practice direction *PD36Z – Pilot Scheme: Private Law Reform* which specifically requires:

- Seeing and hearing from all children sooner and in most cases as opposed to the 30% who are now seen as part of a section 7 (s.7) report that is ordered to Cafcass.²⁹ The principal here is to present the child's view earlier to the court and for this to influence arrangements quickly, at the same time reducing their continued exposure to harm and conflict.
- The commissioning of local domestic abuse support services to work directly with affected adult victims and survivors and to provide an assessment of risk for submission to the court with the Cafcass advice. Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) are typically the people who undertake these assessments.
- 'One assessment, one report' – a single Child Impact Report replaces the Safeguarding Letter and s.7 reports that are requirements under the Child Arrangement Programme.

²⁹ The new measures are shown in the regional performance datasets that have been submitted to Ofsted as part of the national self-evaluation.

- Shorter filing times for those reports, agreed at 40 days from receipt of the application and removal of First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointments.

Where are the reforms being trialled?

During 2024-25, the reforms in England have continued to be tested in Bournemouth and Dorset, and in Birmingham and Solihull. West Yorkshire began testing the reforms in June 2025.

Expansion sites, initially adjacent to those in Dorset and Bournemouth, and Birmingham and Solihull, are planned for December 2025.

How Cafcass practice differs in the Pathfinder courts

To achieve the intended outcomes, we have been internally testing some different ways of working that include:

- The introduction of an information *screening stage* – to triage all private law applications and to identify the assessment that children need in accordance with the information that is provided. If a family is already known to the local children's social care service, then the court directs the assessment to the authority. This secures greater continuity, less duplication and less delay for the family and children.
- Replacing Safeguarding letters, attendance at First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointments and s.7 reports with a single Child Impact Report, filed with the court, within 40 working days.
- *More children are being seen* and engaged as is the intention of the practice direction. We are generally operating at between 65 – 80% of children being seen as part of the assessment that is submitted to the court

- Making early referrals to Independent Domestic Violence Adviser services so that support is secured and the impact of domestic abuse on the adult victims is well understood.

The benefits and opportunities for children and families and the challenges

While formal evaluation of the Pathfinder courts is led by the MoJ and not yet complete, some initial findings have been encouraging. These include:

- Significant reduction in the duration of many private law proceedings.
- The earlier identification of families whose assessment can be ordered from children's social care because they are already known to the service, avoiding the need to repeat assessments and reducing delay.
- The emphasis on problem solving (exemplified by judges managing some enforcement applications without referring these for re-assessment) has provided opportunities for reduced workloads.



The Pathfinder approach presents challenges for Cafcass operationally however and the closer the national system moves to implementation, the more care will need to be taken in terms of the unintended consequences of Cafcass family court advisers seeing all children when the work has been ordered. Essentially this requires us to recruit and retain a much higher number of social workers who are locally based to undertake the work. Staffing capacity, attraction and retention will be important factors to consider in the extent to which timescales and volumes can be managed without causing delay for families. These risks are well known to the project team and senior officials leading the MoJ programme and we continue in active discussion.

Feedback from children

Children who have experienced proceedings in the Pathfinder court areas have told us:

“You helped me tell you something that I felt anxious about telling someone else about.”

“I understood what was going on.”

“You helped me with lots of moving about and gave me a sense that it will all be fine.”

“You made it clear and easy for me to understand what was happening.”

“I appreciated how well my points were vocalised in court.”

“I do not want a letter for now because I think he might say sorry in [a] letter but not actually [be] sorry.”

“You listened to me.”

“Listening to what I had to say and recognising what I was comfortable with.”

“You took what I had to say seriously.”



Accountability report



4.1

Corporate governance

(Directors’ report, Statement of accounting officer’s responsibilities, Governance statement)

Directors’ report

The Chair of the Cafcass Board is Sally Cheshire CBE and the Deputy Chair of the Cafcass Board is Professor Eileen Munro CBE.

The Board comprises non-executive members, listed below, who have been appointed in accordance with the Membership, Committee and Procedure Regulations 2005.

Cafcass Board membership:

- **Sally Cheshire** CBE Chair
- **Professor Eileen Munro** CBE Deputy Chair
- **Catherine Doran**
- **Helen Jones** Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
- **Catharine Seddon** Chair of the Private Law Improvement Programme sub-Committee
- **Dalwardin Babu**
- **Joanna Nicolas** Co-opted Board member
- **Mandy Jones**
- **Peter Fish** Chair of Performance and Quality Committee
- **Rohan Sivanandan** Chair of the People Committee
- **Steven Cox**

Register of interests

Board members have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest; a register of interests can be found on our [website](#).

Information assurance

Cafcass agrees that no unauthorised disclosure of personal data is acceptable but acknowledges that the risk cannot be entirely eliminated. There is a commitment from Cafcass, the Board and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to continue the work to focus on mitigation and there are improvements in place to seek to lower the number of data breaches, and to mitigate the impact when they do occur.

In 2024-25, Cafcass recorded 597 data incidents of which 455 were classified as personal data breaches, 347 of which were avoidable. Of the 455 data breaches 35 were logged as breaches caused by third parties.



	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total number of data incidents investigated	523	463	597
Confirmed breaches	404	365	455
Significant breaches reported to the ICO	2	8	6

Six of the avoidable personal data breaches fell within Cafcass’ assessment of reportable to the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Cafcass worked with a total of 84,350 new and existing children’s cases in 2024-25, with a data breach occurring in 0.5% of children’s cases. This remains an extremely low number when considering the volume of information processed by Cafcass in its open work and the number of staff handling that information through Cafcass systems. Monthly information governance communications continue to be shared about data protection to ensure improved awareness and reporting of incidents.

As in previous years, our primary focus remains on addressing the unnecessary processing of personal information, which can unintentionally impact individuals’ privacy—particularly through the sharing of addresses, educational settings, and other identifiable details. These occurrences are rarely due to negligence, but rather stem from professionals’ genuine commitment to providing the courts with a clear and thorough understanding of the children’s lives. Looking ahead, we are optimistic that the introduction of a revised Information Assurance Policy—soon to be attested to by all staff—alongside updates to our Records Management Policy and enhancements to Cafcass’ data protection training suite, will contribute to a continued and measurable reduction in such errors over time.

Statement of accounting officer’s responsibilities

Under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the Secretary of State has directed Cafcass to prepare for each financial year a Statement of Accounts in the form and on the basis set out in the Accounts Direction. The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of Cafcass and of its net resource outturn, application of resources, changes in taxpayers’ equity and cash flows for the financial year.

In preparing the accounts, the Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the Government Financial Reporting Manual and in particular to:

- Observe the Accounts Direction issued by the Secretary of State, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis.
- Make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis.
- State whether applicable accounting standards as set out in the Government Financial Reporting Manual have been followed and disclose and explain any material departures in the financial statements.
- Prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

The Principal Accounting Officer of the Ministry of Justice has appointed the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer of Cafcass. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding Cafcass’ assets, are set out in ‘Managing Public Money’ published by HM Treasury.

As far as the Accounting Officer is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which Cafcass’ auditors are unaware. She has taken all steps possible to make herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that Cafcass’ auditors are aware of that information.

The Accounting Officer confirms that the annual report and accounts as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable. She takes personal responsibility for the annual report and accounts and the judgements required for determining that it is fair, balanced and understandable.



Governance statement

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body for which I, Jacky Tiotto, am the Chief Executive and the Accounting Officer. I am personally responsible and accountable to Parliament for the organisation and quality of the work carried out by Cafcass, including its use of public money and the stewardship of its assets.

Adjustments have been made to the internal management structure, described below. There have been no other material changes in our governance framework during the financial year. Our governance arrangements satisfy the requirements of the main principles of the code ‘Corporate governance in central government departments: Code of Good Practice’ that are relevant to Cafcass. I consider our Governance Framework to be effective.

The Ministry of Justice

As a non-departmental public body Cafcass is accountable to a sponsor department, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). We work within the strategic objectives agreed with the MoJ and which are underpinned by a success measures framework as set out on pages 72-77.

Regular meetings have been held with the MoJ through the Business Assurance process to facilitate scrutiny of arrangements. A senior MoJ official attends the fortnightly Cafcass recovery and improvement board. We work closely with the MoJ on policy development, and we contribute as required to the MoJ policy objectives for the family justice system.

The Chief Executive is a formal member of the Family Justice Board, chaired by Ministers from MoJ and the Department for Education. She is also a member of the policy and delivery group with the National Director of Operations who also attends.

The Cafcass Board

The Board use their expertise and experience to establish the organisation’s strategic aims and objectives. Their work is supported by four committees:

- 1. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: provides assurance to the Board and Accounting Officer on audit, risk and control issues.
- 2. Performance and Quality Committee: supports the Board in overseeing the performance of services, the quality of casework and the impact of that work on children and families, Cafcass and the courts.
- 3. People Committee: provides assurance to the Board over the policy and strategy frameworks for the recruitment, retention, reward and development of people.
- 4. Remuneration Committee: which considers proposals on the remuneration of executive directors and other organisational pay issues of a significant and strategic dimension.

The Board has also established a time-limited Committee to scrutinise progress of the Private Law and Domestic Abuse Improvement Programmes. The Private Law Improvement Programme Committee commenced in April 2024.

The Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) works across the family justice system to promote the voice of the child in family court proceedings and is integral to the family justice system. A representative of the FJYPB attends each Cafcass Board meeting, providing an update about its work and scrutinising and challenging the work of the Board in the best interests of the children and families we serve.

Meetings attended per member of those eligible to attend:

Board member	Board meeting	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Performance and Quality Committee	People Committee
Sally Cheshire	3 of 4	n/a	n/a	1 of 1
Catharine Seddon	4 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Catherine Doran	4 of 4	3 of 4	n/a	n/a
Dalwardin Babu	4 of 4	n/a	n/a	2 of 2
Eileen Munro	3 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Helen Jones	4 of 4	4 of 4	n/a	n/a
Joanna Nicolas	4 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Mandy Jones	4 of 4	4 of 4	n/a	0 of 2
Peter Fish	4 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Rohan Sivanandan	4 of 4	n/a	n/a	2 of 2
Steven Cox	3 of 4	4 of 4	n/a	n/a

The Board meet on a quarterly basis and meetings are attended by all Board members including co-opted Board members and the Chief Executive and Executive Directors. Representatives of the sponsor department, Ministry of Justice, and the FJYPB are invited to attend and take part in discussions.

Stakeholders and members of the public are invited to observe Board meetings on at least two occasions every calendar year and where possible, all meetings. Stakeholders and members of the public are invited to submit questions either before and / or after Board meetings, to which they receive a written response.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Performance and Quality Committee are mandated to meet on a quarterly basis during the year. The People Committee is mandated to meet twice annually. The Remuneration Committee meets annually as needed.

Standing reports provided to the Board at their quarterly meetings cover reports from the following:

- The Chief Executive who, together with Directors, provides updates on current performance, strategic progress, risk, issues, and successes.
- The FJYPB reports on its work programme and seeks input from the Board on key issues.
- Committee chairs provide key updates from recent committee meetings.
- Governance reports on finance, risk, people and performance (finance and risk reports are delivered at every Board meeting, the people and performance reports are delivered at alternate Board meetings).

Internal management structure

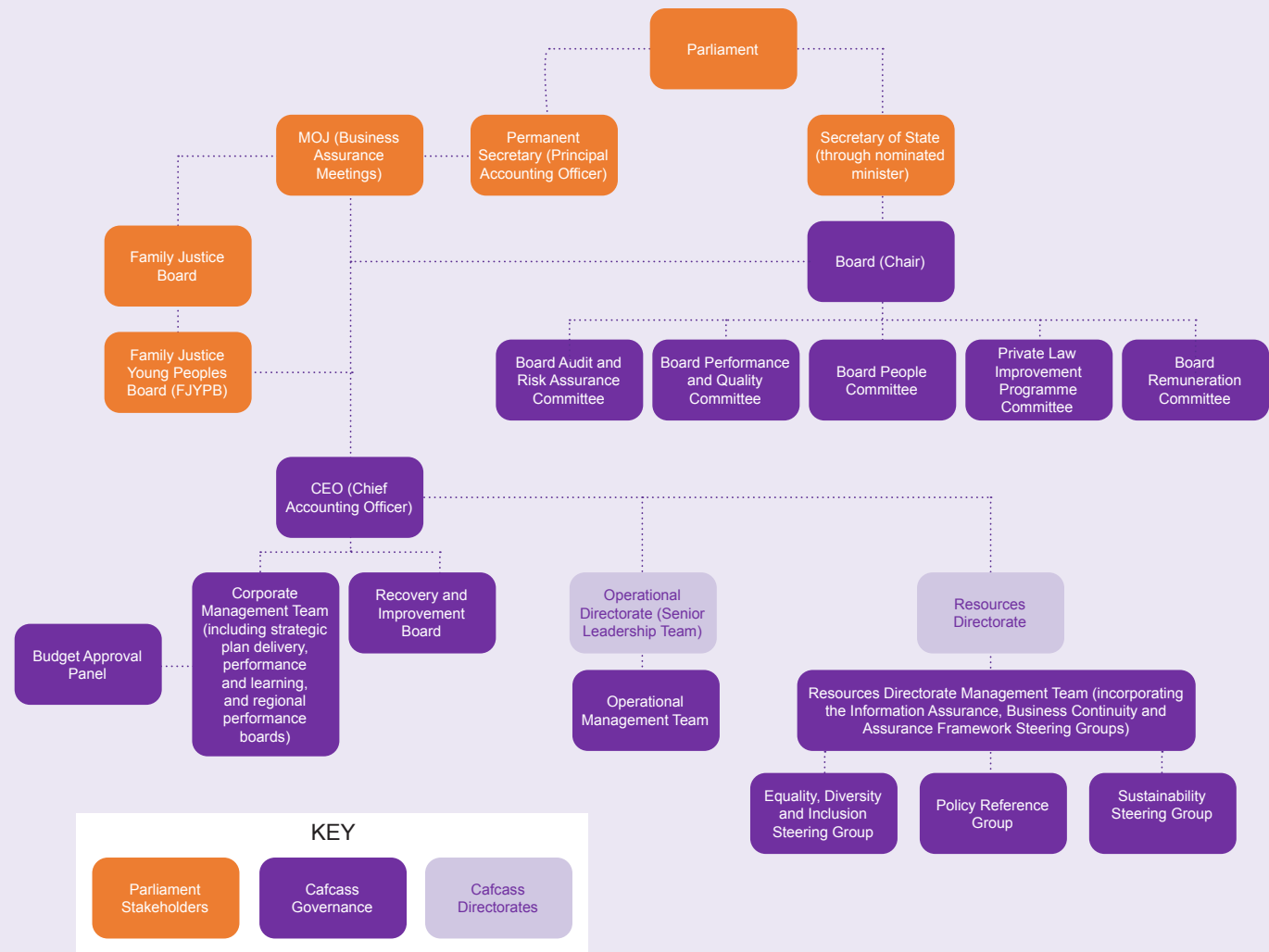
The Chief Executive is supported by two Directors, a Chief People Officer and Deputy Directors who together form the Corporate Management Team. There is an extended Corporate Management Team in addition, comprising a number of senior leaders and heads of profession.

The number of Directors reduced from three to two in June 2024 following the resignation of the Director of Strategy. That post was not replaced and the structure adjusted to two Directors with functions subsumed into the Operational and Resources Directorates. The National Director of Operations post has been vacant since November 2024 and at the time of writing was filled on a twelve-month interim basis from May 2025.

The Corporate Management Team (both core and extended) meets weekly in accordance with a governance and decision-making cycle to enable discussion about strategic intentions, partnership, practice and corporate and business services functions. A number of corporate management team meetings are dedicated for practice and learning and they occur eight-weekly. A range of senior managers across the organisation attend.

The Recovery and Improvement Board meets fortnightly, being chaired by the Chief Executive or the Director of Resources (Deputy Chief Executive) with attendance from operational senior leaders, corporate and business services leaders, and representative of the Ministry of Justice. The Board scrutinise fundamental performance measures across operations, corporate services and Pathfinder.

CAFCASS GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



The Operational Management Team (OMT) is chaired by the National Director of Operations and supported by Deputy Directors for Operations and Improvement. Its membership comprises Assistant Directors, operational Heads of Practice, and representatives from teams that directly support operational services including Finance, Human Resources and Business Analysis. The OMT meets monthly to manage performance across the country.

