

# Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team  
Overview

17 July 2025



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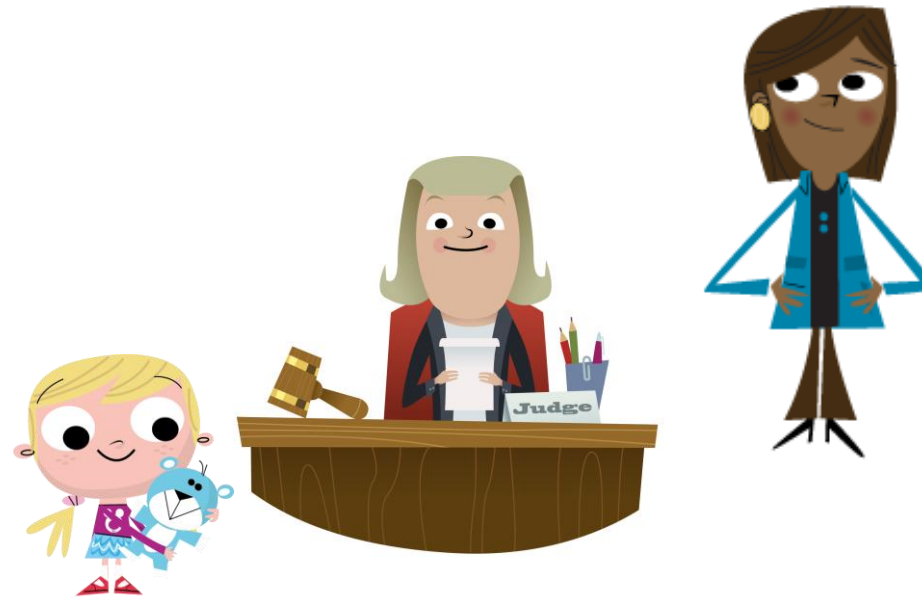
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# Part 1: Annual performance with operational improvement priorities:



# Ambitious for children – 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

## Performance



- **132,416** children were in open proceedings to Cafcass during 2024/2025 (a decrease of 3.6% (4,931 fewer children than last year))
- **35%** of all children were **under the age of five** years and more than 1 in 5 children in Public Law proceedings were aged under 1 year on application.
- C2800 children in public law proceedings over 52 weeks (of whom 442 over 100 weeks) and C5300 in private law proceedings over 52 weeks (of whom 1753 over 100 weeks)
- There was a 25% reduction in children over 52 weeks in proceedings during the year (*28% and 36% in 100 weeks – public and private law respectively*)
- **55,377 new children's cases featuring 85,272 children** – a 0.3% decrease (-167 cases/-840 children) compared to 2023/2024  
These comprise:
  - 16,195 new **Public Law** children's cases involving 25,801 children (+0.7% compared to 2023/2024) of which 11,430 were new care applications for 18,687 children (-0.4% compared to 2023/2024)
  - *NOTE: whilst not specified proceedings, within the new public law applications are 1,207 applications to **deprive children of their liberty** - a 3.0% decrease (37 fewer applications) compared to 2023/2024*
  - 39,182 new **Private Law** children's cases involving 59,471 children (-0.7% compared to 2023/24)
- On average, **221 new children's cases per working day**



# Ambitious for children – 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

## Performance (2)



- **Section 31 Care & Supervision proceedings average 40 weeks in Quarter 4 2024/2025** (-4 weeks compared to Quarter 4 2023/2024), Private Law, **Work To First Hearing 11 weeks** (no change) and **Work After First Hearing, 55 weeks** (-2 weeks) compared to Quarter 4 2023/2024
- **9.2 weeks (average) to file in Public Law cases** - no change compared to the same period last year
- **4.1 weeks (average) to file Safeguarding Letters** - 0.2 of a week higher compared to the previous year
- **14.5 weeks (average) to file Section 7 reports** - no change compared to the previous year
- **29.8% of Section 7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date** – a 6.1% reduction from last year
- **Average social work caseload** (adjusted for Full Time Equivalent) at end of March 2025, was **18.2** for long-term teams compared to 18.8 in March 2024. For work to first hearing teams in private law, the average was **32.4**; compared to the 37.0 in March 2024
- **Mixed heritage children 2.5 times more likely to be in public or private law proceedings** than are represented in the national population (10.6% in proceedings against population 4.3% )
- **17% of children in proceedings are recorded as having at least one disability or health condition** reported compared with 18% in the national population)





