

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team
Overview

1 May 2025



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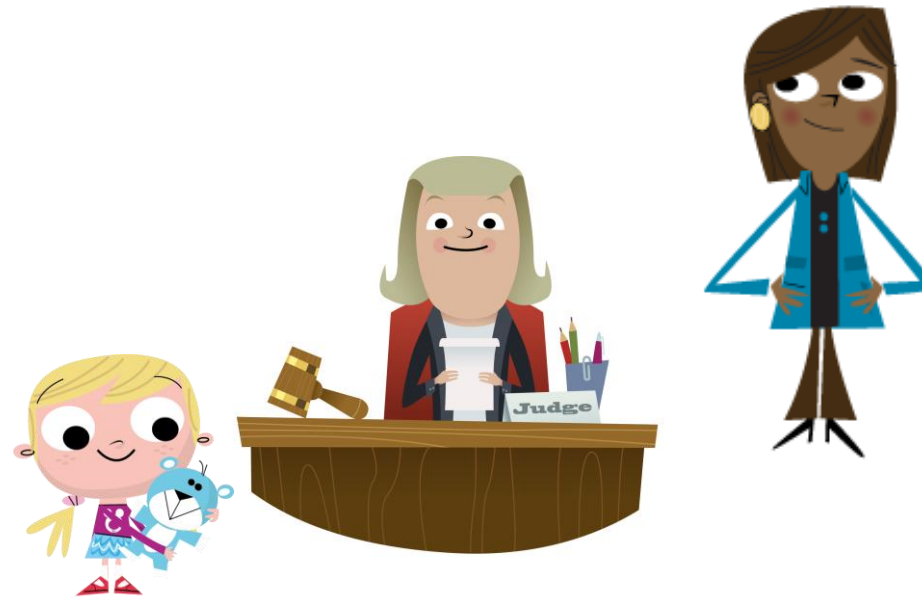
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Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

January – March 2025: New demand and performance headlines



- **55,377, total new children's cases featuring 85,272 children during the full financial year (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025); a decrease of 0.3% (-167 children's cases / -840 children). These cases comprised:**
 - **Public law demand 0.7% higher (+117 children's cases / -151 children). *Section 31 care applications have decreased by 0.4% (-46 Care Applications / -205 children)***
 - **Private law demand 0.7% lower (-284 children's cases / -689 children) for which there were, 18,187 new section 7 reports ordered (inclusive of 5,116 addendum reports) - a decrease of 9.1% (-1,815 reports) AND an associated decrease of 891 addendum reports (-14.8%)**
 - **221 new children's cases received on average per working day compared to 225 during 2023/24**
- **Regional variation remains, A10 (Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Rutland) and A15B (Greater London Private Law) have seen the largest regional increases in new demand (+4.3% / +3.7% respectively) whereas A5 (West Yorkshire) and A9 (Cheshire and Merseyside) have the most notable proportionate decreases (-7.0% / -4.9% respectively)**
- **Social work caseloads have reduced compared to last year.** At the end of March 2025, for long-term teams the average (adjusted for full-time equivalent) is **18.2** (18.8 at the end of March 2024). For work to first hearing teams in private law, the average is **32.4** (37.7 in March 2024)
- **In the last 3 months, 1,208 local audits were completed.** 94.9% of eligible Family Court Advisers had at least one local case file audit (undertaken for **908 Family Court Advisers** against 957 intended)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



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

- In the last year there has been a 25.4% decrease in children (2,767 fewer children) in proceedings lasting more than 52 weeks. At the end of March 2025, there were 8,143 children (4,790 children's cases) whose cases have been open for 52 weeks, of whom 2,195 children (1,354 cases) had been in proceedings for 100 weeks or longer
- In public law proceedings, there are 2,827 children (1,408 children's cases) whose cases have been open for 52 weeks, of whom 442 children (217 cases) have been in proceedings for 100 weeks or longer. This is a reduction of 25.6% (974) and 27.8% (170) children respectively
- In private law proceedings, there are 5,316 children (3,382 cases) whose cases have been open for 52 weeks, of whom 1,753 children (1,137 cases) have been in proceedings for 100 weeks or longer. This is a reduction of 25.2% (1,793) and 36.8% (1,019) children respectively
- At the end of March 2025, 3,904 private law children's cases (5,966 children) were 'court ready' (23.7% of open private law children's cases), meaning Cafcass has filed a report and there is a hearing in the next 6 weeks. In addition, where Cafcass had filed a report, there were 1,453 private law children's cases (**2,308 children**) with a hearing listed ahead 6 weeks or more (8.8% of open private law children's cases)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



2) Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks (1):

- In the latest reportable period for these measures (cases closed 1 October to 31 December 2024):
 - **Final decisions were reached in 34.6% of section 31 care proceedings in 26 weeks or less** (1,246 cases / 1,348 children). This is an increase of 4.5%pts (185 cases / 51 fewer children) compared to cases closed 1 October to 31 December 2023
 - **Final decisions in Section 31 cases overall took on average 39 weeks** (cases closed between 1 October and 31 December 2024 - 5 weeks lower compared to the same period last year)
 - **Fewer Section 8 child arrangements proceedings were closed overall in the period, but the percentage of these resolving in 26 weeks or less was 2.7%pts higher** at 58.9% compared to the same period last year (56.2%; -127 cases/ 167 fewer children)
 - In this period **Private law work completing at the first hearing took an average of 10 weeks** (2 weeks less than the same period last year)
 - **Where further work is ordered at the first hearing, this took an average of 55 weeks** (4 weeks less than the same period last year)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective One: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (3)



2 (continued) Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks (2): Filing and extensions

- **9.2 working weeks (average) to file in public law cases**, 0.1 working weeks lower compared to the same period last year
- **4.1 working weeks (average) to file safeguarding letters**, 0.2 working weeks lower compared to the same period last year
- **14.6 working weeks (average) to file section 7 reports**, 0.1 working weeks higher compared to the same period last year
- **29.8% of Section 7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date**; 6.1% lower than same period last year



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



1) Reduce the number of open children's cases

- At the end of March 2025, the overall number of open children's cases (27,529 cases and 44,216 children) had reduced by 9.0% (2,725 fewer children's cases / -4,525 fewer children) compared to the end of March 2024
- This represents a reduction of 7.0% for open public law children's cases (-829 children's cases / -1,701 fewer children) and a reduction of 10.3% in private law children's cases (-1,896 children's cases / -2,824 children)

2) Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work

- At the end of March 2025, there were 1,288 employed Family Court Advisers (headcount including locums), a reduction of 65 staff compared to 12 months ago (FTE reduced by 59). We continue to rely on the capacity of our flexible workforce, including 52 locum Family Court Advisers and 89 active Cafcass Associates
- 12-month social work turnover is stable at 15.1%. In the last year (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025), 216 Family Court Advisers left Cafcass (13 more than during 2023/24), and were replaced by 182 Family Court Advisers
- 36.7% of Family Court Advisers working in public law / private law work after the first hearing teams have caseloads of 20+ (31 March 2025, adjusted for full time equivalent); this an 8.7% reduction compared to March 2024. Only 4.3% currently have caseloads of 25+ (31 March 2025); a reduction of 4.9% compared to March 2024

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 March 2025, **97% of children eligible had a completed child engagement record, with 93% seen in person**
- For children in **public law proceedings**, **62% of audited files showed personalised letters of introduction had been sent**– a 15.2% increase on the previous year
- For children in **private law proceedings**, **80% of audited files showed personalised letters of introduction had been sent** – a 10.9% increase on the previous year
- There has been **an increase in the percentage of public law children's files showing recommendations shared with children**, from 65.3% in the same period in 2024 **to 75.3%** in March 2025
- The percentage of **private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children** has **increased** from 53.9% in the same period in 2024 **to 73.2%** in March 2025



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 2024 to 31 March 2025), Cafcass received 5,211 reflections (feedback) from children and families** in audit or Digital Feedback system. **2,903 of these (55.7%) 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
- **There has been a significant and intended rise in local quality and impact audits that are collaborative between the manager and the practitioner.** Of the 4,797 completed local audits in the year to date from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 61.3% public law audits and 66.9% of private law audits were collaborative (does not include NIS audits).

