



**Cafcass Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday 24 April 2024, 10:30-12:30**  
**Cafcass, 70 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8NH**

**Present**

Sally Cheshire, Chair  
Eileen Munro, Board member and Deputy Chair  
Catherine Doran, Board member  
Catharine Seddon, Board member  
Dal Babu, Board member  
Helen Jones, Board member  
Joanna Nicolas, Board member (Co-opted)  
Mandy Jones, Board Member  
Peter Fish, Board member  
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  
Marie Gittins, Deputy Director of Operations  
Adam Bowles, Chief People Officer  
Shabana Jaffar, Head of Legal Services  
Merryn Hockaday, Head of Communications  
Rebecca Anderson, Model Office Programme Manager  
Nicola Blakebrough, Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services)  
Julia Dark, Head of CEO Office  
Peter Mitchell, Executive Assistant  
Volker Buck, Head of National Commissioning  
Holly Earthey, Corporate Officer (Secretariat Services)

**In attendance MoJ/FJYPB**

Luke Taylor, MoJ  
Olivia, FJYPB

**1. Welcome from the Chair**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised that due to technical difficulties the open meeting could not be live streamed as intended. The meeting presentations would be made available on the website.

**1.1 Welcome and apologies**

No apologies were received.

## **1.2 Declarations of interest**

No new declarations of interest were received.

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

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 29 February 2024 were approved as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

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

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) representative provided an update on the work of the FJYPB and advised that a variety of new members had joined. The action plan and priorities were presented, and priorities included improving children and young people's participation in proceedings; continuing to raise awareness of the impact of delay; continued focus on the impact of domestic abuse to children and young people and expanding the focus to all types of abuse and harmful parenting; and promoting the uniqueness of children and young people with neurodiverse/multi-diverse disabilities.

Members of the FJYPB had visited Denmark to discuss the work of the FJYPB as Denmark was considering implementing a similar model. Members had also met with David Johnson, MP and Minister for Children, Families and Well-being with regards to the impact of delayed proceedings and listening to feedback from children and families.

It was noted that the Voice of the Child Conference would take place on Thursday 25 July 2024 and Board members were encouraged to attend.

The Chair thanked the FJYPB representative for the presentation and to the FJYPB for their contribution. It was acknowledged that the FJYPB were very influential both internally and externally and positively promoted Cafcass' Together Values.

## **3. Reports from Committees**

Committee Chairs provided a brief update of discussions at the most recent Committee meetings.

### **Public Law Improvement Programme Committee**

The last meeting had been held on 11 April 2024 and was the penultimate meeting of the Committee. Ahead of the final meeting in October 2024, Committee members had requested a closure report incorporating a stocktake of all the workstreams of the programme, detailing the successes and those workstreams that would be continuing. Several workstreams had already completed and were incorporated into business as usual and would be monitored by the existing quality and assurance processes. The Committee had received a report on the completion of the review of Deprivation of Liberty applications.

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

The Chair of the Committee reported that the last meeting had been held on 14 March 2024 and had received updates on security issues and had noted the completion of the Public Bodies Review assessment stage. The Committee had considered risk and had received the annual business assurance report together with an update on compliance against functional standards and the counter fraud strategy.

### **Performance and Quality Committee**

The Board noted that the Committee had last met on 21 March 2024. The level of open children's cases had decreased to pre-pandemic levels however were still high in some areas. The number of children in proceedings over 52 weeks was discussed and noted that this equated to a large percentage of a child's life considering their age. Direct contact with children continued to improve. The average caseload per social worker had been discussed and staff turnover was noted as similar to but still lower than local authorities.

### **People Committee**

The next meeting was planned for 31 May 2024 and Rohan Sivanandan would take over as Chair of the Committee. The focus would be on recruitment and retention of staff. It was confirmed that health and safety issues and guidance would fall under the remit of the People Committee with the Board maintaining oversight of the strategic priority as required.

### **Private Law Improvement Programme Committee**

The Board noted that the first meeting of the Committee had been held on 9 April 2024 and had reviewed the seven workstreams, which excluded Pathfinder. The meeting addressed the scope and governance role of the Committee, and this would be further addressed with format options for future reporting. It was noted that the programme was interlinked with Pathfinder, however the private law improvement programme was an internal Cafcass programme. As the Pathfinder pilot evolved, the role of the Committee and Cafcass-wide governance with respect to our work in private law would be revisited and updated.

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

The Chief Executive Officer and members of the Corporate Management Team provided an update on four specific areas: practice; improvement plans; people and workforce; and future priorities.

### **Part 1 – Demand, performance and operational practice**

The Chief Executive Officer reported on the Ofsted inspection and the judgement of outstanding in all inspection categories. The scale of the achievement was recognised by the Board who thanked those staff directly and indirectly involved for their contribution. The rating was acknowledged as both an excellent achievement for Cafcass and for the children and families with whom it works with. The Board were informed of next steps that included alignment of strategic priorities, success measures, improvement priorities and recovery ambitions.