# Ambitious for children- 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

## Quality and impact (national improvement service)

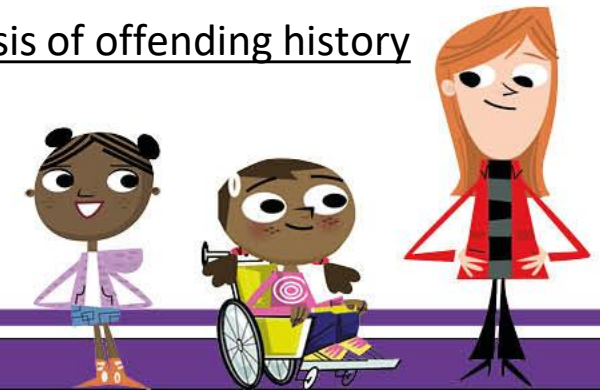


- **Three themed national Practice Quality Audits undertaken every year** (600 children's cases):
  - ✓ Public Law and commitments to Public Law Outline (June 24)
  - ✓ Public and Private Law (January 25)
  - ✓ Domestic Abuse in Public and Private Law and the impact of Domestic Abuse Policy (March 25)
- In addition, 8 Performance Board Quality & Impact Audits are undertaken (c320 additional children's cases audited) and one national Management Quality Audit annually

- **73% of practice judged by the National Improvement Service to be good or better and 4.5% inadequate**

### Headlines:

- **Effective work:** assessments are strengthened by contacting professionals who know them. Timely visits, use of letters, including keeping in touch, and creative direct work. Reports explain what life is like for children, detailing what has happened and the wishes and feelings of children. Reporting domestic abuse using the words of adults and children, analysing criminal histories and existing arrangements
- **Inadequate work:** the welfare of connected children not always considered, weak or no analysis of offending history for an applicant adult, the safety of very young children living with or reunified with parents, quality of safety planning where children are harmed by domestic abuse



# Ambitious for children– 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

## Quality and impact (local quality audits)



- 4,630 Quality and Impact Audits were completed by managers and 12% (553 audits), of these were subject to the required moderation. Nationally, 56% were undertaken collaboratively, 6% above our required standard

### Overview:

- 93% of audits completed by managers demonstrated **positive and impactful engagement with children**, using observation, practice aids or other creative activities to engage children
- 86% evidenced that **recommendations were shared with children** or someone known to them
- 76% of cases with a **personalised letter** that has been sent to children both at the start and end of their proceedings
- 98%, the assessment of harm and risk was well considered, **decisions made were well-reasoned** and did not require further actions to safeguard the child.
- 85% showed **supervision to have happened** when it would have been expected

### Improvement required:

- **Regional variation** in performance continues in some operational service areas and teams
- **Leadership response to policy and quality standard breaches**
- **Work to first hearing reports setting out the reports of domestic abuse with clearly advised action for the court**
- **Management oversight of children's plans**
- **Stronger and more consistent assessment of harm** that children have experienced and the continued risk to them if nothing changes





### **March 2024 – The use in assessments of the background, records and reported behaviours of potential carers**

- Practitioners and managers to consider criminal history and police information, including non-compliance with previous orders.
- Practitioners and managers to include in assessment and analysis, their understanding of the information they have (including when domestic abuse is reported), the actions they have taken and how this will influence the advice they are proposing to the court

### **May 2024 – Domestic Abuse practice in Private Law proceedings and application of Practice Direction 12J**

- Importance of not minimising the nature and impact of domestic abuse, assessing all accounts of coercively controlling and high-risk behaviours and setting out the impact on each child. Talking account of the impact of reported or known abuse on parents or other caregiver's safety and capacity to manage the arrangements for the child.
- This learning had a significant influence in the content of the Cafcass Domestic Abuse Practice Policy

### **December 2024 - Domestic Abuse Practice Policy and use of Section 16A of the Children Act 1989**

- The decision to submit a 16a risk assessment to the court. Its importance as a matter of professional judgement, in conjunction with seeking the views of a manager in supervision and to be used when a child is considered to be at risk of harm or has been harmed