Service area meetings take place locally every month in each service area to lead and implement corporate and operational decisions into local actions. Local team meetings complete this cascade structure and process.

The Chair of the Cafcass Board is Sally Cheshire CBE.

During 2024-25, the Board continued to govern and perform its role effectively and Board members worked closely with members of the Corporate Management Team to provide strong leadership to achieve our priorities.

The Chair is confident that the quality of the data used by the Board is robust. All reports prior to submission to the Board are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes by senior managers. The effectiveness of the systems that generate the financial and performance data contained within the reports is evidenced through positive internal audit and inspection results.

Assurance arrangements

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has oversight of the organisation’s governance, risk and internal control frameworks. It receives reports on matters of assurance and oversees the preparation and publication of the financial statements.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee oversees the internal audit programme work and delivery arrangements. The Head of Internal Audit role and internal audit programme are provided through the Government Internal Audit Agency.

In accordance with our Assurance Framework, we report annually on assurance to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. The annual assurance report identifies the internal controls mapped against the three lines of defence (i.e., frontline and management controls, management monitoring and independent/external assurance) and how they are performing.

The 2024-25 Assurance Report confirmed that the control environment was adequate and supported the Governance Framework and the services to children and families. The report provides a mechanism for identifying areas to be included in the Government Internal Audit Agency audit programme for further scrutiny of the performance of controls. Compliance against Functional Standards continues to show good progress and that there is compliance against the mandatory elements of Standards, and actions plans in place to address improvements.

The National Audit Office (NAO) released a report in May 2025: ‘Improving family court services for children.’ It reviewed the government’s approach to improving how public law and private law cases are managed, with a specific focus on improving family justice services for children. The main government bodies audited included Cafcass, Ministry of

Justice, Department for Education and HM Courts and Tribunals Service. The NAO recommends improvements in data sharing, accountability, and coordination across different government bodies to address the root causes of delays for children. Cafcass is taking forward these recommendations with family justice partners.

Internal audit

Our appointed internal auditors are the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). There is a strong annual programme negotiated with directors and the Chief Executive. The planned programme of audit work was completed during the year and was awarded an overall assurance of **Substantial**. The programme included four main audits and one follow up audit covering:

- **Reconfiguration of operational management:** rating - substantial.
- **Complaints:** rating – moderate
- **Recruitment and retention:** rating – substantial
- **Budgeting and forecasting:** rating – substantial
- **Attendance management – follow up audit:** the final engagement report has been received

All actions arising from recommendations made by the Internal Auditor are allocated to named officers who are charged with implementation. Medium and high risk recommendations are also maintained in a central log held within the Members Office. While the named officers are responsible for completion of the recommendation and updating of the central log, the Members Office also seek assurance on completion of the actions. The updated log of recommendations is presented to each meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

A task and finish group, chaired by the Chief Executive, was established to respond to the six recommendations made in the Complaints audit. The recommendations were completed between October 2024 and January 2025.

Business continuity planning

Business continuity planning provides assurance of resilience within our processes (such as IT systems) so that we can continue to deliver our services effectively during unexpected disruptive events. Business continuity planning and incident response is overseen by our Business Continuity Steering Group and Incident Management Team, and both are chaired by the Director of Resources.

How we manage risk

Our risk management policy sets out our approach and outlines our responsibilities in the management of risk throughout the organisational structure, including how risk is escalated. This includes the responsibility of Corporate Management

Team members who are the senior strategic risk owners and therefore responsible for reporting and ensuring changes to strategic risks are reported to the Corporate Management Team, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Cafcass Board. The risk management function is managed within the Resources Directorate and the risk management policy is reviewed every three years.

Risk is formally reported to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Cafcass Board on a quarterly basis and papers set out strategic risks and above tolerance organisational risks with mitigation actions that are in place. Organisational risks are recorded and maintained within the Risk Register, whereby risk owners are responsible for recording and updating on the status of risks as part of the quarterly risk reporting process. Internal controls that help manage and reduce risk are monitored through our Assurance Framework and categorised using a three-line of defence model: frontline and management controls, management monitoring and independent/ external assurance.



Figure 23: Quarterly assessment and trend of strategic risks for 2024-25

Strategic risk	Quarter			
	Q1 2024-25	Q2 2024-25	Q3 2024-25	Q4 2024-25
Risk to children	↔	↔	↔	↔
Demand, delay and capacity	↔	↔	↔	↔
Staff retention and attraction	↔	↔	↔	↔
Staff retention and attraction - health and safety	N/A	New in Q2 2024-25	↔	↔
Manageable budget	↔	↔	↔	↔
Digital and technology	↔	↔	↔	↔
Information and knowledge management	↔	↔	↔	↔
Change infrastructure (internal and external)	↔	↔	↔	↔
Pathfinder	N/A	New in Q2 2024-25	↔	↔
Reputation - partners and stakeholders	↔	↔	↔	↔

Key: ↔ No change in risk ↓ Decrease in risk ↑ Increase in risk

1-5	(Minor) Acceptable level of risk. Risk is managed within the local business area.
6-11	(Moderate) Risk acceptable but may require monitoring. Consider if additional controls to reduce risk are available (where cost effective and proportional). May require escalation to next management level for information if deemed to be increasing or guidance on acceptable response/action.
12-15	(Significant) Risk exceeds desirable level. Identify additional controls. Requires escalation to next management level for information and guidance on acceptable response/action.
16-25	(Critical) Risk exceeds acceptable levels. Identify additional controls to reduce and manage risk and ensure contingency plans are in place. Immediately report to the next management level.

The risk profile during financial year 2024-25 focused on ten Strategic Risk themes mapped against our strategic plan. The risk environment has remained generally static in the reported period and no new strategic risks were reported.

Despite a strong focus on mitigation, the risk profile remained high, predominantly due to persistent pressures in the family justice system and our overall risk appetite where we take an adverse approach to practice related risks and a cautious approach to people and partner risks. There is also a strong dependency with partners in the delivery of our work, which impacts our control over the likelihood of the risk occurring.

Practice: Risk to Children and Demand, Delay & Capacity focuses on the welfare of children while in the family justice system and the impact of delay or a decline in quality of practice. Both assessed as significant during the period.

Successive practice quality audits and the 2024 Ofsted inspection found increasing evidence of management support, supervision and oversight, and evidence of good practice. To address capacity and the delivery of services to children and families, mitigation included the use of fixed fee overtime, use of our flexible workforce (including Cafcass Associates, bank and locum staff) alongside positive partnership work to reduce delay within the system.

The Recovery and Improvement Board was reconfigured during this reporting year, along with the Performance, Accountability and Assurance Framework both of which have a key focus on identifying areas of rising risk caused by changes in demand, issues with delay, staffing capacity and the quality of practice.

The Domestic Abuse Practice Policy was developed along with the new process for policy attestation which requires that all staff are aware of, understand and have read new and changing policies. Additional management supervision and oversight capacity was created through the deliberate changes to the Career and Learning Pathway with the introduction of Consultant Family Court Advisers and Senior Service Managers.

There has been some reduction in demand, average caseloads and children in proceedings lasting more than 52 weeks, though there continue to be too many children in delayed proceedings and capacity issues in respect of staffing for some operational service areas remain challenging. The Family Strategy was launched in London to support reducing backlogs in London courts in both public and private law. Reducing delay to children and keeping children safe during proceedings remains a key priority.

Both risk areas remained significant during the reported period.

People: the risk relating to **Staff Retention and Recruitment** remains significant due to vacancy levels for operational staff continuing to be at a high level and recruitment challenges in some parts of the country. There has been particular focus on understanding the reasons staff leave through exit interviews and the second and third staff surveys have been used to engage with staff. **Health and Safety** was highlighted in the risk landscape during the year arising from reported incidences and overall adequacy of controls being of concern. Mitigation has included the delivery of security audits across Cafcass sites and implementation of relevant action plans. Improvements have been made to the incident reporting process and work carried out with HMCTS regarding security for Cafcass officer attendance at court. **Budget** continues to be assessed as moderate and the formal funding delegation for 2024-25 received was in line with expectations. **Digital and Technology** continued to be assessed as a low risk.

Partners: Information and Knowledge Management has been consistently assessed as moderate. The level of avoidable data breaches has improved, and the number of serious breaches reportable to the ICO returned to the normal of 5-10 each year. Policy has been refreshed and there continues to be strong focus on training for staff in protecting data. **Change Infrastructure** is related to internal and external change and has been assessed as significant during the year. Management of partner relationships has been enhanced by a new Partners Strategy, and a Pace and Change Group has been established to help us to understand the likely impact of change on frontline professionals and managers. **Reputation** continues to be assessed as significant, and this reflects increased media reporting arising from extension of the transparency pilot and focus on domestic abuse in the family courts.

The significant incident review process is being reviewed. Development of a success measures framework aligned to the National Family Justice Board priorities – to support timely outcomes and improved experiences for children and families in the family justice system - has been completed and is being reported against at each quarterly Cafcass Board meeting. The second animation in the 'Taking me seriously' film series was developed in collaboration with members of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) to help children understand what recommendations are and why it is important they are clearly understood.

Private Law Pathfinder addresses the risk associated with the delivery of private law reform in the test sites and concern about the optimism for national roll-out without a full operational understanding in the system about what this means for Cafcass. In addition, and in the absence of a robust national evaluation, the risks and impact have been assessed as fundamental. Cafcass continues to have a major role and has escalated risk to the Ministry of Justice and implementation group which consists of all key stakeholders and which meets regularly to focus on solutions and progress.

Cafcass Disclosures under Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)

The Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) can be found in section 2.6, the sustainability report, these set out our arrangements for governance on sustainability matters.



Overall conclusions from the accounting officer

I consider that our governance framework has continued to operate effectively with the additional measures outlined in this report. I confirm that the internal control systems have been in place for the year under review and up to the date of approval of the annual reports and accounts. We have continued to prioritise our efforts and directed resources into providing effective services to children and their families. The complexity of the work, the regional variation and continued long durations, create significant challenges. These challenges are not only in how to maintain the quality of our work with children but also, equally importantly, how we can continue to sustain and ensure the resilience and wellbeing of our staff. In this context, while the governance framework in place is working for now, we will continue to keep this under review.

In addition, and as reported last year, the capacity of the organisation to continue to operate effectively while investing in and supporting proposed government changes to the arrangements in private law proceedings is challenging. Whilst we remain committed to the reforms and indeed any national implementation, we will need to secure transformative capacity from the Ministry of Justice. This is understood and we are in active discussion with officials. We have also been open and transparent about the risks associated with the necessary acquisition of an additional 200 social workers were we to move to national implementation of the reforms. Again, we are in open dialogue with the Ministry of Justice and will require a clear plan given the requirement in the reformed model for Cafcass practitioners to spend more time and earlier with more children in private law proceedings.

Our people: remuneration and staff report

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview, including key workforce measures for social work, corporate and business services. Remuneration information outlines the pay and benefits received by Cafcass Board members and directors, our wider pay and pensions policies, details of workforce numbers and costs aligned to our pay framework. This section also outlines our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, our colleague survey, wider workforce engagement and our focus on health, safety and security. Finally, details of supporting policies are outlined when considering our employment conditions and required governance.

Our workforce

Cafcass is the largest employer of children’s social workers in England. As of 31 March 2025, we recorded 2,218 employees (2,001 FTE). In addition to the Chief Executive and one director in post on that date, there were 1,654 social workers and 562 corporate and other professionals. There were 155 contingent workers, including 52 locum (agency) social workers, 89 Cafcass Associates who undertake discrete social work assessments and 14 locum (agency) workers in corporate and professional roles.

Social work roles

There were 1,654 social workers in post at 31 March 2025 (1473.2 FTE), a decrease in headcount of -2.2% from the same point in the previous year. This represents both social work managers and practitioners, with a continual review in areas of where posts are not required to be replaced as part of budget and resource management.

All social work colleagues are required to be registered with the regulator for social work, Social Work England and Cafcass engages proactively to encourage all staff who are required to renew annually to do so within the national deadline.

Additionally at 31 March 2025, there were 52 locums (agency workers) in social work roles which equates to an agency rate of 3.1% (considerably lower than the equivalent local authority rate of 16%).³⁰

This represents a slight increase from 2.5% in the previous year. Additional locums have been and are being utilised to support the implementation of Pathfinder in the pilot areas along with the different resourcing strategies which have been implemented in some hard to recruit areas.

³⁰ Department for Education, Children’s Social Workforce annual report, February 2025

Employed social work FTE				
2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1,485.1	1,549.4	1,548.8	1,515.4	1,473.2

Turnover

There were 237 social work employee leavers in 2024-25. This equates to a turnover rate of 15.1% which is the same as the previous year and just slightly above the national equivalent for local authorities at 14%. While relatively stable, the organisation is vulnerable to regional variation in turnover and ability to attract and retain social workers.

Starters leavers and turnover			
	Starters	Leavers	% Turnover
Social workers	198	237	15.1%

Age and gender

Social work colleagues are predominantly female (89.3%) compared to male (10.7%), which accords with the gender distribution of the wider children’s social work workforce.

Gender	Headcount	% Headcount
Female	1,477	89.3%
Male	177	10.7%

In 2024-25, 61% of Cafcass social work colleagues were between the age of 30 and 49, with a further 23.9% aged 50 to 59 and 12.4% aged 60 years or older. Cafcass age distribution is therefore notably older than the wider children’s social work workforce. We seek to monitor the intentions of our colleagues to support workforce forward planning and forecasting. There has been a -0.6% reduction in the proportion of our social workers aged over 50, compared to last year. The average age of new social work joiners in 2024-25 was 40.4 years.

Age Groups	Headcount	% Headcount
18 – 29	46	2.8%
30 – 39	471	28.5%
40 – 49	537	32.5%
50 – 59	395	23.9%
60+	205	12.4%



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and the degree of accuracy of decimals displayed meaning totals do not add to 100.

The qualification of social workers

75.5% of Cafcass’ qualified social workers achieved their initial social work qualification more than 10 years ago.

Time since initial social work qualification	% Headcount
Less than 5 years	4.8%
Between 5 and 10 years	19.7%
More than 10 years	75.5%

Time in service with Cafcass

As at 31 March 2025, 52.2% of social workers had been employed for less than five years with us. A further 25.2% had been in post for between five and 10 years, with another 22.6% in post for 10 years or more. Cafcass social work colleagues have on average a significantly longer tenure than in the wider children’s social work workforce.

Tenure	Headcount	% Headcount
Less than 2 years	406	24.6%
2 years or more but less than 5 years	457	27.6%
5 years or more but less than 10 years	417	25.2%
10 years or more	374	22.6%

Social work roles

On 31 March 2025, there were 1,818 qualified social workers in the organisation including all employees, senior managers,³¹ agency workers and Cafcass Associates.

Of the 1,654 who were employees undertaking social work roles, the significant majority are family court advisers, and these are frontline case holding practitioner roles.

Role	Headcount	% Headcount
Family court adviser	1,335	79.6%
Assistant service manager / Service manager	292	17.4%
Head of practice / Social work qualified senior managers	50	3.0%

³¹ Includes 23 senior managers who are qualified social workers but who are not undertaking social work roles.

Social work ethnicity

16.9% of Cafcass social work colleagues identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group, compared to 18.1% for all Cafcass employees, 27% for the wider child and family children’s social care workforce³² and 19.3% for the wider working age population.³³

Ethnicity	Headcount	% Headcount ³⁴
Asian - British	7	0.4%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	4	0.3%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	2	0.1%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	33	2.1%
Asian/Asian British: Other Asian	4	0.3%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	17	1.1%
Black British	24	1.5%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	49	3.1%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	52	3.3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Other Black	5	0.3%
Mixed - British	22	1.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed	8	0.5%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	7	0.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	7	0.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	20	1.3%
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	8	0.5%
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	1,235	77.4%
White: European	2	0.1%
White: Gypsy/Roma/Irish Traveller	2	0.1%
White: Irish	28	1.8%
White: Other White	60	3.8%
Not declared	58	

Social work disability

11.9% of Cafcass social work colleagues have a declared disability which is similar to the 12.4% figure for all Cafcass employees. In comparison almost one in four of the working-age (people aged 16 to 64) population report having a disability.³⁵

³² Department for Education Children’s Social Workforce data 2024.

³³ Working age population – GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures.

³⁴ Figures are rounded to one decimal place meaning totals do not add to 100.

³⁵ www.gov.uk - Government statistics – the employment of disabled people 2024.

Corporate and Business Services

There were 564 employees employed in Corporate and Business Services on 31 March 2025 (527.9 FTE), a decrease of -0.4% from the same point in the previous year.

Employed corporate and professional FTE				
2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
466.0	497.8	514.5	527.2	527.9

Turnover

The headcount of leavers in the preceding 12 months was 56. This equates to a turnover rate of 9.8% which is an increase from 7.9% the previous year.

	Starters	Leavers	% Turnover
Corporate and Business Services	52	56	9.8%

Age and gender

The Corporate and Business Services workforce is predominantly female (78.9%) compared to male (21.1%).

Gender	Headcount	% Headcount
Female	445	78.9
Male	119	21.1

As of 31 March 2025, the majority of Corporate and Business Services colleagues were in the age range 30 to 49 (57.1%). Younger employees aged 18 to 29 made up 12.9% of the workforce with 30.0% aged 50 or over.

Age groups	Headcount	% Headcount
18 - 29	73	12.9%
30 - 39	171	30.3%
40 - 49	151	26.8%
50 - 59	121	21.5%
60+	48	8.5%

Time in service with Cafcass

As of 31 March 2025, 37.4% of corporate and business services colleagues had been in post for less than five years. A further 25.2% had been in post between five and ten years, with 37.4% having ten years or more service.

Tenure	Headcount	% Headcount
Less than 2 years	87	15.4%
2 years or more but less than 5 years	124	22.0%
5 years or more but less than 10 years	142	25.2%
10 years or more	211	37.4%

Ethnicity

21.8% of Cafcass corporate and business services colleagues identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group. In comparison, the figure for all Cafcass employees is 18.1%, and for the wider working age population is 19.3%.³⁶

Ethnicity	Headcount	% Headcount
Asian - British	12	2.2%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	13	2.4%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	4	0.7%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	27	5.0%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	13	2.4%
Black British	4	0.7%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	8	1.5%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	15	2.8%
Mixed - British	3	0.6%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed	4	0.7%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	6	1.1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	1	0.2%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	5	0.9%
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	2	0.4%
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	382	71.3%
White: European	1	0.2%
White: Irish	6	1.1%
White: Other White	30	5.6%
Not declared	28	

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and the degree of accuracy of decimals displayed meaning totals do not add to 100.

³⁶ Working age population – GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures



Disability

13.9% of Cafcass Corporate and Business Services colleagues have a declared disability which compares with 12.4% for the Cafcass workforce as a whole. In comparison almost one in four of the working-age (people aged 16 to 64) population report having a disability.³⁷

Sickness absence data

Average working days lost for social work employees during 2024-25 was 11.6 days and this has reduced from the previous year (12.6 days). All sickness absence reasons are included in the following table, with additional interventions having been implemented throughout 2024-25 to improve attendance management.

Category	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Social workers average working days lost	11.6	12.6	10.7	11.1	8.7	9.6
Corporate and professional average working days lost	11.1	8.3	9.9	9.6	8.3	10.9
Overall average working days lost	11.5	11.5	10.5	10.8	8.6	9.9

Our approach to attendance management is supported by a continued focus on colleague wellbeing and keeping people well at work. This is aligned to key initiatives including the provision of an Employee Assistance Programme and dedicated wellbeing days. Alongside, to strengthen the organisational approach to the management of sickness absence, a number of additional interventions will be deployed during 2025-26, including defined resolution strategies, enhanced reporting and automation and a formal review of the Managing Attendance policy.

Remuneration

Remuneration policy

Cafcass Board members are appointed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) according to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Membership, Committee and Procedure) Regulations 2005, which sets out all terms of appointment except remuneration, which is determined by the Secretary of State. Board members are statutory office holders and, as such, do not hold a contract of employment. Cafcass Board members are appointed on one, two, three or four year terms. Appointed board member’s salaries are paid through Cafcass payroll. Co-opted board members are permitted to be reimbursed for loss of earnings.

The remuneration of Cafcass Directors is recommended for approval by the Chief Executive to the Remuneration Committee, made up of the Chair of the Cafcass Board and the Chairs of each of its committees. Additional approvals from our sponsor department the Ministry of Justice are sought in accordance with the rules governing Arms-Length Bodies.

The MoJ determines the salary of the Chief Executive. Cafcass salaries are established by considering factors such as relevant external comparator pay levels, internal benchmarks, affordability, recruitment and retention risks, and political sensitivity. There was no change to this policy for the 2024-25 financial year.

Service contracts

Cafcass’ appointments of directors are made in accordance with the Cafcass Recruitment and Retention Policy. This policy recognises that in order to provide a high-quality service to the children and families whom we serve, it is vital that we recruit and retain people through fair and open competition who share our aims and values and have the requisite skills and abilities to perform to a consistently high standard.

Unless otherwise stated, employees covered by this report hold appointments that are open-ended. Members of Cafcass’ Corporate Management Team are required to provide four or six months’ notice to terminate their contract.

Early termination by Cafcass, other than for gross misconduct, would result in the individual receiving compensation by way of payment in lieu of notice, as set out in the individual contract of employment. No such payments were made to senior executives during the year 2024-25.

Remuneration of Cafcass Board members and senior management

Remuneration includes gross salary, benefits-in-kind, and pension benefits (employer’s pension contributions). More detail on these is set out below in the remuneration tables.

Single total remuneration figures for Cafcass Board members (subject to audit)

Board members	Salary (£000)		Bonus payments (£000)		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension benefits (£000)		Total (£000)	
	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24
Sally Cheshire CBE	30-35	30-35	-	-	3,600	3,000	-	-	35-40	30-35
Catherine Doran	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Joanna Nicolas	10-15	10-15	-	-	500	200	-	-	10-15	10-15
Mandy Jones	10-15	10-15	-	-	800	200	-	-	10-15	10-15
Rohan Sivanandan	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Professor Eileen Munro CBE	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Helen Jones	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Catharine Seddon	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Peter Fish	10-15	10-15	-	-	300	300	-	-	10-15	10-15
Steven Cox	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)
Dalwardin Babu	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)

³⁷ www.gov.uk - Government statistics – the employment of disabled people 2024

Single total remuneration figures for Cafcass Directors (subject to audit)

Directors	Salary (£000)		Bonus payments (£000)		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension benefits (£000)		Total (£000)	
	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24
Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive	190-195	180-185	–	–	100	100	28	29	220-225	210-215
Julie Brown, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive	155-160	145-150	–	–	100	100	39	30	195-200	175-180
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy (to 19/07/2024)	40-45 (Annualised 140-145)	135-140	–	–	–	100	13	42	55-60 (Annualised 155-160)	180-185
Jack Cordery, Operational Director (to 17/11/2024)	100-105 (Annualised 160-165)	150-55	–	–	–	100	42	55	140-145 (Annualised 200-205)	210-215

Salary (subject to audit)

‘Salary’ includes: basic salary, London weighting, honorarium, overtime, market supplement (discretionary payment for some posts to aid retention and recruitment), buy-back of untaken annual leave, and Pay in lieu of notice (PILON).

The Chief Executive may make recommendations for non-contractual performance related payments which would require the endorsement of the Remuneration Committee. PRP for the Chief Executive would be determined by the Remuneration Committee and the Ministry of Justice.

Bonus payments and performance related pay (subject to audit)

Cafcass has moved away from including performance related pay (PRP) clauses in any new director contracts and therefore no performance related payments were made in 2024-25 or in any of the previous three years.

Payments to former directors (subject to audit)

No payments were made to any person who was not a director at the time but had been a director of Cafcass previously. Any previous payments to former directors are included in prior years’ reports.

Benefits in kind (subject to audit)

The monetary value of benefits in kind covers any noncash benefits provided by Cafcass and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as a taxable emolument. Board members’ travel costs to the Cafcass National Office are administered via Payroll/PAYE, which acts as a benefit in kind. Benefits in kind for Directors includes cost of membership of Birmingham Hospitals Saturday Fund which is a health and wellbeing cash plan. The same benefit is provided to all Cafcass employees.

Pension entitlements for directors (subject to audit)

Pension benefits are provided by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), to which Cafcass makes employer’s contributions. Further information on the Cafcass pension schemes can be found starting from page 200 of the Annual Accounts. The accrued pension at retirement age is the pension earned that the member is entitled to receive when they reach pension age, or immediately on ceasing to be an active member of the scheme if they are already at or over pension age.


Cash equivalent transfer value (CETV) is the actuarially assessed capitalised value of the pension scheme benefits accrued by a member at a particular point in time. A CETV is a payment made by a pension scheme or arrangement to secure pension benefits in another pension scheme (or arrangement) when the member leaves a scheme and chooses to transfer the benefits accrued in their former scheme. CETVs are calculated within the guidelines and framework prescribed by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries.

The pension figures shown relate to the benefits that individuals have accrued as a consequence of their total membership of the pension scheme, not just their service in a senior capacity to which disclosure applies. The CETV figure includes the value of any pension benefit in another scheme or arrangement which the individual has transferred to the pension provider and for which the pension provider has received a transfer payment commensurate to the additional pension liabilities being assumed. They also include any additional pension benefit accrued to the member as a result of their purchasing of additional years of pension service in the scheme at their own cost.

The real increase in CETV effectively funded by the employer excludes increases due to inflation and contributions paid by the director (including the value of any benefits transferred from another pension scheme or arrangement). It uses common market valuation factors for the start and the end of the period.



Pension entitlement for directors (subject to audit)

	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at retirement age (£2,500 bands) (£000)	Total accrued pension at retirement age at 31st March 2024 and related lump sum (£5,000 bands) (£000)	CETV at 31st March 2024 (£000)	CETV at 31st March 2025 (£000)	Real increase in CETV after adjustment for inflation and changes in market investment factors (nearest £000)
Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive	0-2.5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	25-30 plus 0-5 lump sum	399	467	41
Julie Brown, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive	2.5-5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	50-55 plus 0-5 lump sum	743	849	57
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy	0-2.5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	15-20 plus 0-5 lump sum	273	310	18
Jack Cordery, Operational Director (from 05/03/21)	2.5-5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	10-15 plus 0-5 lump sum	186	234	35

Pension benefit valuations are based on accrued benefits as at 31 March 2025. Benefits earned post 2014 exclude the re-evaluation of pensions accounts that was applied in April 2025. McCloud underpin calculations were not included in values provided by West Yorkshire Pensions Funds or included in annual benefit statements, but will be included in future years.

Compensation for early retirement or loss of office (subject to audit)

No senior managers received any compensatory payments during 2024-25.

Fair pay disclosure (subject to audit)

This shows the relationship between the remuneration of the highest-paid director in the organisation as well as the 25th percentile, the median and 75th percentile remuneration of the organisation’s workforce. This is based on full-time equivalent salaries and the two tables below include figures for total pay and benefits and also accounting for salary only.

The structure of Cafcass’ workforce means that the majority of employees are undertaking the same role with similar pay, and this is the reason that figures in the table above for 25th percentile, median and 75th percentile are close together. There have been no performance

payments to employees in either 2023-24 or 2024-25 so there is no additional bonus payment quartile data to disclose. There have been no significant changes to pay ratios from the previous reporting period. The change in ratio at the 75th percentile relates to an increase in the number of Consultant Family Court Advisers.

Total pay and benefits	2024-25	2023-24
Highest earner's total banded remuneration (£000)	190-195	180-185
25th percentile	£44,457	£41,616
Ratio	1:4.33	1:4.39
Median total remuneration	£48,451	£46,398
Ratio	1:3.97	1:3.93
75th percentile	£52,156	£46,398
Ratio	1:3.69	1:3.93
Total salary only	2024-25	2023-24
Highest earner's total banded remuneration (£000)	190-195	180-185
25th percentile	£44,391	£41,550
Ratio	1:4.34	1:4.39
Median total remuneration	£48,385	£46,332
Ratio	1:3.98	1:3.94
75th percentile	£52,090	£46,332
Ratio	1:3.70	1:3.94

The table below compares the annual % change of salary, allowances and any performance pay and bonuses for the highest paid director as well as the average equivalent % changes for the workforce as a whole.

Annual % changes to pay, allowances and bonuses		2024-25	2023-24
Highest paid director	Salary and allowances	4.43%	4.00%
	Performance pay and bonuses	0.00%	0.00%
Whole workforce	Salary and allowances	5.79%	4.26%
	Performance	0.00%	0.00%

In 2024-25, no employees received remuneration in excess of the highest paid director (2023-24 was also nil). Remuneration ranged from £15,000 to £195,000 (2023-24 was £14,000 - £185,000). Total remuneration includes salary, non-consolidated performance-related pay and benefits-in-kind. It does not include severance payments, employer pension contributions and the cash equivalent transfer value of pensions.



Staff report

Number of senior civil servant (SCS) equivalent employees

Cafcass has 23 employees who are the equivalent of senior civil servants (SCS): 13 members of the Operational Management Team and 10 senior managers in corporate teams (this excludes directors, whose remuneration has been set out above).

Salary band	Number of SCS equivalent in each band
£76,000 - £86,000	6
£86,000 - £96,000	0
£96,000 - £106,000	1
£106,000 - £116,000	13
£116,000 - £126,000	0
£126,000 - £136,000	3
Total	23

Workforce numbers (subject to audit)

Cafcass employees are subject to levels of remuneration and terms and conditions of service (including superannuation) within the general pay structure approved by the Ministry of Justice. An analysis of workforce numbers and costs is set out below, distinguishing between employees with permanent contracts, and other staff who are flexible, agency, and self-employed contractors. All workforce numbers are presented on an actual basis as at the reporting date (31 March 2025) and reflect headcount.

Category	Social worker	Other	Total
Cafcass Board members		12	12
Corporate employees		210	210
Operational employees	1,546	352	1,898
Employed flexible colleagues (bank / sessional)	108	2	110
Total employees (Exc. Cafcass Board members)	1,654	564	2,218
Agency workers (locums)	52	14	66
Cafcass associates (active)	89		89
Total flexible workforce	141	14	155
Grand total	1,795	590	2,385

Cafcass pay framework

Cafcass employees are employed on the Cafcass pay scale bands 1-10. Each band has a commencement point and a target point with progression based on an assessment of performance after 18 months in post. The pay scale is underpinned by the Cafcass job evaluation framework. Senior management roles (not including directors) are appointed to spot salaries which are subject to internal and external benchmarking. The Cafcass pay framework does not directly align with and is not linked to civil service pay grades.

Employee composition - gender, ethnicity and disability

Employee Composition Groups	Female	Male	Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic	Disability
1. Directors	2			1
2. Senior civil service equivalent (excluding directors)	16 (69.6%)	7 (30.4%)	3 (13.0%)	1 (4.5%)
3. Other Cafcass staff	1,904 (86.8%)	289 (13.2%)	383 (18.2%)	255 (12.4%)
Total	1,922 (86.7%)	296 (13.3%)	386 (18.1%)	257 (12.4%)

Workforce costs (subject to audit)

Workforce costs are presented on total cost during the reporting period (April 2024 - March 2025).

	Cafcass board members	Corporate national office staff	Regional staff	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
2024-25				
Salaries and wages	124	11,827	84,649	96,600
Apprentice levy	0	58	413	471
Social security costs	7	1,163	9,326	10,496
Current service cost	0	1,980	14,272	16,252
Other pension costs	0	(34)	(118)	(152)
Past pension service cost / (gain)	0	0	39	39
Total payroll costs	131	14,994	108,581	123,706
Temporary staff costs	0	152	395	547
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments	0	0	0	0
Total staff costs	131	15,146	108,976	124,253
2023-24				
Salaries and wages	114	10,967	84,210	95,291
Apprentice levy	0	53	409	462
Social security costs	6	1,085	9,182	10,273
Current service cost	0	1,985	15,548	17,533
Other pension costs	0	1	(71)	(70)
Past pension service cost	0	0	9	9
Total payroll costs	120	14,091	109,287	123,498
Temporary staff costs	0	113	289	402
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments	0	0	(50)	(50)
Total staff costs	120	14,204	109,526	123,850

Consultancy

Expenditure on consultancy during 2024-25 amounted to £128,574 all of which related to work to support a pathfinder pilot in partnership with Ministry of Justice and HM Courts and Tribunal Service to assess the effectiveness of a revised approach to private law proceedings.

Off payroll engagements

Cafcass conforms to relevant regulations in respect of tax arrangements for all off-payroll appointments and this includes an assessment of employment status as required under IR35. Where workers are engaged through an intermediary, Cafcass undertakes an assessment of employment status for tax purposes and issues the required status determination statement.

Where relevant, Cafcass instructs that required deductions for income tax and national insurance are made. Cafcass had previously liaised closely on these matters during 2020-21 with the Ministry of Justice and the Government Tax Centre of Excellence in readiness for the changes to IR35 which took effect from April 2021 and have been audited subsequently on the same. There have been no identified instances of non-tax compliant off-payroll engagements as at 31 March 2025 and no challenges of status determination.

Off payroll engagements within Cafcass includes agency workers and Cafcass Associates and those that were in post on 31 March 2025 are reported in the table on page 150. Of those there were 10 engagements that were deemed to be 'high paid'. Cafcass provides separate more detailed annual reporting to meet the Public Expenditure System (PES) requirement through the Ministry of Justice. There were no high-paid off payroll engagements in any position with significant financial responsibility.

Exit packages (subject to audit)

There have been no paid exit packages during 2024-25 or in either of the prior two annual reporting periods.

Pension costs

Cafcass participates in the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) scheme and the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). The WYPF scheme is a multiemployer defined benefit scheme in which Cafcass' share of the underlying assets and liabilities are identified. The employer contribution rate for 2024-25 was 18.6%. Aon Hewitt Limited are the currently appointed fund actuaries. The contribution rate is based on a combination of future service and the effects of past service deficits and ill health retirements.

Employer's contributions to the scheme for the year to March 2025 amounted to £17.424m (costs relating to voluntary early retirement were nil) with 2,394 employees participating in the scheme (2023-24 employer's contributions were £17.663m, voluntary early retirement costs were nil, participating employees 2,421). The last independent actuarial valuation of the WYPF scheme was published on 31 March 2023 and revealed that the scheme was 103.7% funded in relation to past service. That valuation was based on assets and liabilities at 31 March 2022. Following the actuarial valuation, the revised employer contribution rates for Cafcass were set as follows:

Year	Contribution rate %	Additional cash contribution
2023-24	19.1%	£Nil
2024-25	18.6%	£Nil
2025-26	18.1%	£Nil

The PCSPS is an unfunded multi-employer defined benefit scheme for which Cafcass is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities. The scheme's actuary reviews employer contributions every four years following a full scheme valuation. The most recent actuarial valuation was carried out as at 31 March 2020 but was not published until September 2023. Full details can be found in the Civil Service Valuation Report 2023. For 2024-25, employer's contributions of £0.0115m (2023-24 was £0.0103m) were payable to the PCSPS at 28.97% of pensionable pay, based on salary bands (band 2 of PCSPS contribution rates). The contribution rates reflect benefits as they are accrued, not when the costs are actually incurred and reflect past experience of the scheme.

Employee secondments and redeployments

As an arms-length body, Cafcass employees are public servants but not civil servants and we do not therefore engage in civil service interdepartmental loans. Each year a small number of employees are temporarily seconded to other roles both externally and internally and we also receive a small number of inbound secondments such as Civil Service fast streamers. Newly Qualified Social Workers employed by Cafcass also undertake an external placement with a local authority as part of their qualifying year in employment. Figures are included below.

Number of secondments by headcount:

Group	Cafcass employee seconded externally	Seconded to Cafcass from other organisations	Internal secondment	Total
Business Services			13	13
Family court adviser	17		6	23
Senior manager			7	7
Service manager			25	25
Specialist staff		8	17	25
Total	17	8	68	93



Average duration of secondments:

Group	Cafcass employee seconded externally	Seconded to Cafcass from another organisation	Internal Secondment	Total average
	Average duration in weeks			
Business Services			28.2	28.2
Family court adviser	13.5		22.3	15.8
Senior manager			29.1	29.1
Service manager			26.4	26.4
Specialist staff		26.9	27.2	27.1
Total average	13.5	26.9	26.8	24.4

Trade Union recognition and industrial relations

Cafcass formally recognises and has a partnership agreement with Napo and UNISON, with National Partnership Meetings taking place quarterly. During the reporting period managers also met with unions on a number of occasions for pay negotiations. There have been no instances of industrial action during 2024-25.

Trade Union facility time

Number of employees who were relevant union officials during 2024-25	Full-time equivalent employee number
11	9.67
Percentage of time	
0%	0
1 – 50%	11
51 – 99%	0
100%	0
Summary	
Total cost of facility time	£115,961.88
Total pay bill	£124,878,766
% pay bill spent on facility time	0.09%

There were no trade union officials with more than 50% of their time allocated to trade union duties. The overall proportion of the pay bill allocated to trade union facility is unchanged from the previous year which was also 0.09%.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was last reviewed in 2022, and has been in place for three years until end March 2025. Working with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group, which provides governance for our strategic intentions, we have considered our future priorities. Our four equality objectives remain important when thinking about how we use data and insight, how important leadership and commitment is to deploy our priorities, how our people, culture and environment enable improved outcomes, and how we support our workforce to be skilled and confident.

It is important that we align our future equality, diversity and inclusion intentions to the development of our new strategic plan for 2026-29 and ensure that this fully supports our priorities for children and families, as well as our wider workforce plans. Our approach continues therefore to consider all protected characteristics for our employees and for the children and families with whom we work.

During 2025-26 this will be complemented with nine specific priorities aligned to our Practice, People and Partner ambitions within our current strategic plan. Work to develop our next Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be undertaken during 2025-26 to align with our new strategic plan 2026-29, as well reviewing our progress in-year against our priorities through the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group. Membership of the steering group includes our board member lead for equality, diversity and inclusion, colleague diversity network chairs and the FJYPB.

The defined approach for 2025-26 provides that we have a continued framework for us to meet our statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and our specific priorities are outlined below:

Equality, diversity and inclusion priorities 2025-26

Practice

People

Partners

Our approach incorporates all protected characteristics with four equality objectives:

1 Better data and insight - used well

2 People, culture and environment

3 Leadership and commitment

4 Skilled and confident practitioners and wider workforce


During 2025–26 we will specifically:

- Better understand the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women in family proceedings who are impacted by domestic abuse
- Better understand the impact of heritage and culture on our assessments of harm and risk to children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

- Support and enable colleagues who are carers
- Strengthen the mental health support available for all colleagues
- Develop and enable 'Inclusive' leaders
- Enable candidate uniqueness in our recruitment processes

- Work with HM Courts & Tribunals Service to agree a timescale for the inclusion on the C100 (the court application form) of information in respect of the heritage and faith of applicants in private law proceedings
- Understand anti-racist practice in family justice

- Consider how important language is and that it matters to the children and families we support, and our colleagues who work with us



164 Cafcass annual report and accounts 2024-25

www.cafcass.gov.uk 165

Colleague survey

Cafcass does not participate in the Civil Service People Survey and instead undertakes a tailored colleague survey that meets our regulatory obligations. A focused colleague survey was undertaken in December 2024, providing Cafcass with invaluable insights and perceptions of Cafcass from the people working here. This followed a full colleague survey undertaken in 2023. The 2024 survey received a response rate of 63.9% (1,416 respondents), which was lower than our 2023 survey at 84% (1,782 respondents).

The headline results for the survey indicated improvements for most previous engagement themes.



Agree/Somewhat agree Disagree/Somewhat disagree



Four organisational priorities have been determined to consider the areas requiring most improvement. These are:

- workloads and wellbeing
- managing and leading change
- responding to threatening or intimidating behaviour by adults in family court proceedings
- connections in teams and the visibility of leaders and managers.

Corporate Management Team strategic leads have been identified to shape the required actions and programmes of work for deployment from April 2025. Sharing results and engaging local teams has been a critical part of our response to colleague feedback. Senior leaders have identified Directorate, Functional and Operational Service Area (OSA) local actions from May to June 2025 and will outline their 'Team Engagement Priorities' and a summary of this feedback. Agreed actions will be reported to Corporate Management Team in August 2025 to enable us to correlate local responses and the areas of organisational focus.



Wider colleague engagement, consultation and recognition

In addition to our colleague survey, Cafcass engages with its workforce through senior management 'Leadership Live' events regularly held throughout the year. A number of colleague diversity networks are also in place, enabling opportunities to share knowledge, ideas and participate in organisational and workforce development. Where required, consultation on organisational change is conducted in accordance with the Cafcass Management of Organisational Change Policy, including collective and individual consultation as appropriate. A further important strand is our approach to colleague recognition, with a number of initiatives having been implemented during 2024-25. Alongside e-card recognition, personalised years of service letters have been deployed, coupled with our monthly and annual recognition awards recognising the contributions of our colleagues across our workforce, with our next annual awards event scheduled for June 2025.

Health, safety and security of our colleagues

All health, safety and security issues are overseen and directed by the work of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Group, which includes representation from our recognised trade unions. Health and safety incidents are reported quarterly to operational teams, supported by an annual report to the Corporate Management Team.

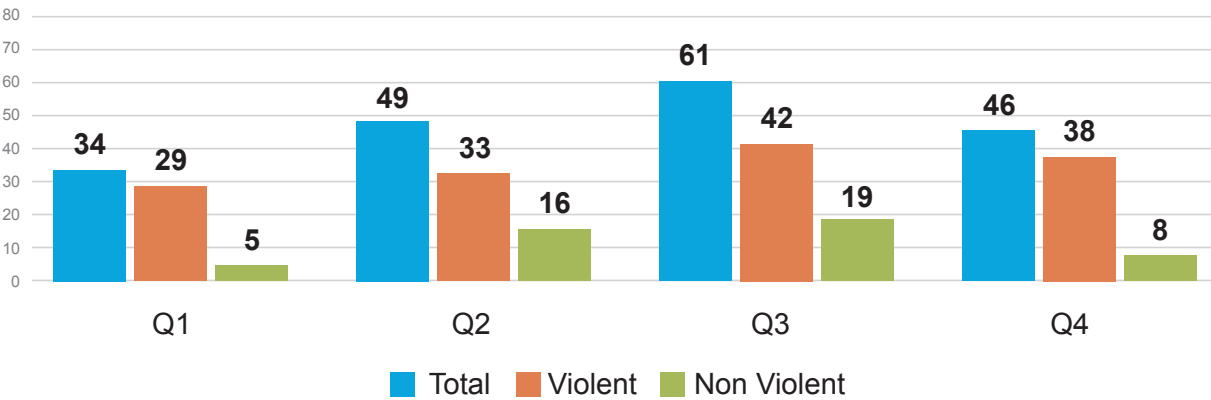
Our reporting includes details of any instances of violence and other safety and security incidents, details of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment completion, fire safety, first aid provision and office compliance through workplace inspections and audits.

Aligned to a strengthened focus on health, safety and security during 2024-25, further improvements have been made to manage all incidents reported through our dedicated system AssessNet, with all incidents monitored through to completion.

We received and supported colleagues through a total of 190 incident reports for the 2024-25 reporting period.

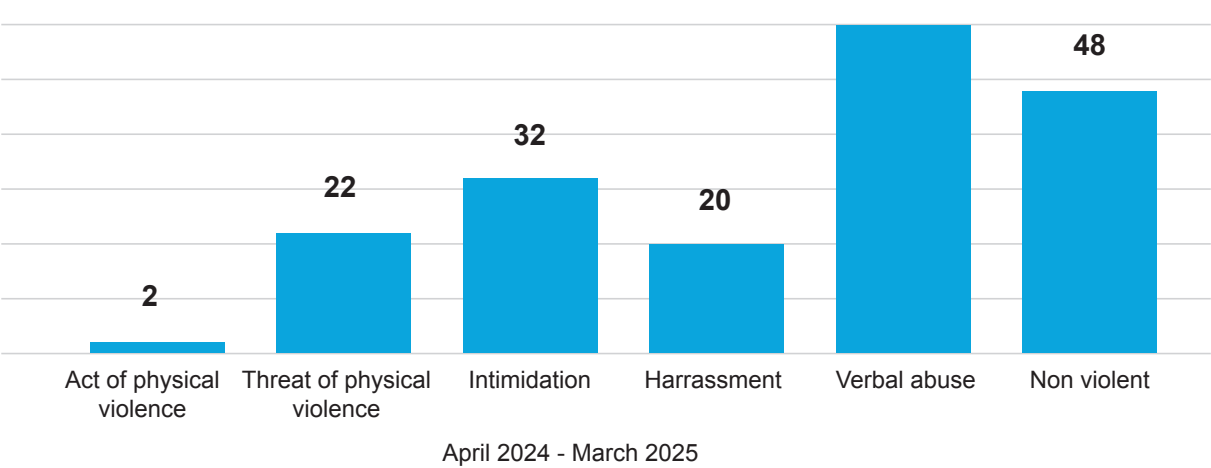
This included 142 violence related and 48 non-violence related incidents.

Breakdown of incidents - Apr 2024 - March 2025



Quarter	Total incidents	Violence related	% of Total incidents are violence related	Non-violence related	% of Total incidents are non-violence related
Quarter 1	34	29	85.29%	5	14.71%
Quarter 2	49	33	67.35%	16	32.65%
Quarter 3	61	42	68.85%	19	31.15%
Quarter 4	46	38	82.61%	8	17.39%
Total	190	142	74.74%	48	25.26%

2024-25 Reported Incidents



We continue to monitor completion of DSE Assessments through our health and safety system AssessNet and support colleagues with a further review where required. 1,642 users have completed an online DSE Assessment, from a total of 2,390 AssessNet users.

The managing unacceptable behaviour and lone working guidance continues to be under review, supported by a new 'Safe Environment' poster displayed in all Cafcass office reception areas. In addition, our contact centre recorded messaging has been updated to reflect the position that unacceptable behaviour will not be accepted. This activity continues to be progressed in response to a number of security incidents in our offices coupled with targeted actions following risk assessments.

Our work will continue on our specific health, safety and security programme through 2025-26, to ensure focused activity is prioritised with regard to the safety and security of our colleagues, including regular meetings with HMCTS when considering security in courts.

Information on health and safety is available to all employees via the Cafcass intranet and through regular communication, and the available training and support will be reviewed to consider enhancements where needed.

Employment policies and procedures

Our employment policies and procedures remain under continual review with focus on employee relations, managing attendance, leave provisions and recruitment and selection. Throughout 2025-26 our policies will be considered against our strategic people priorities to ensure they are enabling and focused on delivering the right conditions to attract, retain and motivate our workforce. Our focus remains on areas which are experiencing particular difficulties in attracting and retaining colleagues, with initial considerations on our ability to use our total reward offer in these areas and learning from insights taken from exit interviews.

As an employer Cafcass is an accredited Disability Confident Leader which recognises our commitment to champion disabled people in the workplace. The accreditation reflects that our various employment policies fully support the attraction, recruitment, ongoing support for and career development of disabled people and this is further underpinned by training for all staff and our very active Ability Matters staff network.



Whistleblowing

Effective whistleblowing is a key component in our strategy to challenge inappropriate behaviour in the organisation. It is both an instrument in support of good governance and a manifestation of a more healthy and ethical organisational culture.

