

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive Officer
and Corporate Management Team Overview

16 July 2026



Contents



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

1. Introducing the senior operational leadership team – verbal
2. Demand and performance headlines – Quarter 1 2025-26
3. Domestic abuse practice quality audit

Part 2: And in other news...

1. Celebrating 25 years of Cafcass
2. The journey animation.....
3. Cafcass Social Work Academy
4. Annual report overview
5. Strengthening practice
6. Revisions to child safeguarding policy

Part 3: People & Workforce

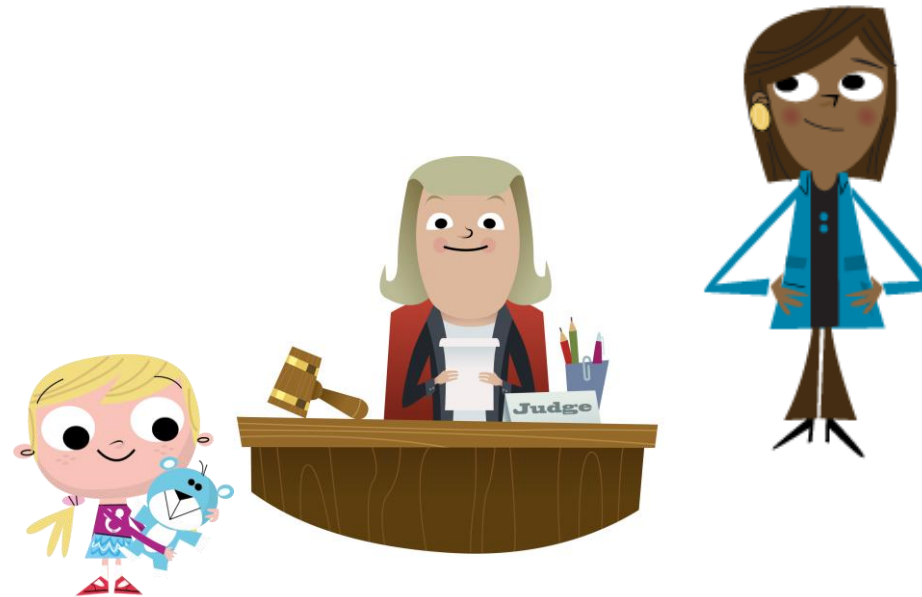
1. Workforce: overview and update
2. Colleague Survey Results 2026
3. Leadership priorities: Sickness Absence & Recruitment and Retention
4. Annual recognition – internal and external

Part 4: Priorities in the next period

1. An animation – Sustaining ambition for children
2. Publication of Strategic Plan 2026/2029
3. Child Focused Courts – overview and update
4. Together with children and families – our practice and people framework priorities for 2026 – 27



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Demand and performance headlines (1) : 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026: Q1



- **Between 1 April 2026 and 30 June 2026, Cafcass received 15,328 total new children's cases featuring 23,494 children.** This is an increase of **9.7%** (+1,357 children's cases / +1,915 children) compared to the previous year. These cases comprised:
- **Public law demand showing 3.3% higher** (+141 children's cases / +100 children). **Section 31 care applications have increased by 3.3%** (+101 Care Applications / +189 children). **Private law demand is 12.6% higher** (+1,216 children's cases / +1,815 children).
- **Overall, the number of private law reports ordered was +27.2%** higher than at the same point in the previous year. (+1,213 reports). While Section 7 reports increased by **7.6%** (+317), the remaining increase is attributed to the practice direction in Child Focused Courts that requires all or most children in private law proceedings are the subject of a child impact report.
- **Unspecified Proceedings: 403 Deprivation of Liberty Applications** (403 children). This represents an increase of **15.8%** (+55 DoL applications / +55 children) compared to the previous year.
- **251 new children's cases per working day received between 1 April 2026 and 30 June 2026**
- **Section 31 Care & Supervision proceedings averaged 38 weeks in Quarter 4 2025/2026** (-3 weeks compared to Quarter 4 2024/2025). In Private Law, **Work To First Hearing averaged 11 weeks** (no change) and **Work After First Hearing averaged 44 weeks** (-10 weeks).
- **29,150 open children's cases on 30 June 2026, featuring 46,645 children** - an increase of **+6.8%** (+1,866 more children's cases / +2,964 more children) compared to the end of June 2025.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Demand and performance headlines (2) : 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026: Q1

Regional variation



There is variation in operational service areas, in demand, open work and durations.

In quarter 1 of this reporting year (1 April and 30 June 2026) compared to the same period in last reporting year:

- **Public Law Demand:** Surrey and Sussex (A16) **+26.9%**, Tyneside and Northumbria (A1) and Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Thames Valley (A7) **+17.9%**. Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire (A18) **-15.1%**.
- **Private Law Demand:** Greater Manchester (A3) **+35.9%**; Surrey and Sussex (A16) and Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (A11) **+31.0%** and **+27.0%** respectively.
- **Open Children's Cases (Public Law):** Tyneside and Northumbria (A1) **+22.3%**, Kent (A17) **-14.3%**.
- **Open Children's Cases (Private Law):** Coventry, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire (A13) **+37.8%**, Kent (A17) **+27.7%**. In contrast, West Yorkshire (A5) **-16.6%**.
- **S31 Care and Supervision durations:** Increased significantly in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Rutland (A10), **+7 weeks**, with the percentage of S31 final decisions being made within 26 weeks down by **-16.8%**. Tyneside and Northumbrian (A1) **-16.9%** in final decisions being made within 26 weeks, and **+2 weeks** for S31 durations. Average durations in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset (A8) and Kent (A17) are both **-4 weeks**.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Demand and performance headlines (3) : 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026: Q1
Child Focused Courts



Revised Private Law Practice Direction (PD36Z), 'Child Focused Courts', is implemented in Birmingham, Bournemouth/Dorset, Portsmouth, Stoke, West Yorkshire, Wolverhampton and Worcester court areas:

- On 1 July 2026 there were **2,680** children (**1,762** cases) in Child Focused Court proceedings (representing **10.1%** of children in open private law proceedings). Between 1 April and 30 June, **c18%** of new private law demand (England) was in areas that are implementing the Child Focused Court model of practice
- In Q1, **1,216 Child Impact Reports** (Welfare assessment of the child / Harm and welfare assessment of the child) including updates were ordered to Child Focused Court areas.
- Average filing time for a Child Impact Report in which Cafcass provided **assessment for harm and/or welfare of the child(ren)** was **8.7 weeks**, +1.1 weeks compared to the previous year.
- Reports for **information, advice, and guidance:** average closed case durations were **11.1 weeks** (98 closed children's cases). Where this was an **assessment of harm and/or welfare of the child(ren)** and a Child Impact Report was filed, durations were **21.0 weeks** (494 closed children's cases).
- Between April and June 2026, 1,549 Child Focused Court cases closed involving 2,348 children. **Welfare or Harm and Welfare assessments were completed for 1,347 children, of whom 1,166 (86.6%) were seen in person**
- As at the end of June 2026, **the average caseload in Child Focused Court areas was 14.2**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Demand and performance headlines (4) : 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026: Q1



- **Social work caseloads have reduced compared to last year.** At the end of June 2026, for long-term teams the average (adjusted for full-time equivalent) is **17.5** compared to 18.0 at the end of June 2025). For work to first hearing teams in private law, the average is 34.5 excluding fixed fee compared to 29.7 in June 2025
- **In the last 3 months, 948 local audits were completed.** 93.9% of eligible Family Court Advisers had at least one local case file audit (undertaken for **925 Family Court Advisers** against 985 intended).
- A total of **7,547** (c12,100 children) Private Law children's cases **were closed where domestic abuse was a factor in the proceedings**, representing **58.4%** of all closures.
- Domestic abuse was identified and **at least one 16A (*an urgent risk assessment for the court*) was filed in 14% of Private Law children's cases.** This is a stable measure.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective One: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (1)



1) Reduce the number of children in long running open proceedings

- In the last year there has been an **11.8% decrease in children** (916 fewer children) in proceedings lasting more than 52 weeks. At the end of June 2026, there were **6,865 children** (4,088 children's cases) whose cases had been open for 52 weeks, of whom **1,511 children** (917 cases) had been in proceedings for 100 weeks or longer.

2) Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks (cases closed 1 January to 31 March 2026* duration data runs a quarter behind)

- Final decisions were reached in **32.9% of section 31 care proceedings in 26 weeks or less** (1,133 cases / 1,488 children). This is an increase of 1% (+18 cases / +62 children) compared to the same period in 2024/2025. Average durations for this period were **38 weeks**, which is -3 weeks lower compared to cases closed 1 January to 31 March 2025.
- For **Section 8 child arrangements proceedings**, **65.3% were closed in 26 weeks or less** (6,067 cases / 9,381 children). This is an increase of 3.8% (+916 cases / +1,501 children) compared to the same period in 2024/2025.
- Private law work completing at the first hearing took an average of **11 weeks** (no change)
- Where further work is ordered at the first hearing, this took an average of **44 weeks** (-10 weeks less compared to previous year)
- For **R16.4 proceedings** when a Children's Guardian is appointed, the average duration was 83 weeks (-12 weeks compared to previous year)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective One: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (2)



Filing and extensions (1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026):

- **35.2 working weeks (average) to file the final analysis in s31 care proceedings;** 4 working days fewer compared to the previous year*
- **4.8 working weeks (average) to file safeguarding letters;** 1 working day more compared to the previous year
- **14.0 working weeks (average) to file section 7 reports;** 1 working day less compared to the previous year
- **31.5% of Section 7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date;** +1.0%pts higher compared to the previous year

Family Justice System Objective Two: Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available (1)

1) Reduce the number of open children’s cases

- At the end of June 2026, **the overall number of open children’s cases (29,150 cases and 46,645 children) increased by 6.8%** (1,866 more children’s cases / 2,964 more children) compared to the end of June 2025. **This is an increase of 3.0% for open public law children’s cases** (+340 children’s cases /+478 children) **and an increase of 9.5% in private law children’s cases** (+1,526 children’s cases /+2,486 children).

2) Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work

- **12-month social work turnover is stable at 14.8%**
- Between 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026, 192 Family Court Advisers left Cafcass. 281 Family Court Advisers joined the organisation
- At 30 June 2026 (FTE-adjusted), **36.2% of Family Court Advisers working in public law / private law work after first hearing teams have caseloads of 20+;** a +0.6%pt increase compared to June 2025. **4.2% had caseloads of 25+ (decrease of -0.8%pts).**

**Children’s cases closed between 1 January and 31 March 2026 (Q4) compared to Q4 2024/2025*

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective Three: Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings (1)



Improve children's understanding and ability to engage in their proceedings:

- At the end of June 2026, **97.2% of children eligible (23,418 children) had a completed child engagement record, with 94.5% (22,751 children) seen in person.***
- For children in **public law proceedings**, **74.0% of audited files showed personalised letters had been sent and well written** (1 April to 30 June 2026) – a 0.3% increase on the previous year.
- For children in **private law proceedings**, **87.0% of audited files showed personalised letters had been sent and well written** (1 April to 30 June 2026) – a 4.0% increase on the previous year.
- Between 1 April to 30 June 2026 there has been **an increase in the percentage of public law children's files showing recommendations shared with children**, from 78.7% in the same period in 2025 to **80.5%**.
- Between 1 April to 30 June 2026 the percentage of **private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children has increased** from 68.5% in the same period in 2025 to **76.8%**.