National practice improvement priorities – adjusted and new	
1. Seeing and engaging respectfully with every child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>throughout</i> proceedings</li> <li>✓ <i>children’s responses</i> to recommendations in reports to court – including when they disagree</li> <li>✓ strengthen engagement with children <b>when their liberty is restricted</b>, review timescales and exit plans and present children’s experiences to the court at all hearings</li> </ul>
2. A detailed understanding of the nature and impact (harm and risk) on child victims of domestic abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ advice specifically addressing <b>what has happened to the child and what remains a risk</b></li> <li>✓ consistent use of <b>new policy in practice</b> - specifically harm and risk assessment, review of existing arrangements and analysis of all safeguarding history and information from police checks – including making the rationale for any contact clear to the court</li> <li>✓ evidencing the <b>impact or likely impact of contact</b></li> </ul>
3. An understanding of the impact of a child’s uniqueness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>reflected in advice</b> to the court and consistently <b>visible in all assessments</b></li> </ul>
4. Effective use of the Assessment and Child’s Plan to analyse harm and risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>clear rationales</b> - what was considered and weighed in professional judgement</li> </ul>
5. Reducing delay for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Investigating local recommendations for the <b>appointment of an expert</b></li> <li>✓ timetables - <b>26 weeks for all cases</b> and for public law, adherence to the <b>Public Law Outline</b></li> <li>✓ Reduce <b>to zero all proceedings in all law types over 100 weeks</b></li> <li>✓ Reduce the number of children in <b>proceedings over 52 weeks</b></li> <li>✓ All <b>safeguarding letters written within four weeks</b> - unless a local agreement signed off by the Deputy Director and the lead DFJ</li> </ul>

## Leadership improvement priorities - adjusted and new

### 1. Compelling leadership in the consistent use of 'Together with Children and Families'

✓ *Holding our culture as a priority with leaders reporting annually*

### 2. Effective management support, supervision, and oversight

✓ *100% management oversight of assessment and child's plans, children's safety and welfare clear at all times*

✓ *Continued targeting of situational supervision where **children are to be or already have been reunified home***

✓ *Increased **supervision of proceedings where the conclusion is delayed***

### 3. Evidence of actively seeking feedback, learning from feedback, and making adjustments to further improve practice

✓ *active **leadership of all negative children's feedback** with clear responses reported*

✓ ***visible evidence of learning** for each OSA from significant incidents, complaints and national learning*

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

✓ *'**strengthening practice – specialist support programme**' – releasing potential and raising the quality of work judged to be less than good*

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

✓ ***leadership of workflow – allocated work**, inactive work and duty cases. New case progression resource active and public law allocations to KPI in all OSAs*

✓ ***reducing extensions to below 25%** where in Cafcass control*

✓ ***targeted improvement plans in 4 OSAs** with visible and formal reporting - including formal notifications to Cafcass board where performance is not improving*

✓ *consistent leadership, follow up and clear expectations and action to **secure compliance with policy, practice and management quality standards in all teams – including conduct discussions***

✓ ***Regular and evidenced oversight (weekly) of workforce requirements and changes in all teams** within the region and Operational Service Area, showing prompt and consistent action to recruit, retain and to manage sickness absence (which also needs reducing in each local team) in close collaboration with the HR business partner*

# London Family Strategy – update

## Priority 1 – Reducing Delay for Children

- Beginning design and progress of a case progression pilot for children experiencing the most delayed proceedings.
- All children who have been in Public Law proceedings for over 90 weeks being reviewed by senior leaders to prepare for decisions and next steps meeting in August 2025.

## Priority 2 – Public Law

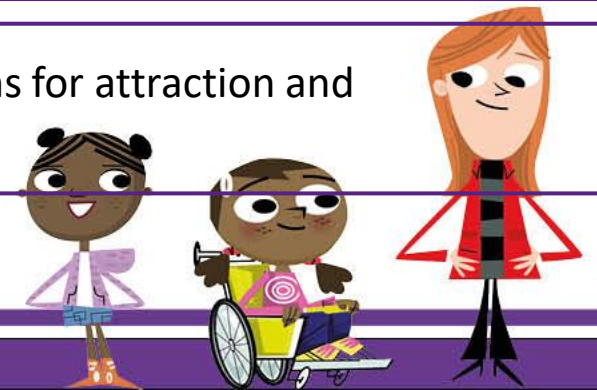
- Launch of combined Independent Reviewing Officer and goodbye letters. Live in ChildFirst from June 2025.
- New arrangements for managing fundamental differences between the Children’s Guardian and the Local Authority Social Work – launch jointly with ADCS August 2025.