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

London Family Strategy: Cafcass proposals



Reduce delay for children

Public law practice

Private law practice

Workforce

1. Minimum 6 in 10 sets of NEW proceedings for children will conclude within 26 weeks

2. No public law proceedings over 90 weeks – develop London Pilot

3. No private law over 100 weeks - develop London Pilot

4. Reduce caseload (open cases to Cafcass) by 14%

5. Pre-Case Management Hearing Trials and next steps

6. Closer work with Independent Reviewing Officers especially at end of proceedings

7. Implement new protocol for managing fundamental differences in care planning - Children's Guardian and local authority Social Worker

8. Reduce delay in proceedings where children are joined (r16.4)

9. Maximise use of 'surge courts'

10. Performance oversight of workflow

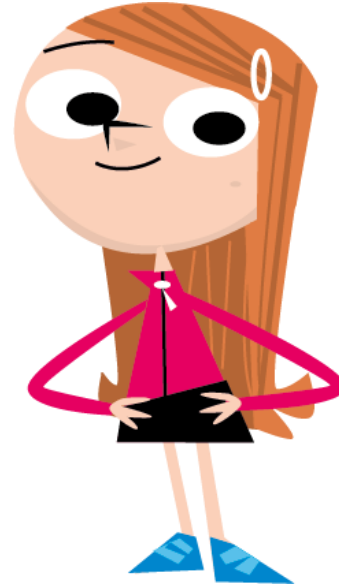
11. Secure timely FHDRA outcomes

8. Recruitment of up to 34 social workers

9. Assess retention options over 2 years

10. Out of region overtime in surge courts

Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news:

Accountability: Review of annual performance board process – why the change?



- In 2024-2025 year – 8 boards, June – May (cycle extended)
- Current **format for four years, key issues need more time and earlier**
- **One off performance assurance event**, rather than an opportunity to show evidence of **progress** throughout the year with priorities – **the impact of leadership on practice**
- **Progress between performance boards** is not as clear as it could be – data and what it says about practice requires better connection – the **nesting of annual boards, with quarterly performance and learning CMT meetings** (targeted and general improvement each quarter)
- The **actions from performance boards need more regularly reporting and finishing**
- The **experiences of people in a region need to be more clearly understood** and discussed - how does it feel to be a social worker or manager in place x
- **Newer operational team** – an opportunity to reiterate again what is expected



Part 2: And in other news:

Accountability: Review of annual performance board process (2)



1. **Assistant Director overview:** Self-assessed judgement (Ofsted single words), learning, practice effectiveness and actions to lift the 30% less than good

2. **Effectiveness of practice report** – Assistant Director for performance and quality assurance

Note: Now includes assessment of effectiveness of duty, follow up on inadequate practice and impact of practice and leadership on children

3. **Peer challenge in two parts:**

a) Peer Assistant Director: how it feels to children in the region, focus on feedback, learning and change, learning from SIRs and practice alerts and specifically action with partners on delay

b) Principal Social Worker: how it feels to work in the region, allocations (balance of duty and throughput), support, protection if threatened, pace of covering vacancies, pressure on managers and practitioners

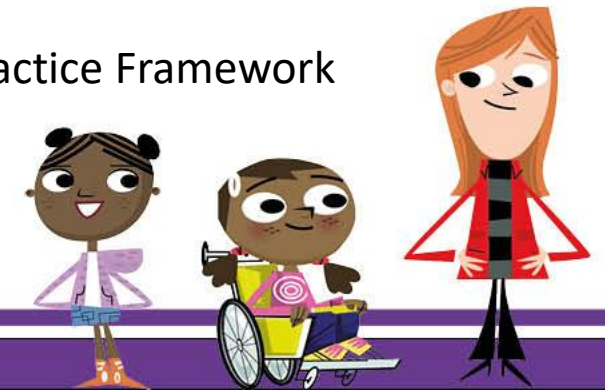
4. **Assistant Director – full self-assessment,** Practice effectiveness (duty, surprises, inadequate practice, regional variation, targeted support, improvement priorities and one thing that WILL change for children in 12 months

5. **CMT challenge** – what is seen in current performance, what is getting better and why, what is the impact of leaders and what needs to improve over next 12 months

