



Cafcass Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday 29 February 2024, 11.00 to 12.30
Zoom
APPROVED

Present

Sally Cheshire, Chair
Catherine Doran, Board member and Chair of the People Committee
Catharine Seddon, Board member
Dal Babu, Board member
Helen Jones, Board member and Chair of ARAC
Joanna Nicolas, Board member (Co-opted)
Mandy Jones, Board Member
Peter Fish, Board member and Chair of the PLIP Committee
Rohan Sivanandan, Board member
Steven Cox, Board member

In attendance - Cafcass

Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive Officer
Julie Brown, Director of Resources
Jack Cordery, National Director of Operations
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy
Sarah Parsons, Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker
Adam Bowles, Chief People Officer (attended virtually)
Merryn Hockaday, Head of Communications
Shabana Jaffar, Head of Legal Services
Nicola Blakebrough, Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services)

In attendance – MoJ/FJYPB

Mark, FJYPB
Luke Taylor, Ministry of Justice

Apologies

Marie Gittins, Deputy Director of Operations
Eileen Munro, Board member and Deputy Chair
Rebecca Anderson, Model Office Programme Manager

1. Welcome from the Chair

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Board meeting and noted apologies. She welcomed stakeholders and members of the public who were observing the meeting by Zoom.

1.2 Declarations of interest

No new declarations were made.

1.3 Minutes, actions, and matters arising

Minutes from the previous meeting held on 8 November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

2. Family Justice Young People's Board Report

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) representative provided an update on the commissions completed in 2023, which amounted to 501 in total, a 20% increase on the previous year. The FJYPB and Cafcass work plan was shared with emphasis on the continued work to raise awareness of the impact of delay in the family courts on children and young people. Priorities for 2024 were noted, which included improving children and young people's participation in their proceedings, continuing to raise awareness of the impact of delay on children and young people, continued focus on the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people as victims, and promoting the uniqueness of neurodivergent/multi diverse disabilities.

The Chair commended the success and achievements of the FJYPB and asked colleagues to note the date of the next Voice of the Child Conference which would be held on 25 July 2024. The Board noted that the FJYPB was involved in helping to develop training for magistrates.

3. Reports from Committees

Committee Chairs were invited to provide a brief overview of recent discussions at Committee meetings held since the last Board meeting to support the respective draft minutes circulated with meeting papers.

Public Law Improvement Programme Committee

The Chair of the Committee noted that the last meeting had been held on 29 January 2024 and had received reports on the outcome of learning reviews and progress of the 5 remaining workstreams within the programme. The Chair of the Committee reported that reducing delay for children was at the heart of the programme and it was positive to see a culture focused on reducing that delay. The Committee was planning to formally close in September 2024 following a review of improvements delivered.

People Committee

The Chair of the People Committee reported that they had last met on 20 November 2023 and had received reports from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group and had discussed findings from the staff survey. Reports on workforce and updates regarding current issues and trends influencing and affecting the Cafcass workforce during 2023 were presented together with updates on recruitment and retention.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reported that they had last met on 4 December 2023 and had reviewed the risk report and agreed risk appetite statements. A report on the number of incidents or threats of abuse or violence against staff by individuals who use the Cafcass service was presented and discussed. An update on the quantum of inaccurate court orders received by Cafcass was reported along with the information assurance bi-annual report.

Performance and Quality Committee

The Committee last met on 11 December 2023 and had focused on 2 key areas: learning from feedback, complaints and significant incidents, and taking stock of domestic abuse practice and

family law proceedings. The Board asked that the terminology of domestic abuse in relation to children and young people be clear so there was no misunderstanding.

4. Governance Reports

4.1. Finance

The Director of Resources reported that Cafcass' financial position was stable and in line with budget and that the capital funding to complete work in the London office had been received. It was noted that there was an approved overspend on the pay cost arising from the additional £1500 non-consolidated pay award earlier in the year.

4.2. Workforce

The Board noted the Workforce Report which is scrutinised in detail by the People Committee. It was noted that some geographic areas remain hard to recruit to but, overall, the headcount remained static. The number of managers had increased because of the plans to support management oversight and supervision. Long-term sickness absence in social workers had risen and the main reasons were noted as non-work related mental ill health. The Board noted that mental ill health was an issue across the sector and that team risk assessments on stress were in place along with a range of self-directed and management referrals for support.

4.3. Risk

The Board noted the Risk Report which set out the key strategic and organisational risks together with mitigating actions and controls and is scrutinised by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at their quarterly meetings. The risk environment remained generally static in the reported period. Despite strong mitigation being in place, the risk profile remained high, and this was predominantly due to capacity within Cafcass and the family justice system, dependencies between risks and the dependency with partners which impacts Cafcass' control over the likelihood of the risk occurring. The Director of Resources reported that the management of risk had achieved an opinion of substantial assurance in its internal audit earlier in the year.

5. Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23

The Director of Resources reported that the Cafcass Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23 had been laid before Parliament on 14 December 2023 and published on gov.uk on the same date having been issued with an unqualified audit certificate from the National Audit Office.

6. Chief Executive Officer's Report

The Chief Executive Officer and members of the Corporate Management Team provided key updates from the accompanying presentation covering demand, performance and operational practice; updates on significant successes; people and workforce; and highlights of improvements planned in the next period.

Part 1: Demand, Performance and Operational Practice

The Chief Executive Officer reported that demand had reduced slightly, however there were still around 221 new children's cases received each working day. There were 49,000 children in open and active cases and the duration of children's cases remained high. In public law, 4,000 children had been in cases that had been open for over 1 year and in private law there were 7,223 children in proceedings lasting longer than a year.

The National Director of Operations noted that social work is a challenging and complex job and Cafcass is a listening organisation. Caseloads are important and these were being reduced. Prioritisation had been successfully deactivated as planned in Greater Manchester and the

Norfolk/Norwich court areas. Mid-year reviews had been undertaken and provided evidence of further overall progress and improvement in the quality of practice and performance, with the gaps being narrowed in most areas.

Part 2: And in other news

The Director of Strategy updated on the work to improve processes related to children's complaints and ensure learning is prioritised. The Children's Complaints Policy had been drafted and would be published shortly. The Board were informed that the commissioning of contracts to run services for Improving Child and Family Arrangements programmes was progressing.

The Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker reported that the President of the Family Division and Cafcass had agreed to introduce a new approach to practice for 16.4 appointments, building on the success of the Cafcass Positive Parenting Programme. Changes had been made to the Child Safeguarding Policy based on consolidated learning from feedback, practice quality audits, significant incidents, child record and learning reviews. A short film was shared with attendees which had been developed for partners to explain the Together Framework.

Part 3: People & Workforce

The Chief People Officer reported on the next steps following the recent staff survey and six national priority areas would be progressed with senior sponsorship.

The Director of Resources reported progress against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives and performance against priorities.

Part 4: Priorities in the Next Period

The Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker reported that there would be continued focus on improving children's experience in private law proceedings. In partnership with the Ministry of Justice, Cafcass and other partners would be piloting a new model for private law and Cafcass' change programme would align with these 'Pathfinders' as well as delivering a range of other smaller internal pilots designed to find out if early benefits could be achieved.

The Director of Strategy reported that the full version of the Strategic Plan 2023-26 – *Ambitious for Children* had been published and supporting success measures had been drafted.

7. Close and Any Other Business

The Chair closed the meeting and thanked all those who contributed and attended.

Minutes approved by the Board Chair, Sally Cheshire, 24.04.24