**Children are required to be seen in person in open public law proceedings 15 working days from first lead allocation. Child engagement is required on open private law cases (CAP) at least 10 working before filing the first s7 report. In Rule 16.4 Proceedings, children are required to be seen in person within 15 working days of the Children's Guardian appointment.*

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective Three: Improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings (2)

Improve the quality & consistency of practice



- In the year to date (1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026), Cafcass received 1,496 reflections (feedback) from children and families in audit or Digital Feedback system. **871 of these (58.2%) were positive.** Feedback from families describing experiences that are less than good is shared with local managers for follow up and a decision as to whether a complaint or early resolution is required.
- Learning from complaints and feedback often relates to children's cases where domestic abuse is a factor. Concerns relate to the quality of assessment and analysis undertaken by FCAs with adults saying their experiences were not well understood or described clearly to the court. Communication, case management, and case recording are the three most commonly identified learning points from complaints, involving frustration about information not being shared, inaccurate information, and a lack of understanding of what is happening.
- Feedback is expected to be **incorporated in the form of adjusted improvement priorities** into regional plans and where there is a theme across more than one region, national priorities are adjusted so that the whole organisation is required to learn and report on progress.
- Of the 948 completed local audits in the year to date from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026, 64.3% of public law audits and 68.4% of private law audits were collaborative (this does not include NIS audits)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Domestic Abuse Practice Quality Audit February 2026 – further improvement



- **83.5%** (167 out of 200) of audited cases in this audit judged as **good or better** - an increase from 70% in the 2025 audit
- **Recognise and evidence children as victims of domestic abuse, so that all court reports explicitly identify, analyse and articulate the child's experience of domestic abuse and the associated impact on them**
- **Continue to share recommendations with all children and report their response in advice to the court**
- **Strengthen the quality and recording of supervision**
- **Secure the consistency in provision and requests for level two police checks**
- **Strengthen the analysis and recording of the harm and risk from domestic abuse as well as the direct impact on children**
- **Develop a work programme for Cafcass associates to enable access all new training and development**
- **Seek to understand the relevance of culture and heritage in assessments of harm and risk where domestic abuse is a factor in proceedings**



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Domestic Abuse Practice Quality Audit 2026 – improvement priorities 2026-27



Retain priority 2 of the National Improvement plan – Understanding the Impact of domestic abuse and **adjust** to include:

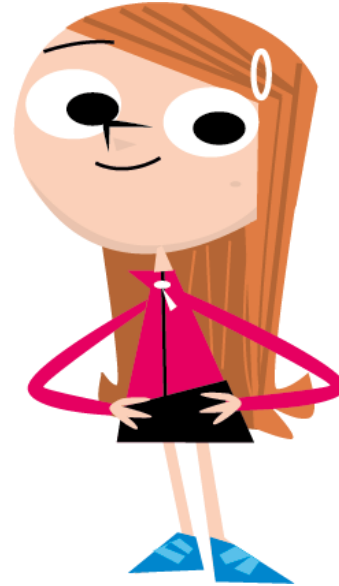
- **NEW:** Revised procedure for level 2 police checks (*new audit question*)
- **NEW:** Analysis of police information, relevance to harm and risk assessment is recorded and set out in advice to court
- **NEW:** Impact on the child as a victim of abuse is clear in reports and new templates are used consistently

National corporate support:

- Develop **new audit questions** and **new management information reports with baseline review at 6 months**
- Review and improve the **pace and commissioning consistency of level 1 and 2 police checks, including the provision of clear guidance for practitioners and managers where there are sexual and violent offences recorded**
- **Revise the Domestic Abuse policy** regarding when checks are to be sought in public law proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor, when an adult with a known, reported or investigated history of sexual harm makes an application AND action (including child protection) to be taken when adult parties have made ‘threats to kill’ a child, associated adult or professional
- Develop a new PRIVATE LAW measure in respect of the **% of children’s cases where there are recommendations to cease contact with adults who are a known or reported risk to children**



Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news: Celebrating 25 years of Cafcass

This year, Cafcass is celebrating its 25th anniversary of serving children and families – supporting **approximately 2.2 million children** in public or private law proceedings over the years.

16 June celebration live broadcast event with senior leaders and Cafcass colleagues across England. Special guests included Baroness Levitt, Ministry of Justice, Neal Barcoe, Director, Ministry of Justice, Baroness Barran, Founder SafeLives, Anthony Douglas, former Cafcass Chief Executive, Arran Poyser, writer and former social services inspector and members of the Family Justice Young People's Board



Part 2: And in other news: Celebrating 25 years of Cafcass (2)

Evening celebration at Royal Courts of Justice - President of the Family Division, Sir Stephen Cobb and Neal Barcoe, MOJ Director spoke in support of Cafcass - many guests in attendance - including 25 colleagues with 25 years of experience with us!

Continuing the celebrations and looking to the future:

- ✓ Many events through the year
- ✓ A series of anniversary posts on LinkedIn channel
- ✓ An internal all-colleague event in March 2027 to close the year, involving members of the Family Justice Young People's Board
- ✓ Local events across the country through 2026/2027



Celebrating 25 Years





Celebrating 25 years of Cafcass

Part 2: And in other news...

Cafcass Social Work Academy



In response to both increased demand and new social work capacity that is required for Child Focused Courts, our social work academy is to be expanded and led by the transformation team

What is changing?