6. **Regional managers:** Learning, SIRs, Change, Evidence of change, Listen and Learn (x2), Practice Framework leadership, Domestic Abuse Policy, FJYPB priority

7. **FJYPB challenge**

8. **National support – progress**



Part 2: And in other news:

Domestic Abuse: Improvement priorities, partnership and practice expertise with survivors (1)



Improvement objectives	Improvement activities		
<u>Improve the assessment of harm and risk of further harm from domestic abuse so arrangements for children in family court proceedings are safer for them in public and private law</u>	Effective implementation of the domestic abuse policy and attestation	Eight annual regional domestic abuse conferences	Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in Cafcass' annual domestic abuse audit moderations• Seek and learn from those who have experienced domestic abuse and use their knowledge and feedback to improve practice and policy• Develop and create Cafcass domestic abuse materials and training• Consider examples of feedback, complaints and compliments from victims of domestic abuse to suggest changes in response• Influence the July 2025 review of the Domestic Abuse Practice Policy.
	Additions to Cafcass' domestic abuse training including on counter allegations and coercive control.	Evaluation of feedback, complaints and compliments from victims of domestic abuse	
	<u>Improve the experiences of child and adult victims of domestic abuse through effective engagement so their lived experiences are heard, understood and are the subject of effective social work assessment and analysis</u>	Listen and learn conversations with victims of domestic abuse each month	

Part 2: And in other news:

Domestic Abuse: Improvement priorities, partnership and practice expertise with survivors (2)



Improvement activities

SafeLives colleagues on secondment at Cafcass:

- Develop a framework to understand and assess harm and risk of harm in private law proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor
- Support development of Domestic Abuse Champions
- Support regional conferences,
- Co-chair Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group
- Review the impact of Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Policy
- Develop and enhance Cafcass' domestic abuse training

Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Champions:

- Share best practice examples and participation in group supervision on domestic abuse
- Showcase the impact of Cafcass' domestic abuse practice materials
- Review Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Policy
- Become specialists in the use of the Assessment and Child's Plan, hosting a monthly 'breakfast' bite on how to assess harm and risk for children

Increase awareness and application of domestic abuse practice materials and domestic abuse pathway

Repeat the year 4 Annual domestic abuse audit



Part 2: And in other news:

Practice Quality Audit : The effectiveness of practice in public and private law proceedings (1)



- Audited work - December 2024, **200 case files** , a mix of public and private law proceedings
- **72.5% (145 records) good or outstanding, 21.5% (43 records) requiring improvement and 6% (12 records) inadequate**
Although this is a decrease of 1.5 percentage points (three records) in work being graded good or outstanding, the number of inadequately graded records has fallen one percentage point from 7% (14 records)
- **Good work shows FCAs as strong advocates for children, working collaboratively with professionals and family members and bringing respectful challenge appropriately**
- **Areas for improvement include, children being seen in timescales, letters being sent to children of all ages, recommendations being shared and children's responses included in reports** – including younger children, with support from their care givers. **Assessments needing to show more detailed analysis**, providing clear recommendations at the start and end of proceedings, **supervision in line with policy, consistent and effective use of the assessment and child's plans and clear communication and handover to Independent reviewing officers** at the end of proceedings
- **More private law Work to First Hearing requires improvement to be good.** This is about more effective assessment to understand the harm and risk to children where domestic abuse is a factor and specifically, where existing spending time arrangement should be reviewed immediately to protect child and adult victims



Part 2: And in other news:

Practice Quality Audit : The effectiveness of practice in public and private law proceedings (2)

Next steps include:

1. A further **specific local audit of Work to first hearing cases** being undertaken in each of the 8 regions
2. **Heads of Practice leading workshops with work to first hearing teams** through May 2025, setting out the expectations where domestic abuse is a factor
3. **Local performance meetings**, discussions based on reported data on children's responses to sharing recommendations being recorded in reports and challenging operational service area teams on what practice development opportunities they are leading through group supervisions
4. **Service managers using the Management Oversight and Supervision guidance when undertaking Assessment and Child Plan reviews AND undertaking one of these collaboratively with a Family Court Adviser** where audits have indicated a need for improvement
5. Following the introduction of the new Performance Learning Review system, an audit is to take place to **review the quality of application of management and practice quality standards and how any practice not compliant with the domestic abuse policy is followed up for improvement**