## Priority 3 – Private Law

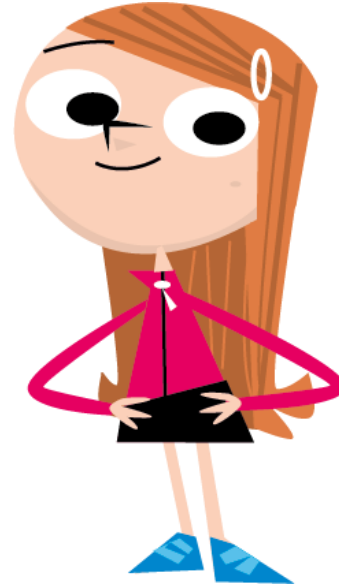
- Lead Assistant Director now commenced in post in London Private Law (A15b)
- Wandsworth ‘surge’ court continues to manage court ready cases
- Option to consider all r16.4 cases over 52 weeks in London pilot (priority 1)

## Priority 4 - Workforce

- Consideration of specific plans to recruit and retain in London – options for attraction and retention payments



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



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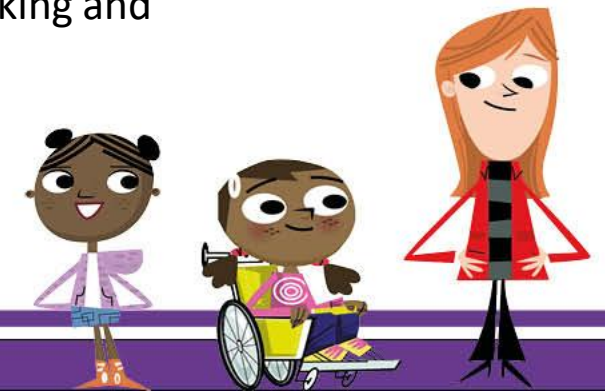
### Domestic Abuse: Annual practice quality audit 2025



- **Fifth annual Domestic Abuse Practice Quality Audit** reported internally July 2025. Considered the experiences of 407 children where domestic abuse was a risk factor in 240 Public and Private Law Proceedings in England. Followed the release of the Domestic Abuse Practice Policy (revised in January 2025) and judged practice effectiveness and the impact of the new policy.

#### Strong practice characterised by:

- **Child engagement through timely visits**, creative direct work, and personalised communication.
- **Assessments involving a range of professionals** beyond the police and local authority.
- Respectful, **trauma-informed** language, using victims' own words
- Court reports **setting out lived experiences and clearly conveyed children's wishes and feelings**
- Managers using the **policy to support practice development** through oversight and supervision.
- **Practice Direction 12J and 16a risk assessments** used effectively to support court decision making and action to protect children from harm and reduce the risk of further harm to them
- Safeguarding was strong, with **appropriate referrals to local authorities**