- **A bigger, stronger intake** - Up to 50 newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) will join us in September. New colleagues will be managed within the Academy in their first year, building on the clear success of testing this year. ***NOTE: our plans address the new two-year ASYE programme from 2027***
- **Real practice, real impact** - NQSWs will still practice in operational service areas (OSAs), gaining day to day experience with new opportunities for Family Court Advisers to shape practice learning
- **Expert support built in** - Consultant Family Court Advisers will be seconded into the Academy to enhance practice development for both NQSWs and students
- **Consistency that counts** - A structured approach to supervision, assessment and development so that every NQSW receives effective and consistent support
- **Working together** - We will collaborate across the organisation to that the induction and introduction of new colleagues is effective and impressive
- **Training and ongoing professional development** – a new training offer that aligns to the new DfE early career standards for social workers



Annual report 2025 - 26



- ❑ In the year, we worked with **133, 672 children** in public and private law proceedings
- ❑ 91, 061 (59,147 cases) were new children
- ❑ **42, 788 in public** law proceedings (70% section 31 care applications)
- ❑ **90, 884 in private** law proceedings (79% live with or spend time applications) – 6081 children or 7% of private law in the year had their proceedings managed in the Child Focused Court Model
- ❑ **Demand was 7.2% higher** this year than in 2024 – 25. **259 children's cases per working day** compared to 230 in March 2025
- ❑ Public law demand was 4.7% higher (1284 children, 769 cases)
- ❑ Private law demand was 8.2% higher (4734 children, 3213 cases) . 18% of new demand in private law is in a Child Focused Court
- ❑ 1,483 Deprivation of Liberty Applications (1,480 children) - an increase of 22.0% (+267 applications)
- ❑ There were **46, 501 children in 29, 313 open cases** at the end of March 2026 – 6.5% higher than the previous year

Annual report 2025 – 26 (2)



- ❑ 79.3% of audited work that is nationally graded is judged to be good or better, compared to 73% in 2024 – 25 (876 cases audited and graded nationally). 2.1% judged as inadequate (18 cases and reduction of 2.4% on previous year)
- ❑ Attributed to clearer policies informed by learning and reflection, stronger management oversight, more supervision, targeting in challenged areas, leaders investing time in learning and associated improvement – all intentions at start of year

Practice overview

- ✓ Seeing children in person in 94% of cases
- ✓ Assessments and children's plans to required standard in 94% of cases
- ✓ Harm and risk of further harm well considered in 98% of cases
- ✓ 8/10 of children have **recommendations shared** with them (3% increase) and double number this year showed child's response in 61% of advice to court
- ✓ 82% **receiving letters** and 97% of reports describe what is **special and unique** about children
- ✓ **Management oversight** present in 88% with a 3% increase in supervision to 88% where it was needed
- ✓ 67% of **audits are collaborative** (7% increase) with a **22% increase (56%) in feedback from children and families**

Improvement priorities 2026- 27 – Practice



Seeing and engaging children:

- ☐ Timescales, throughout proceedings and spotlight under 2 years

The impact of domestic abuse :

- ☐ Criminal histories, analysis of information, impact on children as victims

Children's uniqueness:

- ☐ Impact of racist behaviour, understanding heritage, faith and neurodiversity

Assessing harm and risk:

- ☐ Connected children, accumulating harm, public law if risk remains at end proceedings

***RITBG – Requires improvement to be good*

Reducing delay:

- ☐ Management oversight, intervention and zero at 100 weeks

Practice Framework :

- ☐ Reviews of assessments and child's plans, new 'Together' priorities (slide 38)

Management and supervision:

- ☐ Pressure and availability of managers, plans overseen, Cafcass Associates, quality assurance full compliance and new starter oversight

Seeking and using feedback :

- ☐ Learning from alerts, increased feedback, learning plan to secure practice change

Impact of leaders:

- ☐ 24hr notifications, reduce RITBG** work, Deprivation of Liberty local spotlight, throughout and caseload monthly overview, core improvement in 1/4ly reviews

Reducing regional variation:

- ☐ Monthly Deputy Director review of improvement and progress

NEW: Sexual harm of children

- ☐ TBD

NEW: Care and supervision at home

- ☐ Rationales (under 10 years), mandatory supervision, seen at home with additional visits

Part 2: And in other news: Strengthening Practice Support



- October 2025 – **commitment to help practitioners to learn from effective practice** and to work more consistently at an improved standard.
- **Experienced managers and practitioners available to support others** through coaching and dedicated learning for up to 6 months
- Evidence so far (27 people participating): **practitioners becoming more confident** and assessments of harm and risk of future harm are more effective
- Principal is **‘no blame’** - an investment in people and their willingness to learn from peers and from skills and experience
- In **feedback**, a Family Court Adviser: *“I undertake a more holistic analysis of safeguarding information by drawing together parental accounts, police intelligence and historical safeguarding concerns. This has strengthened my ability to identify patterns of behaviour and assess harm and risk more robustly.”*
- **Improvement intention:** increase number of practitioners and managers taking part in ‘strengthening practice support’, including making the offer where any work is judged ‘requires improvement to be good’

‘Reflective, confident, supported, respected and held’



Part 2: And in other news.....

Revisions to Child Safeguarding Policy



Updates:

- Expectations regarding **Special Guardianship Orders and medical checks**
- **Clear guidance if an adult** with a known or reported sexual or violent offence seeks to spend time with a child
- **Added clarity** regarding safeguarding responsibility beyond proceedings, including auditing of closed cases
- **Specific action required** where there are 'threats to kill' made by an adult in proceedings
- Clarity regarding **the making of 16A risk assessments** and advice to court
- Clarity that **referral to local authority and 16A risk assessment** has regard for the child's current living or spending time arrangements and if harm is known or suspected that the **statutory responsibility to undertake a harm assessment is discharged by the local authority**
- **Guidance for repeat proceedings and** accumulating risk, including the use of case summaries and chronologies
- Clarity about referrals to Local Authority Designated Officers

Next steps for practice

- Policy Attestation 2 July 2026
- Local and national audit - regional and OSA results considered at mid and end year reviews
- Adjusted improvement priority in national and local plans



Part 3: People & Workforce



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce headlines : 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026



Headcount (permanent – including locum social workers)

- At 30 June 2026, there were **2,420 employed and locum colleagues** (2,207 FTE) (+114 FTE compared to last year)
- Of the **1,816 employed and locum social workers** (1,638 FTE), **1377** (1,310 FTE) were FCAs (+67 FTE compared to last year) and **439** (328 FTE) were **social work managers** or in other social work roles
- There were **604** (569 FTE) **employed and locum corporate and business services colleagues**. **Locum usage was 4.1% in social work (75 locums) and 2.8% in Corporate and Business Services (17 locums)**