Part 3: People & Workforce



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce: overview and update Q4, 2024-25



Workforce (Permanent and Flexible)

- Permanent headcount continues to remain relatively static across the organisation, and during Q4 there has been a focused national campaign to attract candidates to our hard to recruit areas with over 60 offers made
- The creation of additional management capacity and oversight is reflected in an increase since last year of 25.8 Full-Time Equivalent social work managers or other social work roles (i.e. not Family Court Advisers)
- Our use of locum social workers remains low and stable. At 31 March 2025 this was 3.0% in social work (52 locums) and 2.4% in corporate and business services (14 locums).

Turnover and Retention

- 12-month social work turnover continues to fluctuate being 15.1% at 31 March 2025, with variations between Operational Service Areas. Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk experienced the highest turnover - 28.2% 31 March 2025
- Work is underway with local managers to develop and implement different approaches and solutions to improve attraction and retention. In contrast, following a reduction of almost 40% since May 2023, lowest turnover was experienced in Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Sussex at 1.5%



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce: overview and update Q4, 2024-25



Wellbeing and looking after our people

- Despite an initial increase linked to seasonal trends during Q4, social work 3-month average working days lost (AWDL) due to sickness has further reduced to 12.1 days as at 31 March 2025, from 13.9 days at March 2024
- This continues to track an overall downward trend and a review of options for further managing sickness absence is due to be considered by CMT in May 2025

Deploying our people priorities aligned to the mid-way strategic plan review

- *Attract Engage and Reward People*: prioritising wellbeing, reward and recognition, increasing the intake of newly qualified social workers, and developing targeted attraction and retention offers for operational service areas where this is needed (namely London, Essex, Devon and Cornwall)
- *Provide a modern, child-focused working environment*: implementing our new health, safety and security priority
- *Lead and govern well*: embedding our leadership and management quality standards, revising our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and continuing our review and plan for the succession of leaders



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Priorities – 2025-26 (1)



- Our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy** was last reviewed in 2022 and has been in place for three years
- Working with our equality, diversity and inclusion steering group, we have **considered our future approach**
- Our **equality objectives** :
 - how we use data and insight
 - how leadership enables our priorities to be seen, understood and implemented
 - how our people, culture and environment enable improved outcomes
 - how we support our workforce to be skilled and confident
- We need to **align our future strategy** to the development of our **new strategic plan for 2026-29**, so that our approach fully supports our priorities for children and families, as well as our wider people agenda
- Our approach continues to **incorporate all protected characteristics**
- This will be complemented with **nine specific priorities for 2025-26**
- These priorities align to the **Practice, People and Partner ambitions** within our current strategic plan



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Priorities – 2025-26 (2)



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



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Priorities – 2025-26 (3)



We have:

- communicated and modelled in a **leadership live** to launch our priorities on 23 April 2025
- reaffirmed our commitment to our current equality objectives and defined priorities for 2025-26 on our **website**

Over the coming months we will:

- work to develop our **next equality, diversity and inclusion strategy** throughout the remainder of the year, to align with our new strategic plan 2026-29
- **engage colleagues** in our approach, including our **diversity champions and colleague networks**
- make sure we **share key messages and updates about our nine priorities**
- meet with our **equality, diversity and inclusion steering group** to **review our progress** against our priorities for 2025-26 and shape our next steps



Part 3: People & Workforce

Colleague survey – Headlines (1)



- Our **focused colleague survey** ran from 12 November to 15 December 2024
- This included questions about support during the civil unrest of summer 2024, specific questions for Resources and Business Services and our social work health check
- Our survey received a **63.9% response rate** (1,416 colleagues)
 - 59.7% Social Work colleagues
 - 75.4% Business Services colleagues
 - 77.7% Resources colleagues
- Our response rate was lower compared to our last survey in 2023 which received a response rate of 84% (1782 colleagues).
- We are currently arranging a Think-in session with colleagues to understand barriers or challenges in completing the survey and to inform our future approach



Part 3: People & Workforce

Colleague survey – Headlines (2)