The National Director of Operations reported on the connectivity between strategic priorities, improvement and performance and reporting. The strategic plan defined all priorities and this was supported by 'Listening to children - Lighting the way' which encompassed the two improvement plans (for operational and corporate/business services), measuring success and assessing and reporting on performance.

The Chief Executive Officer updated on demand, noting that that during the year 2023-24 Cafcass had worked with 137,347 children which was a 4.3% decrease on the previous year. 36% of children were under 5 years of age and 1 in 10 were under 1 year at the point of application. In terms of new children coming into the service there had been 86,419. It was noted that there hadn't been a significant change in demand with a 1.2% drop in public law and 0.4% in private law. This translated to 223 applications received per working day. There were nearly 50,000 children currently in open work and in public law 9,828 were in proceedings

over 26 weeks and 12,462 in private law. Delay was now a Family Justice Board priority. Positively caseloads had reduced, and the number of children seen was at 98%, and of those 93% seen in person, which reflected the relationship-based practice of our Together framework.

The Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker updated the Board on the auditing process within the National Improvement Service. Three practice quality audits had been completed in 2023-24 (involving 600 children's cases). In addition, 8 Performance Board Quality & Impact Audits were undertaken (involving c320 additional children's cases) and one annual National Management Quality Audit. The Board noted the overview of findings.

## **Part 2 – And in other news...**

The Head of National Commissioning provided an update on the Planning Together for Children course which had replaced the Separated Parents Information Programme in April 2023. 17,500 parents had completed the course against an original forecast of 25,000. 11,643 (89%) of parents who provided course feedback said they had a clearer understanding of the impact of conflict on their children. A follow up call had been introduced and was made to a percentage of families who completed the course 6 to 8 weeks after completion. 522 of the 2323 parents (22.4%) contacted had said they had reached a parenting agreement.

The Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker provided an update on improving practice where domestic abuse was known or alleged. A specific domestic abuse practice policy would be introduced to support our ongoing improvement work in this area and to crystallise learning from audits and significant incidents. The secondment of the SafeLives colleagues had been extended to July 2025. A domestic abuse practice reference group had been introduced and there were domestic abuse champions in each Operational Service Area. The Board noted that domestic abuse remained one of the 5 practice priorities with leadership through the Operational Service Area Improvement Plans reflecting these priorities.

The Board noted that there had been an increase in 16A risk assessments submitted to court and referrals made to local authorities. Most courts were responding well to these and Cafcass were working to ensure that the 16A risk assessments were giving advice to the court about the assessed risk, and that referrals to the Local Authority were followed up and escalated where necessary.

The Chair of the Board asked the MoJ representative to note that within the Pathfinder programme there was a grey area that meant there was an increased risk for urgent cases before proceedings reached the court and that the MoJ should consider where that risk sits and how consistent decision making could be ensured.

## **Part 3 – People and workforce**

The Board were informed that the 12-month turnover for social workers had increased to 15.1% and remained high, although below Local Authority averages. Regional variations existed with challenges to recruit and retain people in specific parts of the country. The vacancy rate was positive at 7.5% for social workers compared to the Local Authority figure of 18.9%. There had been an increase in sickness levels, however this was true across all industries. The Board noted that the recognition awards would take place on 13 May 2024 and the leadership conference on 26 June 2024.

With regards to health and safety, learning had been taken from recent security incidents and through the staff survey and this was a new strategic priority, which included engaging with

senior partners to work together to improve and prioritise the safety of staff and colleagues working in family justice.

The revised Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy has been approved through the Corporate Management Team and would be presented to the next People Committee following consultation with the chairs of the staff networks. Evaluation of the Talent Pathway Pilot had been completed and work was underway to re-commission the programmes for 2024-25.

#### **Part 4 – Priorities in the next period**

It was confirmed that Pathfinder would launch on 28 May 2024 in Birmingham and Solihull in partnership with the MoJ, HMCTS, Judiciary and local authorities, and would build upon the previous pilots in Dorset and North Wales. The MoJ representative advised that the evaluation of the Dorset pilot was in three parts – process, finance model and feedback - and this would be available at the end of the calendar year. Understanding from the Birmingham and South- East Wales pilots would take place first to understand how they had operated and the MoJ would liaise with partners to develop the model following feedback and assessment. The Chair advised the MoJ representative that whilst Cafcass was committed to Pathfinder it should be recognised that Cafcass held a significant amount of risk, and this would be discussed with the MoJ and family justice partners as the pilots progressed.

### **5. Governance Reports**

#### **5.1 Finance**

The Board noted the finance report and the small underspend against the delegated revenue budget in the last financial year, and that formal allocation of budget for the current financial was still awaited.

#### **5.2 Performance**

The Board noted the Performance Report and that key details had been discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

#### **5.3 Risk**

The Director of Resources reported that the risk environment generally remained static however at a significant level. There was a strong focus on risk and mitigation, however the risk profile was expected to remain high, which was predominantly due to dependencies within the family justice system and where risks were not solely in Cafcass's control.

### **6. Close and any other business**

The Chair thanked those for attending.

**Minutes approved by the Board Chair, Sally Cheshire, 11.07.24**

*S Cheshire*