Turnover

- **Social work turnover is stable at 14.8%** (30 June 2026), though this is marginally higher (+0.3%) compared to the same period last year
- **New colleagues joining** as Family Court Advisers however continue to exceed colleagues leaving Cafcass
- Corporate and Business Services turnover has also decreased to **9.6%** as of 30 June 2026 (-0.7% compared to last year)

Wellbeing and looking after our people

- **Sickness absence across the organisation has continued to reduce**
- At 30 June 2026, average working days lost (AWDL) **due to sickness in Social Work teams was 13.4 days** (a reduction from 16.2 days at its peak, but remaining higher than last year, +1.0 days)
- **Corporate and Business Services average working days lost has also reduced to 9.6 days** (-2.0 days less than last year)
- Both remain **corporate and leadership improvement priorities**



Part 3: People & Workforce

Leadership priorities: Sickness absence, recruitment and retention



Vacancy Position (FTE)

- At 30 June 2026, there were **166 social work vacancies**, of which 47 have locum social workers covering
- 101 of the vacancies had a new joiner planned against them
- There were 33 known future leavers and 71 new positions needed to implement the Child Focused Court model
- **Resultant recruitment demand is therefore 169 social workers**
- **Our recruitment pipeline** for social work roles included 110 candidates who have applied for a role
- We are also appointing (internally) a number of **Consultant Family Court Advisers** – *the equivalent of senior social work practitioners in a local authority (a two year career promotion grade)*

Recruitment:

- Priority continues for **A7 (Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire), A16 (Surrey and Sussex), A15B (London Private Law)** and Child Focused Court areas (specifically **A12 Birmingham, Black Country and Staffordshire** and **A1 Tyneside and Northumbria**)
- Progress is reviewed weekly with Directors - addressing targeted recruitment activity, professional joining incentives, live attraction events and reward benchmarking

Sickness Absence:

- **Monthly sickness reviews** continue to be led by Heads of Practice with HR business partners and continued targeted work in high impacting areas



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce: Colleague Survey 2026



- **76% of colleagues responded** to our colleague survey for March 2026
- **This represents an engagement measure of 72% - better than industry benchmark**
- **6 engagement themes** - *Information Sharing, Empowerment (Professional Judgement), Job Satisfaction, Instilling Pride, Wellbeing and Reward and Recognition*
- Colleagues see a **strong commitment to our ambition and values**, we are making **positive organisational improvements, new colleagues feel welcomed** and well-equipped and there is **deep understanding** of our Together practice framework. **Managers are supportive and kind. Workloads are and feel high. A strong commitment to improvement means practice change is regular – this is challenging.**
- Senior leaders are now holding **local team engagement discussions** to identify and agree areas of improvements. Chief Executive and Directors will take lead responsibility for **4 national priorities**:
 - Finding solutions to our demand pressure and the impact on social work caseloads
 - Balancing the need to continuously improve with the time to understand what is changing
 - Benchmark our reward terms and review flexible working arrangements
 - Review and improve professional development opportunities



Part 3: People & Workforce

Annual recognition: Internal and external



- **Annual Recognition Event - 25 June 2026**
- **190 nominations** highlighting how our values are part of the culture at Cafcass. In addition, **37 winners from monthly employee nominations** were considered
- **Recognising and celebrating** colleagues who have achieved 25 years service and the fantastic contributions of finalists across award categories:
 - ✓ **Individual categories:**
 - ✓ Holding Children and Families at the heart of our practice
 - ✓ Always looking for the strengths and risks
 - ✓ Believing in respectful relationships
 - ✓ Wanting to know more about you and what is important in your life
 - ✓ Decision making is clear and reasoned
 - ✓ Promoting Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
 - ✓ Supporting Stars (*Corporate and Business Services colleagues*)
 - ✓ People Manager of the Year
 - ✓ **Team categories**
 - ✓ Greatest impact for children and families (*Social Work Teams*)
 - ✓ Greatest Innovation
 - ✓ We couldn't do it without you (*Corporate and Business Services Teams*)



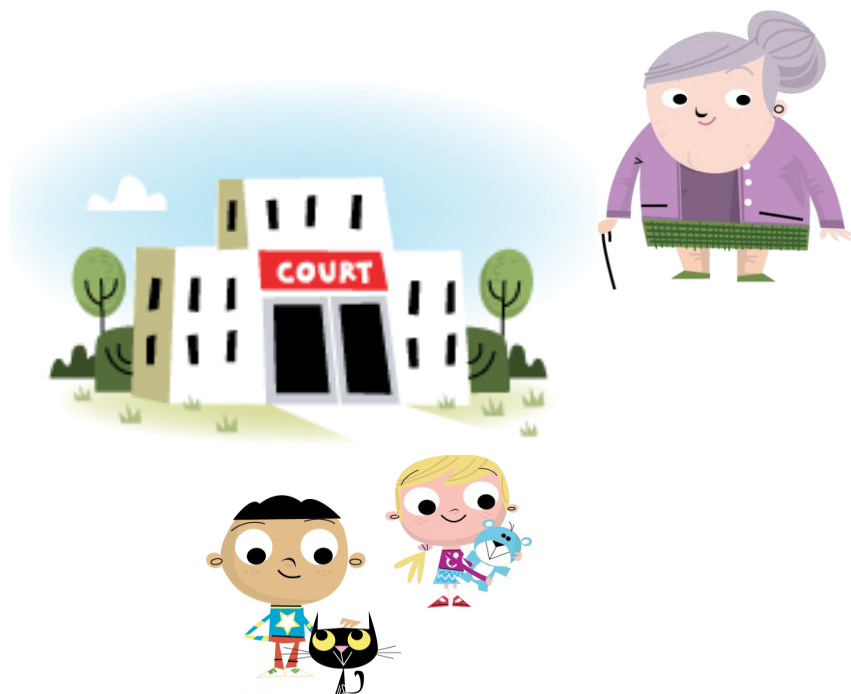
Part 3: People & Workforce

Annual recognition: Internal and external (2)

- **Celebrating colleagues** whose contributions received **external recognition**
- **Faye Kirby, Winner of the Exceptional Children and Families Social Worker Award** at the Stars of Children and Young People Awards 2026
- **Kelly Smith, Finalist** in the Frontline Awards and the National Children and Young People Awards and **Winner of the Outstanding Achievement Award** at the Ministry of Justice Awards 2026



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Publication of strategic plan 2026 – 2029 – 21 May



View our Cafcass Strategic Plan 2026-2029

Sustaining ambition for children

Our vision: For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family court, we want to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time.