Question	% of respondents who agreed
I feel supported by and have confidence in my manager	93.9%
I was sufficiently supported during the period of civil unrest	91.0%
I feel valued by managers	90.8%
Cafcass provides learning opportunities	90.3%
Learning opportunities are discussed	89.3%
Cafcass leaders communicate regularly with me, and I am clear about the vision of our organisation	89.3%
Induction was a positive experience	86.7%
I feel supported in managing my workload	86.3%
I feel connected to my team	85.5%
Senior leaders are visible to me	78.7%
Of those who have experienced threatening behaviour	77.4%

Scores: 75 and over = good 51-74 = moderate 50 and below = poor

- Following feedback to our 2023 survey, we've been working hard in several areas
- The majority of responses this year have scored above **75%** (good range or above)
- Some of our **improvements made over the last year** are being seen by colleagues, with **positive scores across all our colleague survey themes** this year



Part 3: People & Workforce

Colleague survey – Headlines (3)



- **61.4%** of respondents feel that the **pace of change** of the past 12 months has been reasonable
- **23.8%** of respondents state that they have **experienced threatening behaviour** from an **adult or child involved with Cafcass**
- **Local variations for workloads, leadership visibility, pace of change and induction across Operational Service Areas/Directorates.** As well as for **Performance Learning Review, career & learning plans, and Together Framework** (corporate teams only)



Part 3: People & Workforce

Colleague survey – Headlines (4)



Social Work Health Check

Practice Framework Important	Understand Practice Framework	Confidently Use Practice Framework	Exercise Professional Judgement	Domestic Abuse Practice Confidence	Domestic Abuse Training Access
96.9%	98.0%	94.4%	95.0%	96.2%	96.8%
Able to Access Management Support	Supervision Reflective	Together Values Being Applied	Supportive & Effective Employer	H&W Important to Manager	H&W Important to Cafcass
94.4%	89.4%	93.4%	84.2%	92.1%	74.1%
Plan to Stay at Least 12 Months	Recommend Cafcass	Good Work / Life Balance	Individual Characteristics Valued		
85.4%	78.6%	65.6%	92.5%		

Agree/Somewhat agree responses

Scores: 75 and over = good 51-74 = moderate 50 and below = poor

High-level summary highlights more positive scores relating to:

- The Practice Framework
- Domestic abuse practice
- Ability to exercise professional judgement

To explore further:

- Colleague connections
- Work/life balance
- Communication

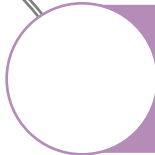




Part 3: People & Workforce

Colleague survey – Headlines (4)

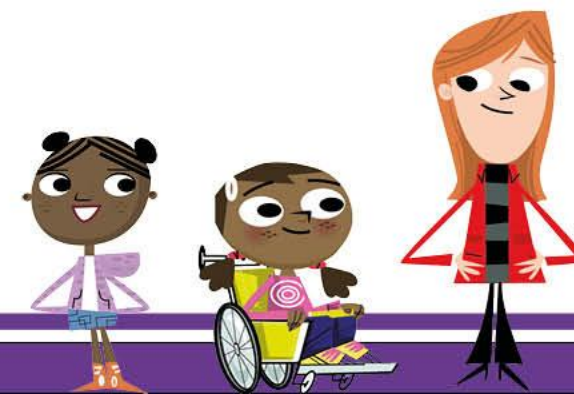
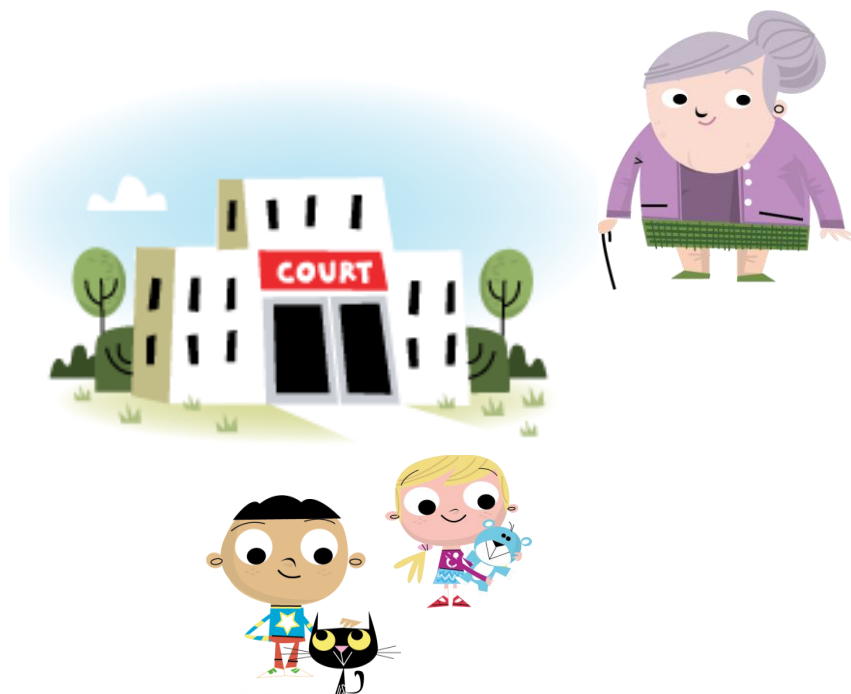