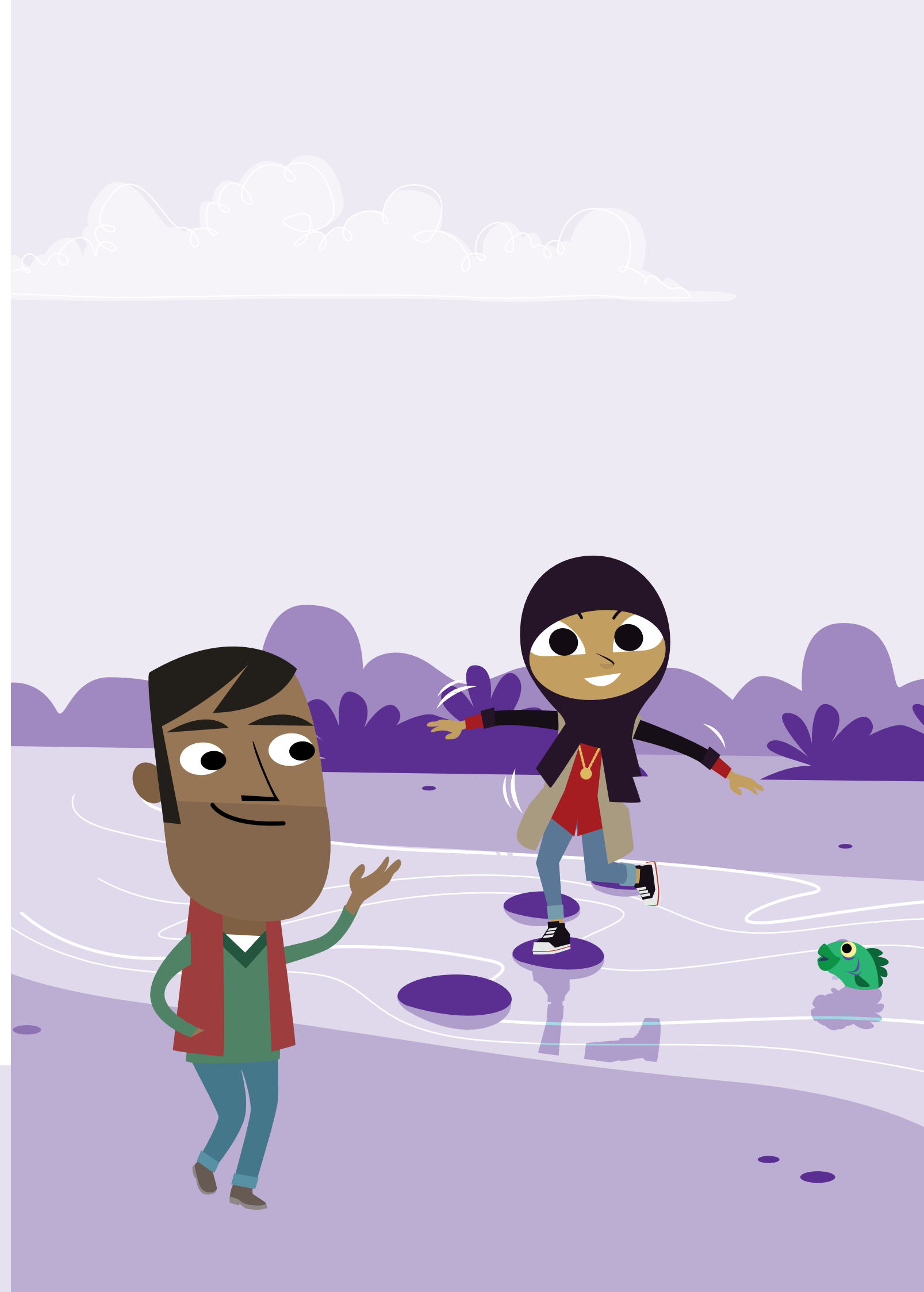
Our whistleblowing policy and procedure was reviewed and relaunched in March 2025, accessible to all colleagues via our intranet. The updated version of the policy has been written to provide clearer explanations of what is considered as whistleblowing (and what is not), what protection is afforded to colleagues who raise a concern in accordance with the policy and how they can expect their concern to be handled, including informal resolution where appropriate. The policy also includes explanation of what to do if a colleague or a manager receives a whistleblowing concern, and the circumstances when it may be appropriate to raise a concern with an external body. The new version of the policy was consulted through the Corporate Management Team and policy reference group and has also had input from our lead board member with responsibility for overseeing any Whistleblowing concerns. During quarter 1 of 2025-26, additional supporting guidance will be cascaded to managers and their teams. The policy and procedure will be kept under regular review.

Conflict of interest

Our Conflict of Interest Policy sets out how we manage conflicts of interest as they arise both in terms of case work and any independent work carried out by Cafcass employees. The policy sets out arrangements to avoid such conflicts including the responsibility of employees to raise these and for managers to consider any action to mitigate and conflict. This applies to all employees. Board members are also required to declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest.

Anti-bribery and corruption

Further detail on our anti-bribery and corruption measures can be found on [our website](#).



Parliamentary accountability and audit report

This information shows how we have spent the money provided to us by Parliament. It also shows that our annual accounts have been audited.

Our accounts

The Statement of Accounts of Cafcass for the year ending 31 March 2025 has been prepared in a form directed by the Secretary of State with consent of the Treasury, in accordance with the Accounts Direction dated 12 April 2002 given under Schedule 2, paragraph (13)2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

The Accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, who is appointed by statute. The notional audit fee is £90,000 and Cafcass have accrued for this amount plus £5,000 for additional audit costs in its Annual Accounts. There have been no non-audit services during 2024-25.

Treatment of pension liabilities

Employees of Cafcass are members of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), which is funded on a pay as-you-go basis. One member of Cafcass staff retained membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) by virtue of their earlier employment with one of Cafcass' predecessor organisations.

The amount charged to the staff costs for the PCSPS represents the contributions payable to the scheme in respect of current employees in the accounting period. Contributions are charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators. The assets of the WYPF, which is a defined benefit scheme, are held separately from those of Cafcass. The scheme assets are measured at realisable value. Scheme liabilities are measured using a projected unit method and discounted at the current rate of return on a high-quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liability.

The pension scheme surplus (to the extent that it is considered recoverable) or deficit is recognised in full on the face of the Statement of Financial Position. The movement in the scheme surplus/deficit is split between operating charges (within staff costs) and reserves in the case of actuarial gains and losses. Net interest receivable on pension scheme assets is shown in operating cash flows.

Long-term liabilities

There have been significant changes in the organisation's long-term liabilities due to actuarial gain associated with the pension liabilities. Further details explaining the movement in pensions are provided in Note 22 of the Annual Accounts.

Long-term expenditure trends

There have been significant changes in the organisation's long-term expenditure trends relating to staffing costs. Further details explaining the movement in staffing costs can be found in the 'Remuneration and staff report'.

Remote contingent liabilities (subject to audit)

There are no remote contingent liabilities.

Losses and special payments (subject to audit)

	2024-25		2023-24	
	£000	Number of cases	£000	Number of cases
Losses statement				
Administrative write-offs	266	4	-	-
Fruitless payments	-	-	-	-
Total value of losses	266	4	-	-
Special payments				
Compensation payments	25	6	21	8
Ex gratia payments	32	6	23	7
Total special payments	57	12	44	15
Total losses and special payments	323	16	44	15

There were £0.323m of losses and special payments charged to the Accounts as at 31 March 2025 (2023-24: £0.044m). The actual cash amount paid in the period was £0.057m (2023-24: £0.044m). These payments were made in accordance with HM Treasury guidance.

One leased premises was deemed unoccupiable during the year due to construction and landlord related issues. This resulted in a £0.265m net book value write-off of previously capitalised leasehold improvements.

Signed: **Jacky Tiotto**
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Date: 8 December 2025

THE CERTIFICATE AND REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Opinion on financial statements

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service ('Cafcass') for the year ended 31 March 2025 under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

The financial statements comprise Cafcass':

- Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2025;
- Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, Statement of Cash Flows and Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity for the year then ended; and
- the related notes including the significant accounting policies.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in the preparation of the Cafcass' financial statements is applicable law and International Financial Reporting Standards as interpreted by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual.

In my opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of Cafcass' affairs as at 31 March 2025 and its net expenditure after interest for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and Secretary of State directions issued thereunder.

Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects, the income and expenditure recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Basis for opinions

I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs UK), applicable law and Practice Note 10 Audit of Financial Statements and Regularity of Public Sector Bodies in the United Kingdom (2024). My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of my certificate.

Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Financial Reporting Council's Revised Ethical Standard 2024. I am independent of Cafcass in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to my audit of the financial statements in the UK. My staff and I have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that Cafcass' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on Cafcass' ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Accounting Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this certificate.

The going concern basis of accounting for Cafcass is adopted in consideration of the requirements set out in HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual, which requires entities to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements where it is anticipated that the services which they provide will continue into the future.

Other Information

The other information comprises information included in the Annual Report, but does not include the financial statements and my auditor's certificate. The Accounting Officer is responsible for the other information.

My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my certificate, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

My responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or my knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion the part of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the parts of the Accountability report subject to audit have been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000; and
- the information given in the Performance and impact report and the Accountability report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements and is in accordance with the applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of Cafcass and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Performance and impact report and the Accountability report.

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept by Cafcass or returns adequate for my audit have not been received from branches not visited by my staff; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the financial statements and the parts of the Accountability report subject to audit are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of remuneration specified by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual have not been made or parts of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited is not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with HM Treasury's guidance.

Responsibilities of the Accounting Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities, the Accounting Officer is responsible for:

- maintaining proper accounting records;
- providing the C&AG with access to all information of which management is aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
- providing the C&AG with additional information and explanations needed for his audit;
- providing the C&AG with unrestricted access to persons within Cafcass from whom the auditor determines it necessary to obtain audit evidence;
- ensuring such internal controls are in place as deemed necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements to be free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error;

- preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000;
- preparing the annual report, which includes the Remuneration and Staff Report, in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000; and
- assessing Cafcass' ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Accounting Officer anticipates that the services provided by Cafcass will not continue to be provided in the future.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a certificate that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Extent to which the audit was considered capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations including fraud

I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud. The extent to which my procedures are capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud is detailed below.

Identifying and assessing potential risks related to non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud, I:

- considered the nature of the sector, control environment and operational performance including the design of Cafcass' accounting policies, key performance indicators and performance incentives.
- inquired of management, Cafcass' head of internal audit and those charged with governance, including obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation relating to Cafcass' policies and procedures on:
 - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations;
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud; and

- the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations including Cafcass’ controls relating to Cafcass’ compliance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and Managing Public Money;
- inquired of management, Cafcass’ head of internal audit and those charged with governance whether:
 - they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations;
 - they had knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
- discussed with the engagement team regarding how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud.

As a result of these procedures, I considered the opportunities and incentives that may exist within Cafcass for fraud and identified the greatest potential for fraud in the following areas: revenue recognition, posting of unusual journals, complex transactions, bias in management estimates and the valuation of the defined benefit pension liability. In common with all audits under ISAs (UK), I am required to perform specific procedures to respond to the risk of management override.

I obtained an understanding of Cafcass’ framework of authority and other legal and regulatory frameworks in which Cafcass operates. I focused on those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on material amounts and disclosures in the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of Cafcass. The key laws and regulations I considered in this context included the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, Managing Public Money, employment law, pensions legislation and tax legislation.

Audit response to identified risk

To respond to the identified risks resulting from the above procedures:

- I reviewed the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with provisions of relevant laws and regulations described above as having direct effect on the financial statements;
- I enquired of management, the Audit and Risk Committee and in-house legal counsel concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- I reviewed minutes of meetings of those charged with governance and the Board and internal audit reports;
- I addressed the risk of fraud through management override of controls by testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements on estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

I communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential risks of fraud to all engagement team members including internal specialists and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council’s website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of my certificate.

Other auditor’s responsibilities

I am required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control I identify during my audit.

Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.

Gareth Davies	Date
Comptroller and Auditor General	9 December 2025
National Audit Office	
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road	
Victoria	
London	
SW1W 9SP	

2024-25 Annual accounts



Financial statements

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2025

		2024-25		2023-24	
	Note	£000	£000	£000	£000
Expenditure					
Staff costs		124,213		123,841	
Past pension service cost	4/22	39		9	
Total staff costs	4	124,252		123,850	
Self-employed contractors and agency staff	20	6,823		6,823	
Depreciation and amortisation	7/7.2/8	2,052		2,790	
Partnerships	21	1,931		1,994	
Other expenditure	5	22,655		20,116	
			157,713		155,573
Income					
Income from activities	3/6	(107)		(120)	
			(107)		(120)
Net expenditure			157,606		155,453
Right of use interest cost	7.2		103		116
Pension net interest (gain) / cost	22		(512)		157
Net expenditure after interest			157,197		155,726
Other comprehensive expenditure					
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7		(3)		(3)
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8		(1)		0
Loss / (gain) on re-measurement of pension benefits	22		21,106		(14,155)
Total comprehensive net expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2025			178,299		141,568

The Notes on pages 185 to 213 form part of these Accounts.

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2025

		31 March 2025		31 March 2024	
	Note	£000	£000	£000	£000
Non-current assets					
Property, plant and equipment	7	3,673		2,295	
Right of use assets	7.2	9,148		9,600	
Intangible assets	8	166		208	
Pension assets	22	0		2,045	
Total non-current assets			12,987		14,148
Current assets					
Trade and other receivables	11	3,139		3,430	
Other current assets					
Cash and cash equivalents	12	3,115		1,489	
Total current assets			6,254		4,919
Total assets			19,241		19,067
Current liabilities					
Trade and other payables	13	(7,605)		(4,650)	
Total current liabilities			(7,605)		(4,650)
Non-current assets less net current liabilities			11,636		14,417
Non-current liabilities					
Provisions	14	(3,822)		(3,816)	
Right of use liabilities	16	(9,629)		(10,239)	
Pension liabilities	22	(17,376)		0	
Total non-current liabilities			(30,827)		(14,055)
Assets less liabilities			(19,191)		362
Taxpayers' equity					
General reserve			(19,444)		20
Revaluation reserve			253		342
			(19,191)		362

The Financial Statements on pages 181 to 213 were approved by the Board on 4 December 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Jacky Tiotto

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Date: 8 December 2025

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 March 2025

		2024-25	2023-24
	Note	£000	£000
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net expenditure after interest	3	(157,197)	(155,726)
Depreciation and amortisation	7/7.2/8	2,052	2,790
Loss on disposal of assets	5/7	265	0
Decrease in trade and other receivables	11	291	91
Increase in trade payables	13	2,955	185
Non-cash pension current and past service (gain) / cost and net interest (gain) / cost	22	(1,685)	27
Increase in provisions	14	6	1,112
Right of use assets movement in provisions not passing through SoCNE	7.2	(50)	(784)
Right of use interest on lease liabilities	7.2	103	116
Right of use net cash outflow for lease costs and incentives	7.2	(32)	(33)
Impairments	7.2/10	0	71
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(153,292)	(152,151)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	7	(1,890)	(966)
Purchase of intangible assets	8	0	(114)
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(1,890)	(1,080)
Cash flows from financing activities			
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		154,924	151,460
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,890	1,080
Other grant funding		1,932	1,996
Right of use repayment of principal on leases	7.2	(1,938)	(1,711)
Net cash inflow from financing activities		156,808	152,825
Total cash and cash equivalents			
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period	12	1,489	1,895
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	12	3,115	1,489
Net increase / (decrease) / in cash and cash equivalents		1,626	(406)

Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity as at 31 March 2025

		General reserve	Revaluation reserve	Total
	Note	£000	£000	£000
Balance at 31 March 2024		20	342	362
Changes in taxpayers' equity				
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7	0	3	3
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8	0	1	1
Release of revaluation reserve to general reserve due to disposals		93	(93)	0
Net expenditure after interest	3	(157,197)	0	(157,197)
Pension fund actuarial loss	22	(21,106)	0	(21,106)
Total comprehensive expenditure		(178,210)	(89)	(178,299)
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		154,924	0	154,924
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,890	0	1,890
Other grant funding		1,932	0	1,932
Balance at 31 March 2025		(19,444)	253	(19,191)
Balance at 31 March 2023		(12,976)	370	(12,606)
Changes in taxpayers' equity				
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7	0	3	3
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8	0	0	0
Release of revaluation reserve to general reserve due to disposals		31	(31)	0
Net expenditure after interest	3	(155,726)	0	(155,726)
Pension fund actuarial gain	22	14,155	0	14,155
Total comprehensive expenditure		(141,540)	(28)	(141,568)
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		151,460	0	151,460
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,080	0	1,080
Other grant funding received		1,996	0	1,996
Balance at 31 March 2024		20	342	362

Notes to the Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025

1. Accounting policies

These Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the 2024-25 Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by HM Treasury and in accordance with the Accounts Direction dated 12 April 2002 given under Schedule 2, paragraph (13)2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The accounting policies contained in the FReM apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector.

Where the FReM permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be most appropriate to the circumstances of Cafcass to give a true and fair view has been selected.

The policies adopted by Cafcass for 2024-25 are described below. They have been applied consistently in dealing with items that are considered material to the Accounts.

Please also reference the "Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities" contained within the Accountability Report.

a) Accounting convention

The Accounts are prepared under the historical cost convention, modified to include assets at their value to the business by reference to current costs. Without limiting the information given, the Accounts meet the accounting and disclosure requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and accounting standards issued or adopted by the Accounting Standards Board insofar as those requirements are relevant. The Accounts are also fully consistent with IFRS.

b) Going concern

Parliament has voted Grant-in-Aid to Cafcass for 12 months following the Statement of Financial Position date.