Our five values: Fairness, Respect, Partnership, Safety, and Ambition.

Our four cornerstones: Fairness, Respect, Partnership, and Safety.

Our three pillars: Practice, People, and Partners.

Our nine priorities: 1. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 2. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 3. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 4. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 5. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 6. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 7. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 8. Enhance the quality of the family court experience, 9. Enhance the quality of the family court experience.

Child focused courts: The family court is the heart of the family justice system. It is the place where the family court judge sits to hear cases and make decisions. It is the place where the family court judge sits to hear cases and make decisions. It is the place where the family court judge sits to hear cases and make decisions.

- **Full and shorter version of the plan:** Including one-page visual summaries
- **Short animation for children and families** (*coming up in a moment*)

Both are available on website:

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/about-us/our-strategic-priorities>

Coming up:

- **Role specific guides:** Short, visual aids for children and families; practitioners; practice managers; corporate and business services colleagues, and partners.
- **Internal leadership packs:** to support managers as they lead and use the strategy in everyday practice



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Strategic plan 2026 – 2029: animation for children and families



Our plan to help children
who are involved in
family proceedings

2026-2029

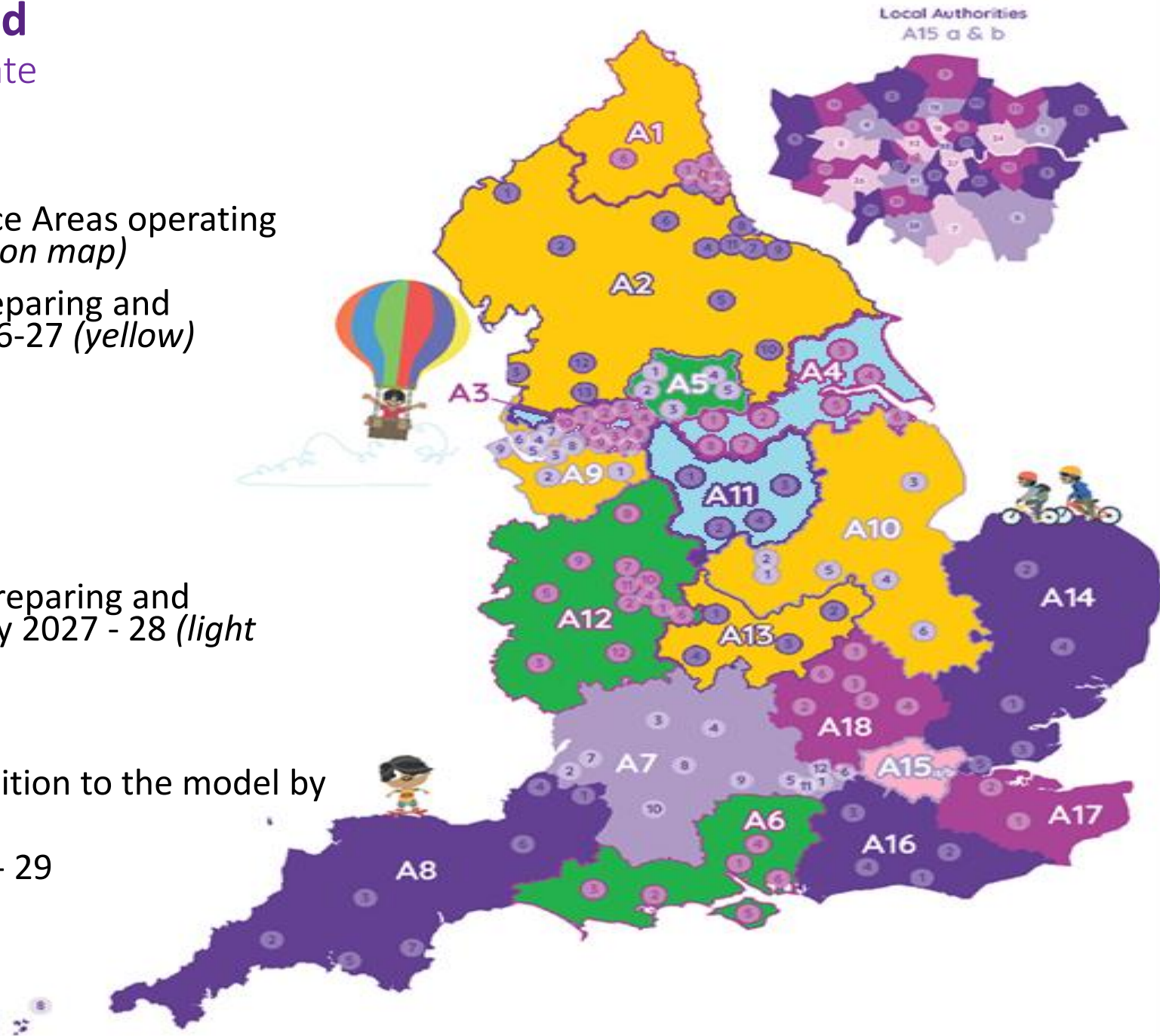
www.cafcass.gov.uk



Part 4 – Priorities in the next period

Child Focused Courts – overview and update

- Currently there are three Operational Service Areas operating Child Focus Courts – A5, A6 and A12 (*green on map*)
- A further four Operational Service Areas preparing and transitioning to operating this model in 2026-27 (*yellow*)
 - A13 – October 2026
 - A1, A2 and A9 – November 2026
 - A10 – January 2027
- A further three Operational Service Areas preparing and transitioning to operating this model in early 2027 - 28 (*light blue*)
 - A3, A4 and A11 – April 2027
- Preparations begin in October 2026 to transition to the model by October 2027 – A15 (London) (*light pink*)
- Remaining areas will transition during 2028- 29



Part 4 – Priorities in the next period

Child Focused Courts – what is different?