Organisational priorities in the year ahead

- **1. Workloads and Wellbeing**
National Director and Deputies
- **2. Managing and leading change**
Chief Executive
- **3. Responding to threatening or intimidating behaviour by adults in family court proceedings**
Chief People Officer
- **4. Connection in teams and the visibility of leaders and managers**
Director of Resources



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in private law – *Pathfinder court update*



- Pilot in West Yorkshire - 3rd June 2025 and will test the impact for the first time for Family Court Advisers who are working with both public and private law children's cases, already standard practice in the area
- Preparation, including training for colleagues and recruitment is going well. Readiness assessment completed internally and showing confidence that Cafcass teams will be well prepared to commence the pilot
- Dorset and Birmingham continue, with 810 families having experienced the model in Birmingham since 27 May 2024
- A decision in principle to expand the pilots in Birmingham and Dorset to the remainder of the West Midlands Operational Service Area (A12) and the remainder of A6 (Hampshire and the Isle Of Wight) before the end of March 2026
- Key findings from the pilots so far, being analysed by the Cafcass project team, working closely with Ministry of Justice
- Learning is derived from child and family feedback, from operational teams and from our data
- Key benefits include reduced duration of proceedings, the opportunity to engage with more children and the involvement of locally commissioned Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers (IDVAs)
- Model requires intensive early work by Family Court Advisers and complex assessments to be completed more quickly which impacts on workflow arrangements and requires more social workers.
The challenge is increased where there are vacancies or workforce capacity is an issue



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Guidance with local authorities: What happens when there are fundamental differences in plans for children?



- Cafcass has developed guidance with the Association of Directors of Children's Services - **when the independent advice of the child's guardian and the assessment by the local authority about the safety and best interests of the child are fundamentally different**
- **Derived from learning in Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews** - to enable fundamental differences in care plans between a children's guardian and a local authority social worker to be explained to the court
- **Must not and cannot to be used to agree a joint position before court** – must set out court a clear explanation about why professionals have reached fundamentally different positions
- **A meeting before the final hearing to identify and explain points of difference** - A template is provided so that fundamental differences are summarised. This is included in both the local authority and the children's guardian evidence to court. **It remains for the court to decide what is safe and in the best interests of the child.**
- Subject to formal sign off, the **guidance will publish on 2 June 2025** with a plan for shared promotion through Cafcass and Association of Directors of Children's Services networks



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Partner overview



Improving children's experiences in private law (pathfinder courts)

- Testing areas continue – 6 by end of this year. Early evidence – more efficient for courts and HMCTS. Children are seen earlier, their reports are filed within 40 working days. Cases conclude earlier. Stronger gate keeping at the start and expert case progression work means that up to 25% of child impact reports are ordered to local authorities. Cafcass is seeing 65% of all children for whom a child impact report is ordered . Specialist domestic abuse agencies are providing local support for families where domestic abuse is a factor.