It is expected that Cafcass will continue to be fully funded and operate as a going concern for the 12 months following the publication date of this Annual Report and Accounts. As such, Cafcass operates as a going concern.

c) Property, plant and equipment

Property, plant and equipment, except for leasehold properties and right of use assets, have been stated at their fair value to the business using appropriate indices published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Revaluations above the depreciated historic cost of these assets are credited to a revaluation reserve. Any downward revaluation of property, plant and equipment below the asset's depreciated historic cost is recognised when it occurs through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Property, plant and equipment include those assets costing £2,500 or more. Assets valued at less than the threshold are capitalised if they constitute integral parts of a composite asset that is in total valued at more than the threshold. Furniture and fittings are not capitalised but fully expensed in the year of acquisition.

d) Right of use lease liabilities and assets

IFRS 16 provides a single lessee accounting model, requiring lessees to recognise assets and liabilities for all leases, unless the lease term is 12 months or less, or the underlying asset is of low value.

Cafcass as lessee: Scope and exclusions

In accordance with IFRS 16 Leases, contracts or parts of contracts that convey the right to control the use of an asset for a period are accounted for as leases.

Contracts for services are evaluated to determine whether they convey the right to control the use of an identified asset, incorporating both the right to obtain substantially all the economic benefits from the asset and to direct its use. If so, the relevant part of the contract is treated as a lease.

As adapted by the FReM, IFRS 16 has been applied to leases with nil or nominal (that is, significantly below market value) consideration and arrangements for accommodation between Government departments.

Cafcass excludes two types of leases. Firstly, those relating to low value items which it considers as those where the underlying asset would have a cost of less than £3,500 when new, provided those items are not highly dependent on or integrated with other items. Secondly, contracts whose term (comprising the non-cancellable period together with any extension options, Cafcass is reasonably certain to exercise and any termination options Cafcass is reasonably certain not to exercise) is less than 12 months.

Cafcass as lessee: initial recognition

At the commencement of a lease Cafcass recognises a right of use asset and a lease liability.

The lease liability is measured at the value of the remaining lease payments, discounted either by the interest rate implicit in the lease, or where this is not readily determinable, the incremental rate of borrowing advised by HM Treasury. This rate is advised annually by HM Treasury (4.72% for leases recognised in 2024 and 4.81% for those recognised in 2025). Where the lease includes extension or termination options, the lease payments will be for the non-cancellable period together with any extension options that are reasonably certain to exercise, and any termination options that is reasonably certain not to exercise. The measurement of lease payments excludes any VAT payable, and irrecoverable VAT is expensed at the point it falls due in line with IFRIC 21 Levies.

The right of use asset is measured at the value of the lease liability, adjusted for: any lease payments made before the commencement date; any lease incentives received; any incremental costs of obtaining the lease; and any costs of removing the asset and restoring the site at the end of the lease.

Peppercorn leases (leases with nil or nominal consideration) are measured at their existing use value, with the difference between the carrying amount of the right of use asset and lease liability treated as notional income.

Cafcass as lessee: Subsequent measurement

The lease liability will be adjusted for the accrual of interest, repayments, reassessments, and modifications. Reassessments are reappraisals of the probability of the options given by the existing lease contract, for example where we no longer expect to exercise an extension option; modifications are changes to the lease contract. Reassessments and modifications are accounted for by discounting the revised cash flows: using a revised discount rate where Cafcass becomes or ceases to be reasonably certain to exercise or not exercise an extension or termination option, or the lease is modified to amend the non-cancellable period, change the term of the lease, change the consideration or the scope; or at the existing discount rate where there is a movement in an index or rate that will alter the cash flows, or the amount payable under a residual value guarantee changes.

After initial recognition, the right of use asset will be measured using the fair value model. Cafcass considers that the cost model (measurement by reference to the lease liability) is a reasonable proxy for fair value, in the case of non-property leases, and for property leases of less than five years or with regular rent reviews. For other leases, the asset will be carried at a revalued amount.

The value of the asset will be adjusted for subsequent depreciation and impairment, and for reassessments and modifications of the lease liability. Where the amount of a reduction to the asset exceeds the carrying value of the asset, the excess amount is recognised in expenditure.

Expenditure for each financial year includes interest on the lease liability and a straight-line depreciation charge on the right of use asset over the life of the lease, together with any impairment of the right of use asset and any change in variable lease payments, that was not included in the measurement of the lease payments during the period in which the triggering event occurred. Rental payments in respect of leases of low value items, or with a term under 12 months, are also expensed.

Estimates and judgements

Where a lease is embedded in a contract for services, the amount to be recognised as the right of use asset and lease liability should be the stand-alone price of the lease component only. Where this is not readily observable, a determination will be made by reference for other observable data, such as the fair value of similar assets or price of contracts for similar non-lease components.

Cafcass has determined the lease term by assessing the level of certainty as to whether termination or extension options will be exercised. In making these judgements, reliance has been placed on the professional judgement of estates staff, supported by other business strategies, ongoing business needs and market conditions.

Cafcass has determined that the cost model is a reasonable proxy for fair value in most cases because the rents payable is aligned to open market rates. In the case of longer leases where there are not regular rent reviews, there is a greater chance of divergence between cost and fair value, hence a professional revaluation is appropriate.

Cafcass leases various non-property assets such as vehicles and IT equipment. It has determined that, at the present time, all non-property leases which are not individually low value, are immaterial. Consequently, no non-property leases have been recognised in these Accounts.

Rolling leases judgement

If a lease has expired but Cafcass remains in occupation with no renewal term pending, Cafcass has considered the broader economic situation for each contract to determine whether there is an enforceable period. Cafcass has recognised such contracts in the Financial Statements.

e) Intangible fixed assets

Intangible assets consist of software and website and intranet costs. These have been stated at their fair value to the business using appropriate indices published by the ONS.

Revaluations above the amortised historic cost of these assets are credited to a revaluation reserve. Any downward revaluation of intangible assets below the asset's amortised historic cost is recognised when it occurs through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Intangible assets include those assets costing £2,500 or more. Assets valued at less than the threshold are capitalised if they constitute integral parts of a composite asset that is in total valued at more than the threshold.

Intangible assets are periodically reviewed to ensure that they have been accurately stated at their value to the business.

f) Depreciation and amortisation

Depreciation is provided to write-off property, plant and equipment and right of use assets, and amortisation to write-off intangible assets, on a straight-line basis over their expected useful lives, or for leased assets and right of use assets, over the life of the lease.

Expected useful lives are as follows:

Leasehold improvements	Lease term
Information technology	Five years
Telecoms	Five years
Office equipment	Seven years
Right of use assets	Lease term

g) Pensions

Employees of Cafcass are members of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) which is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). It is a funded defined benefit pension scheme.

Contributions are charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators.

The assets of the WYPF are held separately from those of Cafcass.

The scheme assets are measured at fair value. Scheme liabilities are measured using a projected unit method and discounted at the current rate of return on a high-quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liability. The net pension liability is the present value of the defined benefit liabilities less the fair value of the assets. All estimates are performed by Aon Hewitt Ltd, the independent actuary for WYPF and in accordance with International Accounting Standard 19 – Employee Benefits (IAS 19).

The pension scheme surplus (to the extent that it is considered recoverable) or deficit is recognised in full on the face of the Statement of Financial Position. The movement in the scheme surplus / deficit is split between operating charges (within staff costs) and reserves in the case of actuarial gains and losses.

Net interest receivable on pension scheme assets is shown in operating cash flows.

One member of Cafcass staff retains membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) due to their earlier employment with one of Cafcass' predecessor organisations. The scheme is a funded defined benefit pension scheme, with contributions charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators.

h) Funding

Grant-in-Aid, used to finance activities and expenditure that supports the statutory and other objectives of Cafcass, is treated as financing and credited to the general reserve, because it is regarded as contributions from a controlling party.

Other grant funding (Contact Services funding) is used to provide grants to Child Contact Centres and is also treated as financing and credited to the general reserve.

i) Income from activities

Income from activities is generated from training, student placements and one-off receipts in the year. Income is recognised on the issuing of an invoice. All income is stated net of VAT.

j) Insurance

Except for comprehensive insurance on contract lease and hire vehicles, Cafcass does not insure but carries its own risks for fire, accidental damage and similar accidents and claims at common law.

k) Accounting for Value Added Tax

Cafcass is registered for VAT. It is unable to recover most of the VAT incurred on expenditure, although a small amount of VAT can be recovered where it is related to the costs recovered in court cases. Expenditure is therefore stated inclusive of any irrecoverable VAT.

l) Financial instruments

Cafcass does not hold any complex financial instruments. The only financial instruments included in the Accounts are receivables, cash, and payables (notes 11, 12 and 13).

Financial assets comprise trade receivable and other receivables. Receivables are recognised at carrying value, reduced by appropriate allowances for estimated irrecoverable amounts.

Trade creditors are short term and are stated at carrying value in recognition that these liabilities fall due within one year.

m) Provisions

A provision is recognised in the Statement of Financial Position when Cafcass has a present legal or constructive obligation arising from past events, and it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will be required to settle the obligation.

2. Change of accounting policy

New standards, amendments and interpretations issued but not effective for the financial year beginning 1 April 2024 and not early adopted.

IFRS 17 Insurance Contracts, which replaces IFRS 4, was issued in May 2017 and applies to the public sector for annual reporting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2025. An assessment has been made and it is considered that this standard will have no material impact on Cafcass' Annual Accounts.

3. Analysis of net expenditure and non-current assets by segment

	Operational service areas	Other	Total
	£000	£000	£000
2024-25			
Gross expenditure	109,061	48,243	157,304
Income	0	(107)	(107)
Net expenditure	109,061	48,136	157,197
Non-current assets	2,663	10,324	12,987
2023-24			
Gross expenditure	105,595	50,251	155,846
Income	0	(120)	(120)
Net expenditure	105,595	50,131	155,726
Non-current assets	2,080	10,023	12,103

'Operational service areas' and 'Other' reflect the structure of the standard monthly management information provided to Cafcass' chief operating decision makers.

4. Staff costs

	Note	Cafcass board members £000	Corporate national office staff £000	Regional staff £000	Total £000
2024-25					
Salaries and wages		124	11,827	84,649	96,600
Apprentice levy		0	58	413	471
Social security costs		7	1,163	9,326	10,496
Current service cost	22	0	1,980	14,272	16,252
Other pension costs		0	(34)	(119)	(153)
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	39	39
Total payroll costs		131	14,994	108,580	123,705
Temporary staff costs		0	152	395	547
Outward secondments		0	0	0	0
Total staff costs		131	15,146	108,975	124,252
2023-24					
Salaries and wages		114	10,967	84,210	95,291
Apprentice levy		0	53	409	462
Social security costs		6	1,085	9,182	10,273
Current service cost	22	0	1,985	15,548	17,533
Other pension costs		0	1	(71)	(70)
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	9	9
Total payroll costs		120	14,091	109,287	123,498
Temporary staff costs		0	113	289	402
Outward secondments		0	0	(50)	(50)
Total staff costs		120	14,204	109,526	123,850

Please also reference the 'Remuneration and staff report'.

5. Other expenditure

		2024-25	2023-24
	Note	£000	£000
Outsourced finance and ITC services		9,201	7,778
Accommodation costs		4,374	3,769
Travel and subsistence		2,909	2,688
Office supplies, printing and stationery		1,126	973
Telecommunications and postage		869	902
Staff related costs		639	517
Training costs		509	419
Interpreters and translators		473	501
Legal costs		437	321
Recruitment costs		321	320
Fuel and utilities		266	375
Vehicle costs		147	118
External audit costs		95	87
Internal audit costs		75	64
Other		924	885
Total cash		22,365	19,717
Provisions created in year	14	1,706	2,296
Provisions no longer required	14	(1,631)	(1,184)
Loss on disposal of assets	7	265	0
Movement in right of use assets due to provisions	7.2	(50)	(784)
Impairments	10	0	71
Total non-cash		290	399
		22,655	20,116

6. Income

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Training	92	91
Other income	15	29
	107	120

7. Property, plant and equipment

	Leasehold improvements	Assets under construction	Information technology and telecoms	Office equipment	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
2024-25					
Cost or valuation					
Balance at 1 April 2024	2,104	234	994	22	3,354
Additions	0	1,890	0	0	1,890
Reclassification	0	0	0	0	0
Disposals	(314)	0	(329)	0	(643)
Revaluations	0	0	3	0	3
Balance at 31 March 2025	1,790	2,124	668	22	4,604
Depreciation					
Balance at 1 April 2024	257	0	780	22	1,059
Charged in year	150	0	100	0	250
Disposals	(49)	0	(329)	0	(378)
Balance at 31 March 2025	358	0	551	22	931
NBV at 31 March 2025	1,432	2,124	117	0	3,673
NBV at 31 March 2024	1,847	234	214	0	2,295
Asset financing					
Owned	1,432	2,124	117	0	3,673
NBV at 31 March 2025	1,432	2,124	117	0	3,673

One leased premises was deemed unoccupiable during the year due to construction and landlord related issues. This resulted in a £0.265m net book value write-off of previously capitalised leasehold improvements.

2023-24					
Cost or valuation					
Balance at 1 April 2023	396	1,050	990	22	2,458
Additions	892	0	74	0	966
Reclassification	816	(816)	0	0	0
Disposals	0	0	(73)	0	(73)
Revaluations	0	0	3	0	3
Balance at 31 March 2024	2,104	234	994	22	3,354
Depreciation					
Balance at 1 April 2023	188	0	763	22	973
Charged in year	69	0	90	0	159
Disposals	0	0	(73)	0	(73)
Balance at 31 March 2024	257	0	780	22	1,059
NBV at 31 March 2024	1,847	234	214	0	2,295
NBV at 31 March 2023	208	1,050	227	0	1,485
Asset financing					
Owned	1,847	234	214	0	2,295
NBV at 31 March 2024	1,847	234	214	0	2,295

7.2 Right of use assets

	Building leases	Total
	£000	£000
2024-25		
Cost or valuation		
Balance at 1 April 2024	14,630	14,630
Additions	1,557	1,557
Disposals	(303)	(303)
Movement due to provisions	50	50
Remeasurements	(300)	(300)
Impairments	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2025	15,634	15,634
Depreciation		
Balance at 1 April 2024	5,030	5,030
Charged in year	1,759	1,759
Disposals	(303)	(303)
Balance at 31 March 2025	6,486	6,486
NBV at 31 March 2025	9,148	9,148
NBV at 31 March 2024	9,600	9,600

2023-24		
Cost or valuation		
Balance at 1 April 2023	14,260	14,260
Additions	414	414
Disposals	(1,304)	(1,304)
Movement due to provisions	784	784
Remeasurements	547	547
Impairments	(71)	(71)
Balance at 31 March 2024	14,630	14,630
Depreciation		
Balance at 1 April 2023	3,732	3,732
Charged in year	2,602	2,602
Disposals	(1,304)	(1,304)
Balance at 31 March 2024	5,030	5,030
NBV at 31 March 2024	9,600	9,600
NBV at 31 March 2023	10,528	10,528

Amounts recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Depreciation	1,759	2,602
Interest on lease liabilities	103	116
Low value and short-term leases	2,575	1,877
Amounts recognised in the SoCNE	4,437	4,595

Amounts recognised in the Statement of Cash Flows

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Legal expenses and lease incentives	(32)	(33)
Interest on lease liabilities	103	116
Repayment of principal on leases	(1,938)	(1,711)
Amounts recognised in the SoCF	(1,867)	(1,628)

8. Intangible assets

	Information technology	Websites that deliver services	Assets under construction	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
2024-25				
Cost or valuation				
Balance at 1 April 2024	2,146	214	0	2,360
Additions	0	0	0	0
Disposals	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	0	1	0	1
Balance at 31 March 2025	2,146	215	0	2,361
Amortisation				
Balance at 1 April 2024	2,146	6	0	2,152
Charged in year	0	43	0	43
Disposals	0	0	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2025	2,146	49	0	2,195
NBV at 31 March 2025	0	166	0	166
NBV at 31 March 2024	0	208	0	208

2023-24				
Cost or valuation				
Balance at 1 April 2023	2,146	89	101	2,336
Additions	0	215	(101)	114
Disposals	0	(90)	0	(90)
Revaluations	0	0	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2024	2,146	214	0	2,360
Amortisation				
Balance at 1 April 2023	2,124	89	0	2,213
Charged in year	22	7	0	29
Disposals	0	(90)	0	(90)
Balance at 31 March 2024	2,146	6	0	2,152
NBV at 31 March 2024	0	208	0	208
NBV at 31 March 2023	22	0	101	123

9. Financial instruments

As the cash requirements of Cafcass are met through the Estimates process, financial instruments play a more limited role in creating and managing risk than would apply to a non-public sector body.

Most of Cafcass' financial instruments are consistent with the expected purchase and usage requirements of a non-departmental public body and relate to contracts to buy non-financial items. As such, Cafcass is exposed to minimal credit, liquidity, and market risks.

10. Impairments

	Net cost charged to SoCNE	Release of revaluation reserve to SoCNE	Net impact in SoCNE
	£000	£000	£000
2024-25			
Right of use assets	0	0	0
	0	0	0
2023-24			
Right of use assets	71	0	71
	71	0	71

11. Trade receivables and other current assets

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Amounts falling due within one year		
Other receivables	1,000	1,650
Provision for bad debts	(3)	(2)
Prepayments	2,140	1,781
Travel advances	2	1
	3,139	3,430

12. Cash and cash equivalents

	Cash	Bank	Total
	£000	£000	£000
2024-25			
Balance at 1 April 2024	2	1,487	1,489
Net change in cash and cash equivalent balance	0	1,626	1,626
Balance at 31 March 2025	2	3,113	3,115
The following balances were held at:			
Government Banking Service and cash in hand	2	3,113	3,115
Balance at 31 March 2025	2	3,113	3,115

2023-24			
Balance at 1 April 2023	4	1,891	1,895
Net change in cash and cash equivalent balance	(2)	(404)	(406)
Balance at 31 March 2024	2	1,487	1,489
The following balances were held at:			
Government Banking Service and cash in hand	2	1,487	1,489
Balance at 31 March 2024	2	1,487	1,489

13. Trade payables and other current liabilities

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Amounts falling due within one year		
Taxation and social security	0	1
Trade payables	663	294
Other payables	2,646	47
Accruals and deferred income	4,296	4,308
	7,605	4,650

Accruals and deferred income comprise £4.296m accruals plus £nil deferred income (2023-24: £4.308m plus £nil).

14. Provisions for liabilities and charges

	Employment and legal claims	Annual leave amount	Dilapidations	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
2024-25				
Balance at 1 April 2024	519	977	2,320	3,816
Provided in the year	180	881	645	1,706
Not required written back	(403)	(977)	(251)	(1,631)
Utilised in the year	(67)	0	(2)	(69)
Balance at 31 March 2025	229	881	2,712	3,822

Analysis of expected timing of discounted flows				
Not later than one year	229	0	2,346	2,575
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	881	126	1,007
Later than five years	0	0	240	240
	229	881	2,712	3,822

2023-24				
Balance at 1 April 2023	171	651	1,882	2,704
Provided in the year	460	977	859	2,296
Not required written back	(112)	(651)	(421)	(1,184)
Utilised in the year	0	0	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2024	519	977	2,320	3,816

Analysis of expected timing of discounted flows				
Not later than one year	519	0	1,937	2,456
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	977	132	1,109
Later than five years	0	0	251	251
	519	977	2,320	3,816

IAS 37 requires the recognition of a provision (a liability that is of uncertain timing or amount) when it exists at the Statement of Financial Position date. It must therefore fulfil the criteria of being a present obligation arising from a previous event, where it is probable there will be a transfer of economic benefits to settle the obligation and where a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. Cafcass makes provisions for legal or constructive obligations (liabilities), which are of uncertain timing or amount at the Statement of Financial Position date, based on the best estimate of the expenditure required to settle the obligation.

Employment and legal claims

Employment claims relate to employment tribunal cases that are likely to be brought against Cafcass, which may or may not result in court attendance. There were no legal claims in 2024-25 (2023-24 £0.174m).

Annual leave amount

The annual leave amount is the monetised value of holiday entitlement approved by management for carry over to the new financial year. It is the liability that Cafcass would have to settle, should it cease to exist as a going concern and accumulated staff leave be crystallised into actual payments.

Dilapidations

Cafcass operates from a number of leasehold properties which include provision for the payment of dilapidations on exit from the premises.

Cafcass considers it appropriate to recognise these liabilities through the creation of a provision while premises are in active use, and to accrue for these liabilities once settlement has been agreed.

Provisions have been maintained for these using actual information and industry information on the most likely costs for dilapidations per square metre.

15. Capital commitments

There were no material contracted capital commitments as at 31 March 2025 (2023-24: £nil).

16. Commitments under leases

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Finance lease commitments		
Obligations under finance leases comprise:		
Buildings		
Not later than one year	1,595	1,928
Later than one year and not later than five years	3,377	3,236
Later than five years	5,420	5,579
	10,392	10,743
Less interest element	(763)	(504)
	9,629	10,239

Maturity analysis: Present value of obligations under finance leases comprise:

Buildings		
Not later than one year	1,451	1,833
Later than one year and not later than five years	2,911	2,961
Later than five years	5,267	5,445
	9,629	10,239

17. Other financial commitments

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Not later than one year	2,351	2,302
Later than one year and not later than five years	294	2,589
Later than five years	0	0
	2,645	4,891

Cafcass signed a three-year contract with Littlefish, commencing May 2023, to provide an integrated information and communication technology service across the organisation.

18. Related party transactions

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body that is sponsored by the Department (the MoJ). The Department as such is regarded as a related party. During 2024-25, Cafcass had various material transactions with the Department, including the receipt of £158.746m grant and additional funding from the Department (2023-24: £154.536m).

Transactions with the Department not related to Grant-in-Aid or other funding are considered not to be material. Cafcass does have occasional small transactions with other Central Government bodies and Local Authorities that are considered not to be material.

All payments made to senior managerial staff are disclosed in the Remuneration and Staff Report. A register of interest is held for all Board Members and there were no material related party transactions with Board Members or the Corporate Management Team during the year other than those associated with remuneration for normal duties.

19. Events after Statement of Financial Position date

In accordance with the requirements of IAS 10 'Events After the Reporting Period', post Statement of Financial Position events are considered up to the date on which the Accounts are authorised for issue. This is interpreted as the same date as the date of the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

20. Self-Employed Contractors

In 2024-25 we contracted the services of 110 Self-Employed Contractors (2023-24: 138), to whom payments made amounted to £2.891m in the year (2023-24: £3.268m).

As Self-Employed Contractors, they are ordinarily responsible for meeting travel, office and all other expenses related to their work, as well as related tax and national insurance liabilities.

Further to this, agency staff costs amounted to £3.932m in the year (2023-24: £3.555m).

21. Partnership costs

Partnership costs of £1.931m (2023-24: £1.994m) represent the cost of services provided by Cafcass through third party organisations such as contact centres and mediation centres. This expenditure is funded by the Department separately to Grant-in-Aid and in compliance with FReM is credited to the general reserve as other grant funding. In 2024-25 Cafcass received other grant funding of £1.932m from the Department (2023-24: £1.996m).

Cafcass also engages third party organisations for court ordered contact activities. Expenditure on these activities is shown net of reimbursement claimed back and received from the Department.

22. Pension liabilities

Under the requirements of IAS 19, WYPF's actuary, Aon Hewitt Limited, carried out an accounting valuation for Cafcass as at 31 March 2022, based on a roll forward from the last actuarial funding valuation in 2019. The accounting valuation aims to measure the assets and liabilities of the pension scheme on a best estimate basis in terms of the calculation approach and data used at the end of the accounting period, whilst the actuarial funding valuation carried out every three years determines the scheme's funding position and the cash contribution by employers in future years.

The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of Cafcass and are invested in funds managed externally to Cafcass.

Cafcass accounts for scheme liabilities in accordance with IAS 19 – Employee benefits. The in-year current service cost has been reflected in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Cafcass considers and follows the recommendations from the actuary for significant estimates and assumptions, including future increases in pay levels.

Introduction

The disclosures below relate to the funded liabilities within the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) which is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The LGPS is a funded defined benefit plan with benefits earned up to 31 March 2014 being linked to final salary. Benefits after 31 March 2014 are based on a Career Average Revalued Earnings scheme. Details of the benefits earned over the period covered by this disclosure are set out in 'The LGPS Regulations 2013' (as amended) and 'The LGPS (Transitional Provisions, Savings and Amendment) Regulations 2014' (as amended).

Funding / governance arrangements of the LGPS

The funded nature of the LGPS requires Cafcass and its employees to pay contributions into the WYPF, calculated at a level intended to balance the pension liabilities with investment assets. Information on the framework for calculating contributions to be paid is set out in 'The LGPS Regulations 2013' and the WYPF's Funding Strategy Statement.

The last actuarial valuation was at 31 March 2022 and the contributions to be paid until 31 March 2026 resulting from that valuation are set out in the WYPF's Rates and Adjustment Certificate. Cafcass' contribution rates set out over the period are: 2023-24: 19.1%, 2024-25: 18.6% and 2025-26: 18.1%.

WYPF's Administering Authority, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, is responsible for its governance. Cafcass engages with the WYPF administrators to seek assurance on their management of risk.

The entitlement of staff to membership of the WYPF forms part of the constitution of Cafcass. The scheme is a defined benefit scheme and forms a significant financial staff benefit within the Cafcass reward strategy. Decisions on the collection of employer contributions are taken to provide predictability and stability to future budget requirements. The overall performance of the scheme is reported and reviewed annually by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, informed by the work and findings of both the Government Actuary's Department and the LGPS Scheme Advisory Board.

Assets

The assets that are allocated to Cafcass are notional and are assumed to be invested in line with the investments of the WYPF for the purposes of calculating the return over the accounting period. WYPF holds a significant proportion of its assets in liquid investments. As a consequence there will be no significant restriction on realising assets if a large payment is required to be paid from the WYPF in relation to Cafcass' liabilities. The assets are invested in a diversified spread of investments and the approximate split of assets for the WYPF as a whole is shown in the disclosures. The WYPF 'Investment Strategy Statement' is available via the wypf.org.uk website.

Risks associated with the Fund in relation to accounting

Asset volatility

The reported liabilities are calculated using a discount rate set with reference to corporate bond yields at the accounting date. If assets underperform this yield this will create a deficit in the Accounts. WYPF holds a significant proportion of growth assets which, while expected to outperform corporate bonds in the long term, creates volatility and risk in the short term in relation to the accounting figures.

Changes in bond yield

A decrease in corporate bond yields will increase the value placed on the liabilities for accounting purposes although this will be marginally offset by the increase in the assets as a result (to the extent that WYPF invests in corporate bonds).

Inflation risk

The majority of the pension liabilities are linked to either pay or price inflation. Higher inflation expectations will lead to a higher liability value. The assets are not perfectly correlated with inflation meaning that an increase in inflation will increase the deficit.

Life expectancy

The majority of WYPF's obligations are to provide benefits for the life of the member following retirement, so increases in life expectancy will result in an increase in the liabilities.

Exiting employers

Employers which leave the WYPF (or their guarantor) may have to make an exit payment to meet any shortfall in assets against their pension liabilities. If the Employer (or guarantor) is not able to meet this exit payment the liability may in certain circumstances fall on other employers in the WYPF. Further the assets at exit in respect of 'orphan liabilities' may, in retrospect, not be sufficient to meet the liabilities. This risk may fall on other employers. 'Orphan liabilities' are currently a small proportion of the overall liabilities in the WYPF.

Duration of liabilities

The duration of liabilities is the average period between the calculation date and the date at which benefit payments fall due. The calculated duration, based on the 2024-25 Accounting Results Schedule is 15.0 years.

Impact of McCloud / Sargeant judgement

The December 2018 McCloud / Sargeant judgement found that transitional protection arrangements put in place during the reform of firefighters and judges pension schemes was discriminatory on grounds of age. The Government launched a consultation on proposed amendments to underpin in July 2020, and a response to the consultation was published in February 2021. The impact of the McCloud / Sargeant judgement was first accounted for in the 2019-20 Accounts under IAS 19, covering an allowance for the service since the scheme's reforms within the past service liabilities in the SoFP and an "underpin" liability within the current service cost. As the period of protection applies from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2022, the McCloud / Sargeant liability has been updated as part of the 2022 valuation within the past service liabilities and no allowance is made within the current service cost over this accounting period. The method for valuing the McCloud remedy is closely aligned with the method proposed by the Government in its consultation and consistent with the method adopted in the previous year.

Impact of Virgin Media judgement

In June 2023, the High Court handed down a decision (Virgin Media Ltd v NTL Pension Trustees II Limited), which was subsequently upheld by the Court of Appeal in July 2024. The ruling potentially has implications for the validity of amendments made by pension schemes, including the LGPS, which were contracted-out on a salary-related basis between 6 April 1997 and the abolition of contracting-out in 2016. The ruling related to the requirement on the trustees to obtain the scheme actuary's confirmation that a scheme continued to provide a minimum level of benefits (known as a 'reference scheme test') following certain types of rule amendments. Without this confirmation (sometimes referred to as a section 37 confirmation, by reference to section 37 of the Pension Schemes Act 1993, which sets out that scheme rules can only be altered as prescribed in the relevant regulations), the amendment may be void and ineffective.

At time of writing the government has not yet confirmed that they have been able to locate the actuarial confirmations from the Government Actuary's Department for all LGPS amendments between 1997 and 2016.

There remains uncertainty as the case may be subject to a further appeal or the Department for Work and Pensions could legislate to amend section 37 to allow retrospective actuarial confirmation. In a ministerial statement on 27 February 2025, responding to a question on whether section 37 will be amended, Torsten Bell said that "No final decisions have been made but we are actively considering our next steps, and will provide an update in due course".

Given the uncertainty, no allowance has been made for the possible impact of the ruling as it is currently unclear whether any additional liabilities might arise, and if they were to arise, how they would be reliably measured.

Accounting for a pension surplus under IAS 19 and IFRIC 14

Cafcass has an initial net pension asset position at the accounting date before the calculation of the asset ceiling. The main accounting standard to consider in relation to the carrying value of this asset is IFRIC 14. This is alongside IAS 19.

The asset ceiling

The initial position calculated using IAS 19 is a surplus of £158.498m. As this is a surplus position, IAS 19 requires calculation of the maximum economic benefit Cafcass could recognise in the Accounts (referred to as the asset ceiling) calculated in accordance with IFRIC 14. If the asset ceiling is below the net pension asset, the net pension asset is restricted to the asset ceiling.

The asset ceiling is defined as the present value of any economic benefits available in either i) the form of a refund from the scheme; or ii) reductions in future contributions to the plan. The figure recognised in the accounts is then the lower of the IAS 19 surplus and the asset ceiling. The standards do allow for the implementation of the asset ceiling to take the overall position from a surplus to a deficit.

Paragraph 6(1) of Schedule 2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 provides that Cafcass staff are to be appointed on terms and conditions determined by Cafcass, but paragraph 6(3) provides that any such determination by Cafcass requires the approval of the Secretary of State. Thus, any exit to secure a refund from the scheme would rely on the occurrence of an uncertain future event not wholly within our control; i.e. The approval of the Secretary of State. Under the standard this means that Cafcass do not have an unconditional right to a refund of the surplus and this method of calculating an asset ceiling is therefore not applicable.

IFRIC 14 lays out the method by which the economic benefit available as a reduction in future contributions should be calculated as: (a) any amount that reduces future minimum funding requirement contributions for future service because the entity made a prepayment; and (b) the estimated future service cost less the estimated minimum funding requirement contributions that would be required for future service in those periods if there were no prepayment as described in (a).

The estimated future service cost has been calculated as:

- The value of prospective current service costs (based on accounting assumptions at the accounting date) in perpetuity, less
- The value of prospective future service rates (as calculated at the last triennial valuation) in perpetuity.

Perpetuity is appropriate in these estimates as there is no intention to close the scheme.

Cafcass is paying contributions above the future service rate (i.e. secondary, or deficit, contributions), so we have considered if there is an additional liability due to the future payment of those contributions breaching the asset ceiling (i.e., where those contributions do not have any future economic benefit once they are paid into the Fund).

Recognition of an additional liability regarding minimum funding requirements

Cafcass is currently paying deficit contributions. Deficit contributions relate to the shortfall between current funding levels and past service cost, separate to the contributions for future service. Both are contained within the single overall contribution percentage. IFRIC 14 may require recognition of an additional liability if there is an obligation to pay deficit contributions in the future under a minimum funding requirement. The additional liability is equal to the value of the future deficit contributions that cannot be recognised as a net pension asset after they have been paid into the Fund (i.e. they would have no economic benefit to the Employer).

The amounts recognised in the Statement of Financial Position are as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000	£000
Present value of funded obligations	(613,929)	(704,062)
Fair value of plan assets	772,427	745,264
	158,498	41,202
Adjustment loss due to restriction on surplus	(158,498)	(18,871)
Adjustment loss due to minimum funding requirement	(17,376)	(20,286)
Net (liability) / asset	(17,376)	2,045

The amounts recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure are as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000	£000
Current service cost	16,252	17,533
Past service cost	39	9
Service cost	16,291	17,542
Interest on obligation	33,271	32,579
Interest income on plan assets	(35,663)	(32,422)
Interest on unrecognised asset	906	0
Interest on additional liability due to minimum funding requirement	974	0
Net interest (gain) / cost	(512)	157
Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	15,779	17,699

Changes in the present value of the defined benefit obligation are as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000	£000
Opening defined benefit obligation	704,062	701,512
Current service cost	16,252	17,533
Interest on obligation	33,271	32,579
Member contributions	6,384	6,291
Past service cost	39	9
Actuarial gain due to changes in financial assumptions	(113,861)	(23,024)
Actuarial gain due to changes in demographic assumptions	(4,864)	(11,295)
Actuarial loss due to liability experience	1,542	3,975
Benefits / transfers paid	(28,896)	(23,518)
Closing defined benefit obligation	613,929	704,062

Changes in the fair value of plan assets are as follows:

	2025	2024
	£000	£000
Opening fair value of plan assets	745,264	689,429
Interest income on plan assets	35,663	32,422
Re-measurement (loss) / gain on assets	(3,452)	22,968
Contributions by employer	17,464	17,672
Member contributions	6,384	6,291
Benefits / transfers paid	(28,896)	(23,518)
	772,427	745,264

Asset allocation

	Quoted value at 31 March 2025	Unquoted value at 31 March 2025	Total at 31 March 2025	Total at 31 March 2024
Equities	64.4%	14.9%	79.3%	79.4%
Property	0.8%	2.0%	2.8%	2.8%
Government bonds	9.0%	0.0%	9.0%	8.5%
Corporate bonds	4.0%	0.0%	4.0%	4.2%
Cash	0.0%	2.6%	2.6%	1.8%
Other	0.1%	2.2%	2.3%	3.3%
	78.3%	21.7%	100.0%	100.0%

Actual return on assets

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Interest income on plan assets	35,663	32,422
Re-measurement (loss) / gain on assets	(3,452)	22,968
	32,211	55,390

The major financial assumptions used in the valuation were:

	2024-25	2023-24
Pension accounts revaluation rate	2.50%	2.60%
Rate of increase in salaries	3.75%	3.85%
Rate of increase in pensions	2.50%	2.60%
Nominal discount rate	5.80%	4.80%

Estimated pension expense in future periods

Analysis of amount charged to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure on the provision of services next year

	Year ending 31 March 2026	Year ending 31 March 2025
	£000	£000
Current service cost	10,405	16,538
Interest on net defined benefit liability	498	(527)
Total estimated pension expense	10,903	16,011

Allowance for administration expense included in current service cost	389	384
Estimated pensionable payroll over the period	97,193	96,037

Reconciliation of re-measurement of pension benefits in the Statement of Financial Position

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Pension assets as at 31 March current year	(158,498)	(41,202)
Pension assets / (liabilities) as at 31 March prior year	41,202	(12,083)
Adjustment loss due to restriction of surplus 31 March prior year	(18,871)	0
Adjustment loss due to minimum funding requirement 31 March prior year	(20,286)	0
Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	(15,779)	(17,699)
Contributions by employer	17,464	17,672
Adjustment loss due to restriction on surplus	158,498	18,871
Adjustment loss due to minimum funding requirement	17,376	20,286
Loss / (gain) on re-measurement of pension benefits	21,106	(14,155)

Reconciliation of in-year additional pension cost in the Statement of Cash Flows

	2024-25	2023-24
	£000	£000
Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	15,779	17,699
Contributions by employer	(17,464)	(17,672)
In-year additional pension (gain) / cost	(1,685)	27

Sensitivity analysis

The approximate impact of changing the key assumptions on the present value of the funded defined benefit obligation as at 31 March 2025 and the projected service cost for the period ending 31 March 2026 is set out below.

Discount rate assumption

Adjustment to discount rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	604,720	613,929	623,138
% change in present value of total obligation	(1.5%)		1.5%
Projected service cost	9,874	10,405	10,946
Approximate % change in projected service cost	(5.1%)		5.2%

Rate of general increase in salaries

Adjustment to salary increase rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	614,543	613,929	613,315
% change in present value of total obligation	0.1%		(0.1%)
Projected service cost	10,405	10,405	10,405
Approximate % change in projected service cost	0.0%		0.0%

Rate of increase to pensions and rate of revaluation of pension accounts

Adjustment to pension increase rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	622,524	613,929	605,334
% change in present value of total obligation	1.4%		(1.4%)
Projected service cost	10,946	10,405	9,874
Approximate % change in projected service cost	5.2%		(5.1%)

Post retirement mortality assumption

* Adjustment to mortality age rating assumption	-1 year	Base figure	+1 year
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	626,435	613,929	600,423
% change in present value of total obligation	2.2%		(2.2%)
Projected service cost	10,790	10,405	10,010
Approximate % change in projected service cost	3.7%		(3.8%)

*A rating of +1 year means that members are assumed to follow the mortality pattern of the base table for an individual that is 1 year older than them.

Mortality assumption

The mortality assumptions are based on actual mortality experience of members within the Fund based on analysis carried out as part of the 2022 Actuarial Valuation, and allow for expected future mortality improvements. Sample life expectancies at age 65 in normal health resulting from these mortality assumptions are shown below.

	31 March 2025	31 March 2024
Males		
Pensioner member aged 65 at accounting date	20.9	21.0
Active member aged 45 at accounting date	21.8	22.3
Females		
Pensioner member aged 65 at accounting date	24.1	24.2
Active member aged 45 at accounting date	24.8	25.2

23. Contingent liabilities

There were no qualifying contingent liabilities as at 31 March 2025 (2023-24: £nil).

24. Contingent assets

There were no qualifying contingent assets as at 31 March 2025 (2023-24: £nil).

Appendix

Glossary

Cafcass and the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) have together created a glossary of the more commonly used terms and words in family proceedings. We thank the FJYPB and other colleagues for coordinating this, enabling readers to understand the terminology used in our annual report.

For more information about the FJYPB’s word busting project please visit the Cafcass website.

Adjournment – A decision made by the family court to hold the court hearing at another time because things are not ready or people need more time to do something.

Adoption order – A type of order made by the family court which transfers parental responsibility to new, adoptive parents and means that a child or young person is no longer legally the child of their birth parents. It allows them to start a new family.

Agency staff/workers – Social workers who do not normally work for Cafcass but will sometimes do work for Cafcass during busy periods.

Area Quality Review (AQR) – A way of measuring how well an area is working. People involved include the assistant director/heads of service in that area. The AQR findings help form the action and development plans for that area.

Application – This is how a person asks the family court to help them.

Barrister – A legally trained person who advises people going through the family court and speaks for them in court hearings.

Bank workers – Social workers who do not normally work for Cafcass but will sometimes do work for Cafcass during busy periods. These workers do not come through an agency.

C100 form – This is the form used to apply to the courts for a contact or child arrangements order.

Cafcass worker – Depending on what the family court has ordered Cafcass to do, the Cafcass worker (sometimes known as a practitioner or officer) can be known as a family court adviser or a children’s guardian (for more detail, look for their descriptions).

Care order – An order made by the family court when the local authority can prove that a child or young person living in their area is not being looked after properly.

Child record audits – Internal audits which are completed by Cafcass managers to ensure consistency and best practice.

Case management conference – This is a hearing where the major issues for a child or young person are talked about and the judge sets out how the family court case is going to proceed.

Child Contact Intervention (CCI) – CCIs are short-term interventions of supervised contact. They are designed to help adults and children establish safe and beneficial contact when this is difficult to do on their own.

Child contact centre – This is a safe place where children and young people can see a parent who they do not live with. Usually, this allows for direct contact, supervised contact or supported contact.

Child arrangements order – When people cannot agree on where a child might live or who they should see, the family court might be asked to decide. The judge will look at what is best for the child or young person and make a decision setting out what people must do.

ChildFirst – Cafcass’ electronic case management system which stores Cafcass’ case related information including feedback and complaints.

Children’s guardian – Sometimes when the problems within a family are really difficult then the family court will ask for a children’s guardian to help them. The children’s guardian is an independent person who is there to keep the court focused on what is best for the child or young person. They will also appoint a solicitor to act for the young person in court.

Consent order – Made by the court where all parties in the case have agreed to what it says.

Direct contact – When a child or young person spends time with someone that they do not live with.

Early Intervention Teams (EIT) – EIT operate in service areas, with Cafcass workers carrying out safeguarding checks to inform the safeguarding letter we provide at the first hearing.

Family assistance order – An order which the family court can make to provide short term (usually six months) support to a family who agree to it. This can be from a Cafcass worker or a social worker from the local authority.

Family court – This is where important decisions are made about children, young people and their families. It is different to criminal courts where people go when they might have done something wrong. Decisions in the family court are made by judges or magistrates when people cannot agree about what is best for a child or young person.

Family Court Adviser (FCA) – Sometimes the family court may ask an FCA to meet with a child or young person to talk about their wishes and feelings and to make sure the family court hears what they have to say. The FCA also gives their view to the court about what is best for the child. FCAs do not need to meet all children and young people because sometimes families can agree themselves on what is best.

Family group conference – All of the important people in a child’s life get together to check that they are safe. It means that everyone knows what is happening and keeps them safe.

Final order – This is the last order made by the family court. The court expects all the people named in the order to keep to it and do as it says and can punish adults if they do not.

Foster carer – People who give a home to children and young people who need a safe place to live. They may have children of their own, or other foster children living with them, in which case you would all live in the same house together.

Guardian’s report – The family court will ask the children’s guardian to write a report to help it make decisions about a child or young person. The report will include information on their wishes and feelings and a recommendation from the children’s guardian on what they think is best for the child. The report will also include information from the other people involved such as the parents and any other individuals such as experts.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) – IROs help to make sure the best decisions are made for children looked after by the local authority. Their main focus is to make sure that the care planning process for each child or young person is meeting their needs, and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

Indirect contact – A child or young person can use forms of contact such as letters, cards or gifts to communicate with a parent where the court considers it is safe and beneficial for them to do so.

Interim care order – This means that the local authority makes decisions about a child rather than their own parents for the short term, before the family court makes a final order. The child will get a social worker to make the decisions day to day.

Issues Resolution Hearing (IRH) – This is a special hearing where the family court decides which issues need to be sorted out and hears arguments about which is a true version of events.

Judge – Sometimes families have problems which they might find too hard to sort out by themselves. A judge works in a family court, listens to everybody and then decides what is best for the child or young person involved in the case. They have the final say and will make the decision about that child or young person’s life.

Level 1 check – A police criminal record check which is completed by Cafcass’ Police National Computer (PNC) team.

Legal adviser – A legally qualified person who helps magistrates in the family court apply the law. They do not play any part in the decision-making process but are there to advise.

Litigants in person – A party in a case who is representing themselves i.e. they do not have legal representation/lawyer.

Local authority (also known as children’s social care or social services) – This organisation is responsible for making sure all children and young people in their local area are kept safe by the people who care for them.

Magistrate – This person is a member of the community who volunteers to make decisions that affect families, children and young people. They are similar to a judge but are not legally qualified. They are advised on the law by their legal adviser.

Mediation – When people cannot agree, they go to another person to help them sort it out (a mediator). The mediator talks to everyone and tries to help them find an outcome that they are all happy with. This might mean that they do not have to go to the family court.

Non-molestation order – This is a type of order the family court uses to keep adults, children and young people safe from someone who has been abusive toward them.

Operational Service Area (OSA) – Cafcass divides up the country into 18 geographical regions called operational service areas, each managed by an assistant director and head of practice.

Parental order – An order which transfers legal parenthood from a surrogate to the intended parent(s).

Parental responsibility – Parental responsibility means all the rights, duties, and responsibilities that a parent has to a child or young person. A person or the people with parental responsibility can make decisions about a child such as who they will live with and what school they will attend.

Placement order – An order which allows the local authority to place a child with suitable adopters following care proceedings (even if the parents do not agree).

Post-assessment hub – Children’s cases are allocated to a post-assessment hub once the work ordered by the court has been completed and the FCA has no authority to continue working with the family. This means that once a report has been completed and filed with the court, the involvement of the FCA ends until the final hearing, where they may be ordered to attend.

Pre-proceedings – Work that is carried out by the local authority (sometimes involving Cafcass) before a decision on making a care application is made.

Private law – These cases are brought to the family court by private individuals, generally in connection with divorce or parents’ separation. The family court may make a child arrangements order, prohibited steps order or a specific issues order or no order at all.

Prohibited steps order – A parent can be prevented by the family court from doing something the other parent does not want them to do. The most common type is where one parent is stopped from moving abroad with the child or young person.

Public law – Public law cases are brought to the family court by local authorities where they are worried that a child or young person is not being looked after safely. The family court may make a care order, a supervision order, or no order at all.

Relinquished babies and children – Term used to describe where parents feel that adoption may be the best option for providing a permanent, safe future for their child (the child is ‘relinquished’).

Rule 16.4 cases – These are particularly difficult or complicated family court cases where the judge decides to make the child a party to the case under rule 16.4 of the Family Procedure Rules 2010. A Cafcass guardian will be appointed to represent the child in the case.

Safeguarding letter – This is a letter that a Cafcass worker will write and send to the family court. They will speak to the parties (usually the parents) and ask about the child or young person’s safety and any worries that they might have.

Section 37 report – S37 is the power by which a judge can order a local authority to investigate a child's circumstances and report back to the court within eight weeks explaining whether or not the local authority considers it necessary to initiate proceedings that would place the child in local authority care. If the local authority decides this is not necessary, they must set out the basis on which they have reached their decision.

Section 7 report – This report is ordered by the family court and makes either Cafcass or the local authority investigate all the circumstances of the family, often including the wishes and feelings of a child or young person, and send a report to the court.

Section 8 – The court can make four different orders (i) Child Arrangements orders (ii) prohibited steps orders (iii) Specific Issue orders (iv) orders under the Inherent jurisdiction (a special power exercised only in the High Court).

Section 16A risk assessment – A duty held by Cafcass officers to undertake a risk assessment whenever they have cause to suspect that the child concerned is at risk of harm.

Self-employed contractor – social work staff who are offered work on a case-by-case basis to assist in providing additional capacity and have a contract for services for each individual case.

Sessional workers – Former Cafcass staff who stay to complete case work which occurs after their departure from the organisation, for example by attending a final hearing and/or closing an existing case rather than having to reallocate that case to a new worker.

Social worker – These specially trained people help to make sure children and young people are safe and properly looked after. They will work with families to help make it possible for children to stay safely with them. If the family court decides that it is not possible, they will help to make sure there is somewhere else that is safe where a child can live.

Solicitor – A legally trained person who provides advice to people going through the family court and can speak for them in court.

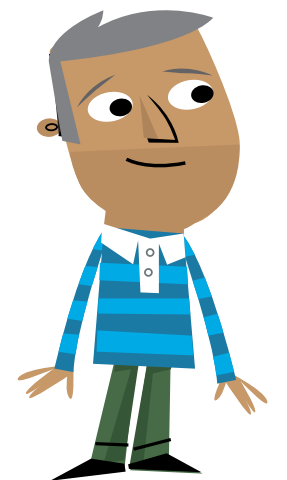
Special guardianship order – This family court order allows another person to become a child's 'special guardian'. It is for children who cannot live with their birth parents and gives parental responsibility to the special guardian so that they can make decisions alone about the child's life.

Specific issue order – This order is made by the family court when there is an important issue to be resolved but parents cannot agree on it. For example, which school a child should go to.

Supervised contact – This is a type of direct contact which requires a supervisor to make sure that the child is safe with the other person. This may be done in a contact centre.

Supervision order – A supervision order makes the local authority take responsibility for advising, assisting and befriending a young person, and ensuring that the child or young person is kept safe in the care of their parents.

Supported contact – This is direct contact whereby a child contact centre worker gives some support to the adults so that they can meet the needs of their child.



ISBN: 978-1-5286-5983-3

E-Number: E03446259 (12/25)