One report, one hearing

No safeguarding letters or First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment (FHDRA)

Reduced duplication in reporting

Reduced delay - Report in 40 days and fewer hearings

Increased child participation

More children are being seen

Children's views into the hearing – the child impact report is about their experience of harm and conflict

CIRs include a photo (with consent)

Increased multi-disciplinary working

Case Progression Officers

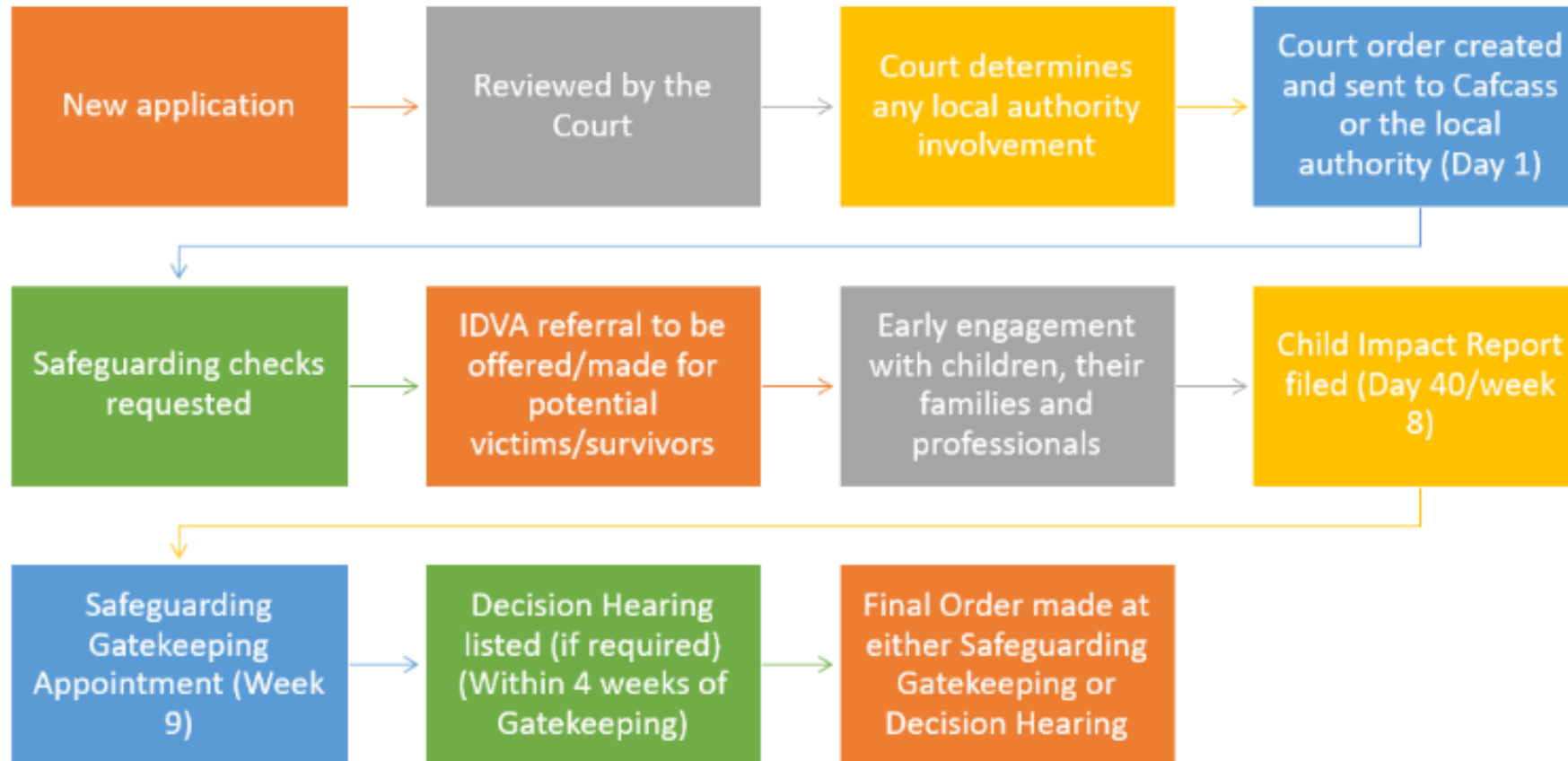
Local authority involved early when the threshold for harm and risk of further harm is met and/or they have worked recently with the child

Independent domestic violence advocates (IDVA) offer services



Part 4 – Priorities in the next period

Child Focused Courts – how proceedings work



Part 4 – Priorities in the next period

Child Focused Courts – what can partners expect?

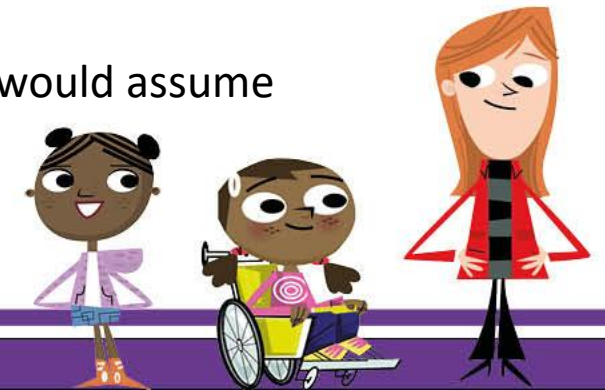


What is the role of the Court Case Progression Officer?