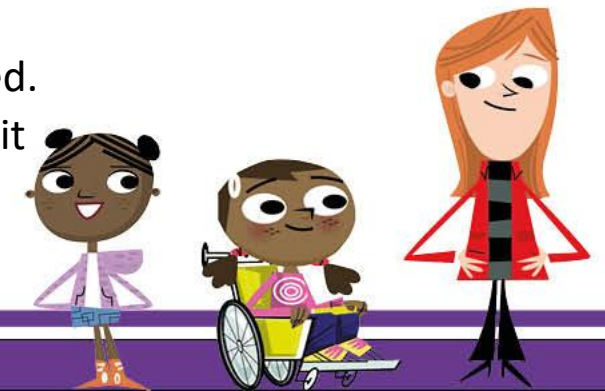


## Part 2: And in other news:

### Domestic Abuse: Annual practice quality audit 2025 (2)



- **Improvements required:**
  - **Consider children not subject to proceedings** (connected children) and share information with local authorities where necessary and appropriate to keep children safe
  - Record evidence of **past histories and patterns of abuse** in casefile recordings and not just in reports to court
  - Assessments always **setting out clearly how children were harmed and the risks that remain if nothing changes**. Use the plan and assessment to show evolving thinking and impact on likely advice to the court
  - Reports to be strengthened by showing both **short and long term impact of recommendations** on children
  - If there is a need to **depart from a child's wishes, explain why and involve them**, making sure they understand that what is happening
  - Improve **safeguarding interviews by clearly recording questions to support understanding of adult domestic abuse experiences**
- In response, a focused programme to reduce variation in the application of practice standards, improving supervision and completion of mandatory domestic abuse training has been developed. Domestic abuse champion programme has been strengthened to discuss and learn from the audit



## Part 2: And in other news:

### Reporting Improvement – Business and Corporate Services



#### 1. Corporate and Business Services Performance Board

- a) First board meeting 10 June 2025
  - 1. Overview of progress against corporate and business services improvement plan priorities
  - 2. Deep dive into performance of: Information Technology, Policy Research and Library, National Commissioning Team
  - 3. Learning being reviewed for individual teams and for the board process itself

#### 2. Corporate and Business Services Improvement Programme

- a) Met: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion priorities will be published in June 2024, new induction programme launch, new private law arrangements and learning materials
- b) Partially Met: Corporate and Business Services leaders will develop and submit a self-assessment with improvement priorities, all Corporate and Business Services Managers will assess themselves against each of the management standards, local staff survey action plans, priorities for innovation, clear policy, guidance, leadership and engagement with staff in the development of the work under the health and safety priority, sickness absence process and arrangements
- c) Not complete: Corporate Management Team to establish and implement the minimum expectations for in person work in offices and associated visible leadership



## Part 2: And in other news:

### Annual recognition awards

- Third Annual Recognition Event took place in June 2025
- **151 annual nominations and 32 monthly nomination winners considered across award categories**
- These included 11 Cafcass awards (individual and team categories), and 2 Cafcass board awards: Social Work colleague of the year and Resources and Business Services colleague of the year
- **Over 100 colleagues attended London office to celebrate successes and the personal and professional achievements of one another**
- Shortlisted nominees and winners announced by our Board member, Family Justice Young People's Board member, senior sponsors and panel members, with a live Teams feed across the organisation
- Celebrated external award successes, including hearing from silver winner at the 2024 Social Worker of the Year Awards
- Huge congratulations to our overall winners, whose talent and hard work truly shone through, as well as to everyone who received a nomination!



## Part 3: People & Workforce





## Part 3: People & Workforce

### Workforce priorities : overview and update



#### Our People Priorities during Quarter 1 2025/2026

- **Attract, engage and retain people:** prioritising recruitment, sickness absence management, engaging local teams in colleague survey results, third annual recognition event, and developing targeted attraction and retention solutions for operational service areas where it is needed
- **Provide a modern, child-focused working environment:** reviewing the impact of health, safety and security policies
- **Lead and govern well:** deploying our equality, diversity and inclusion priorities for 2025/2026 across practice, people and partners, and continuing our review and planning for the succession and development of leaders

#### Headcount (Permanent and Flexible)

- During 2024/2025 and in Quarter 1 2025/2026, permanent headcount continued to be relatively static across the national organisation with some significant regional variation
- Our use of locum social workers also remains stable but needs to reduce as permanent staff join
- At 31 March 2025 locum usage was 3.0% in social work (52 locums) and 2.4% in corporate and business services (14 locums). At 30 June 2025 this slightly increased to 3.4% in social work (59 locums) and reduced to 1.9% (11 locums) in corporate and business services
- A review has been undertaken of locum utilisation within corporate and business services
- At year end, there were 2218 people employed (2001 FTE), of whom 1655 are social workers and 563 were business and corporate services colleagues. In addition, there were 155 people working for Cafcass as Associates, bank staff or as locums





## Part 3: People & Workforce

### Workforce priorities: overview and update Q1, 2025/2026 (2)



#### Turnover and retention

- **12-month social work turnover was at 15.1%** at end year 2024/2025.
- Quarter 1 2025/2026 has **reduced to 14.5% at 30 June 2025**, with significant variation across operational service areas
- **Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk experienced the highest turnover** at 30 June 2025 at 33.3%. In contrast, turnover was 1.5% in Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Sussex
- **Clear resource baselines are in development in all 19 service areas** so that targeted and hard recruitment can commence more quickly and over a sustained period.
- In addition, **attraction and retention payments** are being considered as part of our pay award business decisions.
- London Private Law and Essex, the Southwest and our Private Law reform (Pathfinder) implementation and expansion areas are being targeted for recruitment campaigns and new activity to attract

#### Wellbeing and looking after our people

- At 30 June 2025, the **3-month average working days lost due to sickness was 12.4 days**. Actions to further strengthen our management of sickness absence are being implemented including:
  - ✓ *area/function sickness absence reviews led by senior leaders*
  - ✓ *enhanced reporting and automation of sickness absence management*
  - ✓ *review of sickness absence within our Managing Attendance Policy*
  - ✓ *enhanced focus on return to work discussions and leadership focus*
  - ✓ *alignment with our wellbeing provision*



## Part 3: People & Workforce

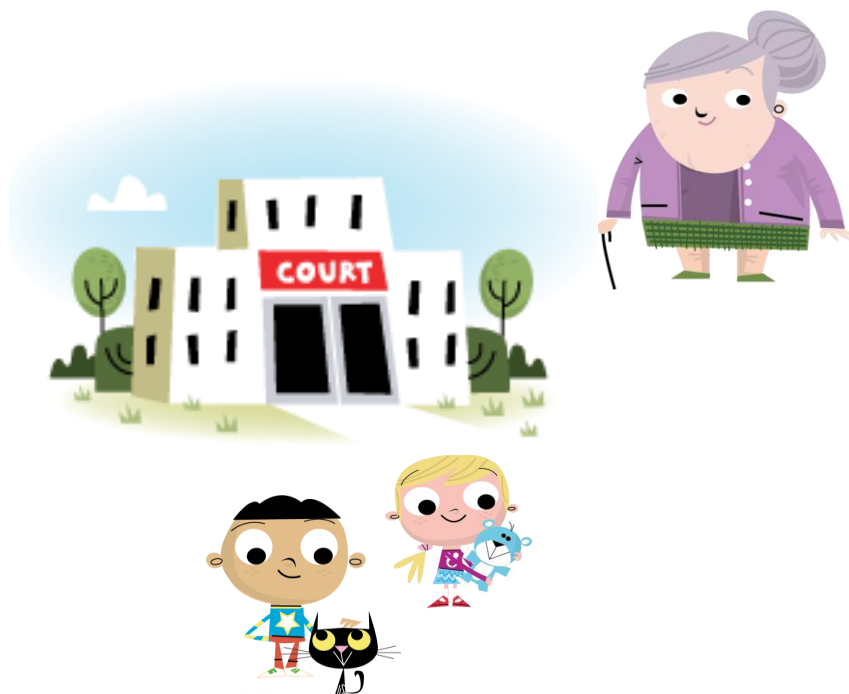
### Workforce: Developing social work leaders



- At the end of 2022, following a period of consultation, we reconfigured the operational management arrangements, introducing the additional management role of Assistant Service Manager. This was to create the capacity and capability to improve the quality and effectiveness of practice. New posts were introduced with effect from 1 April 2023.
- During 2023-2024, social work manager headcount increased by 144 posts to 284 posts and during 2024-2025, it increased by a further 26 posts to 310 posts – reconfiguration was funded from operational budget.
- A key priority for us in 2025/2026 is to embed our leadership and management quality standards so that we maximise the quality and effectiveness of leadership for the organisation.
- Annual leadership conference - February 2026, supporting self – assessment against leadership quality standards and set out in Ambitious for Children week in September 2025
- In addition:
  - Mapping our current leadership development offer to identify gaps and alignment with leadership induction and mandatory training requirements
  - Offer of external leadership training to most senior operational leaders
  - Developing immediate immersion support (12-month internal programme) for our recently appointed Assistant Directors
  - Developing a high potential programme for Heads of Practice - *succession and talent mgt*
  - Reviewing our Performance Learning Review process
  - Working to improve the visibility of senior leaders



## Part 4: Priorities in the next period



## Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in private law proceedings: Challenges and opportunities in private law reform (pathfinder courts)



### Challenges

In a national implementation, would need to recruit 230 more Family Court Advisers if we see 80% of children, in addition to the vacancies which already exist

The extent of the reform needed to implement pathfinder and the capacity needed to achieve this, whilst continuing to deliver statutory functions and achieve commitments in the strategic plan

Understanding the requirements for Family Court Advisers to be skilled and trained to carry out private and public law work if that is the operating model

Resource modelling to include management oversight, national infrastructure costs – it does not yet do this

Pace and consistency of cultural change across the system - indications of the difficulty in achieving this are apparent in some test areas

Speed of assessment versus quality - without the right level of resourcing and reduction in caseloads, there is a clear risk that quality and safety of practice will be at risk if caseloads are too high to carry out longer assessments for more children

Working in uncertainty whilst the decisions regarding future implementation are made

The evaluations undertaken to date do not provide the evidence base to conclude that the intended benefits regarding victims of domestic abuse

The cultural shift away from what is characterised as a 'contact at all costs culture' is not consistent and there is evidence that pathfinder by itself does not achieve this

Without the full understanding that risks and challenges fall disproportionately on Cafcass and without absolute clarity about the mitigations, Cafcass' reputation and its ability to deliver services to children are likely to be compromised

## Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in private law proceedings: Challenges and opportunities for private law reform (pathfinder) (2)



**Opportunities – those highlighted in green, are benefits, which are being realised**

Strengthening public confidence in the Family Justice System

System ownership of the need to reduce duration and delay for children and families, especially those who have been there the longest

Amplified voice of children and direct engagement with more children in their own proceedings, numbers known, quality and impact not known

More consistency in risk identification and action taken by Cafcass at the outset of proceedings

Improved experience for victims of domestic abuse and achieve better outcomes

Reduced number of hearings and hearing attendance by FCAs, and quicker throughput leading to reduced caseloads- supported by additional funding. Recognition that this funding is required.

More autonomy over extent and nature of Family Court Adviser enquiries and satisfaction regarding the impact of the role at this time – NOTE the limited mixed team experience – ie what happens in a team covering all law types

Courts taking a more robust and solution focussed approach to case management and making of final orders- reduces reliance on Cafcass

Local authority doing the assessments when they are currently or recently involved . Known in Birmingham

Clarity about assessment versus intervention – not using proceedings for interventions and to test arrangements

To shift the conversation to a wider focus on private law reform and what is needed in Cafcass and the system



## Part 4: Priorities in the next period

### Ambitious for children week – our intentions



- Ambitious for Children Week, previously Practice Week – 25 September -October 1
- Dedicated time for reflection, learning, and shared ambition to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and families in family court proceedings — recognising the importance of doing our best for every child
- Timetable for both social work and corporate and business services staff to learn together and in specialist sessions – a mix of mandated and elective work
- 41 sessions timetabled for social work colleagues and 39 for corporate and business services
- Four themes in the intended learning:
  - ✓ **Strengthening practice in safeguarding and the assessment of risk and harm, including domestic abuse**  
Build practitioner confidence and consistency, including through updated policies and guidance
  - ✓ **Embedding quality and reflective practice**  
Promote continuous improvement through reflective learning and robust quality assurance
  - ✓ **Leadership for impact and accountability**  
Require leaders to drive high practice standards, support teams effectively, and taking accountability for change and improvement
  - ✓ **Celebrating the voices and experiences of children**  
Asking how well and what more we need to do to hold children centrally in everything



## Part 4: Priorities in the next period

### Training and development – Using practice direction 12J in family court proceedings



- The purpose of Practice Direction 12J is to set out what the Family Court or the High Court is required to do in any case in which it is alleged or admitted, or there is other reason to believe, that the child or a party has experienced domestic abuse perpetrated by another party or that there is a risk of such abuse.
- Explicitly draws the court's attention to consider whether a parent's involvement will support the child and their safety.
- As part of the learning and development programme for 2025/2026, we are offering specialist training specifically on Practice Direction 12J. It is essential that Family Court Advisers have the skills, confidence and experience to understand and assess the risk and offer advice to the court.
- Four modules: Legal and Policy Foundations; Procedural Fairness and Safeguarding; Evidence and Risk management; and Protective Orders and Accountability
- To be launched at 'Ambitious for children' week – end September 2025 and then offered in person to all operational service areas. To be mandated training for induction



# Discussion and questions.....