Domestic abuse

- Revised policy January 2025, evaluation starting in July. Secondment of experts from SafeLives to Cafcass extended for a further 18 months and the Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group, comprised of family justice professionals and adults and young people with lived experience of domestic abuse and the family justice system.

Guidance on understanding why a child does not want to spend time with a parent

- Webinar 28 January to share the revised guidance and the reissued Domestic Abuse Practice Policy. The revised guidance will be published in June 2025 once partner feedback has been completed

Private law portal

- HMCTS' private law portal was extended to litigants in person in February; testing continues






Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Ambitious for children: Mid-way strategic plan review - end May 2025



PRACTICE: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO PRIORITISE FOR YEAR 3 OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN AND WHY?

<p>Priority 1</p> <p>Further improve the quality and impact of practice – narrow the gap</p> <p>Because children everywhere should receive an exceptional service whether or not they have already met their family court advisor (FCA).</p> 	<p>Prioritise targeted improvement programmes for public and private law and improving practice where domestic abuse is a factor in proceedings</p> <p>Review and protect family court adviser caseloads</p> <p>Enhance the use of our Together practice framework</p> <p>Increase the effectiveness of management oversight and supervision arrangements – targeting teams where this is less consistent</p>
<p>Priority 2</p> <p>Seek out and learn from feedback</p> <p>Because more of our work will be good or better if we ask for and act on feedback.</p> 	<p>Review and evaluate our strategy for learning from feedback</p> <p>Action on learning from complaints, compliments and significant incidents</p>
<p>Priority 3</p> <p>Enable Cafcass systems to support practice - targeted support</p> <p>Because our practitioners need effective support so they can prioritise quality of practice and engagement with children.</p> 	<p>Further embed the use and oversight of operational service area improvement plans, including those with targeted support – formalising twice yearly progress reports to corporate management team in addition to revised expectations at annual performance boards</p> <p>Improve the efficiency of closing children’s cases – formal case progression programme with HMCTS to secure the swift and effective sharing of court orders</p> <p>Embed the performance, accountability and quality assurance frameworks – review effectiveness of local Performance and Practice quarterly reviews, extending performance board to the National Improvement Service and Corporate and Business Services functions</p>



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Ambitious for children: Mid-way strategic plan review (2)



PEOPLE: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO PRIORITISE FOR YEAR 3 OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN AND WHY?

Priority 4

Attract, engage and retain people

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



Prioritise wellbeing, reward and recognition – strengthening immediate support available to practitioners and managers affected by death or serious injury to children and revised process for reviewing and reducing sickness absence

Implement the next phase of the Cafcass social work academy – increase intake of newly qualified social workers and new mandatory training module addressing the requirements of Practice Direction 12J

Priority 5

Provide a modern child-focused working environment

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



Develop a targeted attraction and retention offer for operational service areas where it is needed

Implement a new health, safety and security priority – action when adult parties threaten and/or intimidate practitioners and managers

Continue with improvements to the ChildFirst case management system – work with independent reviewing officers and recording extent to which courts accept advice given in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

Priority 6

Lead and govern well

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



Further implementation of the Cafcass Estates strategy – review of all 33 Cafcass offices

Embed leadership and management quality standards – adding a leadership development objective

Revise quality, diversity and inclusion strategy

Continue with Cafcass Board to review and plan for the succession of leaders



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Ambitious for children: Mid-way strategic plan review (3)



PARTNERS: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO PRIORITISE FOR YEAR 3 OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN AND WHY?

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.



Evaluate our learning from the private law pathfinder courts – learning, resourcing and evaluating experiences for victims in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

Determine requirements of new commission for the improving Child and Family Arrangements programme – in partnership with Ministry of Justice

Prioritise private law and Domestic Abuse targeted improvements programmes – implementation of new Domestic Abuse Practice policy specifically as it relates to the safety of family time arrangements for children

Implement new protocol in public law proceedings when the views of the children's guardian and the local authority social worker diverge

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

Increase our understanding of regional variation in public and private law proceedings

Continue to enhance our work with partners – private law reform, partnership with SafeLives and the Cafcass Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group

Enable children to understand and participate in their proceedings – with Department of Education, testing protocol before first case management hearing

Continue to improve processes to share information efficiently and effectively – implementation of the private law portal with HMCTS and reform of C100