- Court Case Progression Officers are part of HMCTS' administration teams, offering a direct link to the court. They liaise closely with legal advisers and judges, can chase for information and help schedule hearings

How do we work with Local Authority Children's Social Care services in this new model?

- The court identifies which agency (Cafcass or the local authority) is responsible for information gathering and assessment on receipt of the application. Where Children's Social Care are or have been involved with the family in the last twelve weeks, they are the agency directed to file the Child Impact Report. Where the local authority is completing the Child Impact Report, Cafcass shares information relating to any previous involvement and connected children
- If the local authority starts working with a family during the course of Cafcass enquiry or assessment, the responsibility of the Child Impact Report would transfer to the local authority. If Cafcass has already completed work with the family, particularly seeing the child/ren, then Cafcass would file a Child Impact Report setting out what is known about the experiences of the child at that time.
- Formal recommendations would **not** be included in the report because the local authority would assume responsibility for advising the court on what is safe and in the child's best interests



Part 4 – Priorities in the next period

Child Focused Courts – what can partners expect (2)?



Will local authorities still complete Section 7 reports or only Child Impact Reports?

- Local authorities will complete Child Impact Reports. Section 37 directions also continue to be an option available to the Court. Whether the work is ordered to Cafcass or the local authority, the Child Impact Report must be filed within 40 working days

How will hearings change? Will there still be FHDRAs? Will Family Court Advisers still attend court?

- There will no longer be First Hearing and Dispute Resolution Appointments (FHDRAs), Dispute Resolution Appointments (DRAs) or final hearings in Child Focused Courts. All proceedings have a Safeguarding Gatekeeping Appointment following the filing of the Child Impact Report. Parents/carers and Cafcass do not attend these hearings. A final order can often be made at these appointments. If the proceedings cannot conclude at this appointment, a Single Decision Hearing will be listed to make a final order. Family Court Advisers will only attend a Decision Hearing if required to give evidence.

What is the role of the Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) service?

- Each region has IDVA provision, supporting adult victim survivors of domestic abuse before, during and after proceedings. Adult victims may consent to FCAs making a referral to the IDVA service provider who completes an assessment and summary which is shared with Cafcass as information to be considered in the advice. The IDVA summary is appended with the Cafcass report to court.



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

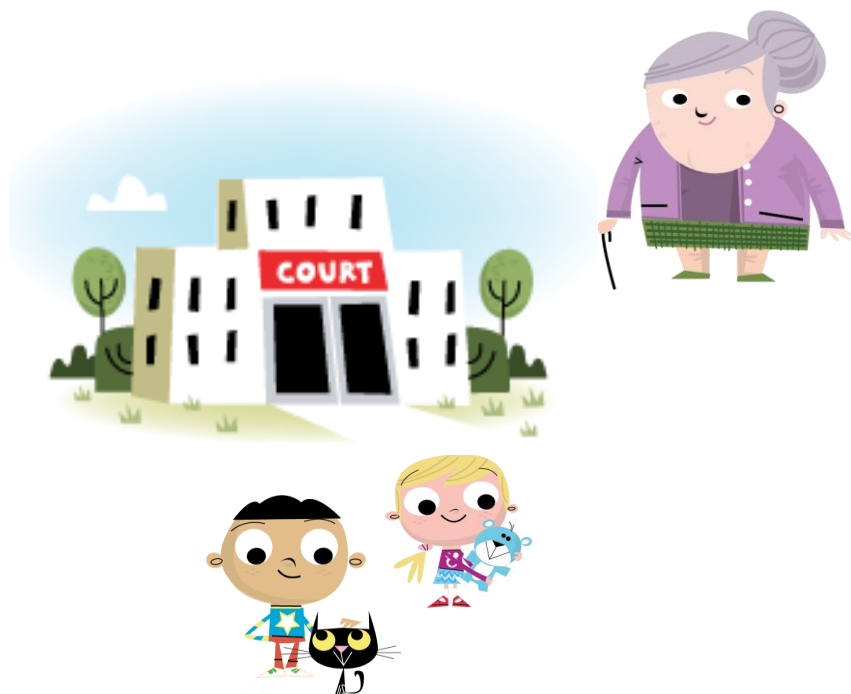
Together with children and families – our practice and people framework priorities for 2026 – 27



- Strengthening **effective multi-agency relationships** with all professionals involved in children's proceedings
- Analyse, understand and present to the court, the likely **impact of Cafcass advice on the adults involved with children**, particularly where domestic abuse is a factor in the proceedings
- Further strengthen quality assurance to maintain a clear focus on **evidencing the impact on children of their experiences**
- **Reassessing harm and the risk of further harm throughout proceedings** and in repeat proceedings
- Recognising **accumulating risk in longer proceedings**
- Address the impact of delay on children and **see them in accordance with risk and need throughout proceedings**
- Improve the **identification and analysis of the risks of sexual harm** from adults who are involved in children's lives, particularly for babies and younger children
- Strengthening the **analysis of harm and risk of further harm in connection with criminal histories and previous proceedings.**
- Continue to learn about and use **anti-racist practice in all engagements with children**, families and carers, making sure that **practice is respectful, inclusive and takes account of what is happening or has happened in advice to the court.**



Discussion and questions.....



Annex: Cafcass regions and operational service areas

- A1 – Tyneside and Northumberland
- A2 – Durham, Teesside, North Yorkshire, Cumbria and Lancashire
- A3 – Greater Manchester
- A4 – South Yorkshire and Humberside
- A5 – West Yorkshire
- A6 – Hampshire, Dorset and Isle of Wight
- A7 – Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Thames Valley
- A8 – Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.
- A9 – Cheshire and Merseyside
- A10 – Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Rutland
- A11 – Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire
- A12 – Birmingham, the Black Country, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire and Herefordshire
- A13 – Coventry and Northampton
- A14 – Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk
- A15a – London Public Law
- A15b – London Private Law
- A16 – Sussex and Surrey
- A17 – Kent and Medway
- A18 – Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire

