



## CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE

### CAFCASS COMMERCIAL STRATEGY 2025-2026

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#### 1. Introduction and Background

This is the commercial strategy for The Children and Family Court Advisory Service (Cafcass), covering the period 2025-2026. It sets out at a high level the plans that Cafcass intends to follow when undertaking commercial activity across the organisation. It demonstrates how a strategic approach to commercial activities supports the organisations objectives and fits with wider government policies. This is the first commercial strategy for the organisation, and it is expected that planned actions will be tracked and updated in future versions. The initial timeframe has been set to coincide with the current Cafcass Strategic Plan which also runs to 2026.

Cafcass is an executive non departmental public body (NDPB) delivering statutory services with funding received from our sponsoring department the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). A small amount of additional funding is sometimes received via partnership project work with other public sector bodies. There is limited scope for income generation in a commercial sense, but the organisation will actively explore any opportunities that do arise providing they fit with the overall ethos of Cafcass and our values.

#### 2. Overall Strategy

Cafcass advises the family courts about the welfare of children and what is in their best interests. The organisational strategic priorities are set out in The Cafcass Strategic Plan: ***Ambitious for children: Exceptional experiences, for every child, everywhere and every time*** which covers the period 2023 to 2026. This sits alongside the Cafcass Together framework, which sets our culture and values. Cafcass puts the needs of children at the heart of all the work we do and this is equally true for business services, resource and support functions as well as for our social work staff.

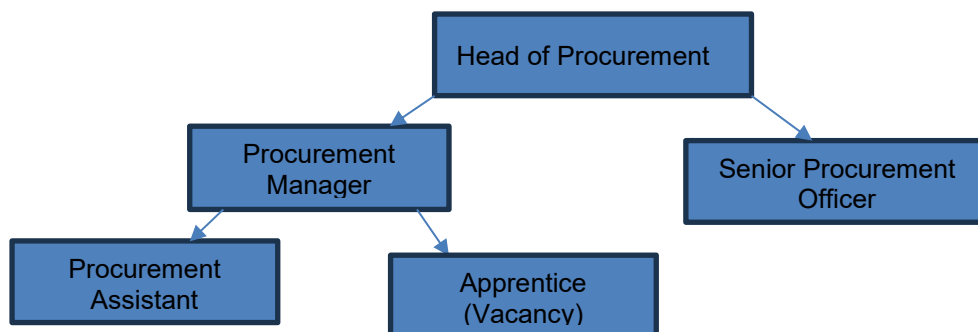
Commercial activity within Cafcass encompasses procurement, commissioning and contract management. The overall strategic aims are to: -

- Provide overall value for money so that every penny possible can be directed to services for children
- Be compliant with legislation and government policy
- Support operational priorities
- Derive added value from our good relationships with suppliers and external partners
- Be proportionate and efficient to make best use of time and resources

The Cafcass strategic plan has priorities in 3 pillars: Practice, People and Partners. Commercial activity enables work in all 3 pillars, our contracts with external suppliers for services are essential to keep the organisation running and our commercial partners also help us deliver services to families like Planning Together for Children and the Pathfinder project.

### 3. The Current Position

Commercial activity is de-centralised, Cafcass has a small procurement team of 5 as shown below:



The senior members of the team are professionally qualified with the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) and maintain Chartered status through actively undertaking CPD. The junior members of the team are supported to work towards CIPS qualifications.

We make use of collaborative procurement arrangements wherever possible this is in accordance with our remit from our sponsoring department MoJ which requires us to procure standard items from central framework contracts run by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). This currently accounts for around 35% of overall spend, Cafcass also utilises MoJ contracts where they are suitable and agreements from other government procurement organisations. Tendering activity is conducted via the Pro-contract e-procurement system which gives suppliers access to a secure portal for tenders and maintains an audit trail.

Day to day requirements for routine procurement needs like stationery and travel are set up for online ordering with consolidated invoicing. This is both for ease of use and to minimise transactional costs. These processes are embedded within departmental guidance documents so that staff can quickly and easily access the goods and services they need from pre-agreed contracts without needing to undertake any further procurement work themselves.

The procurement manual and related documentation is available on the intranet and staff with procurement needs utilise these documents, seeking advice from the procurement team when necessary. For procurements not already covered by an existing framework a competitive tendering process is followed. Contract notices are published on the Government Central Digital Platform. Business cases and associated approvals are required for any new areas of spend. Delegated Commercial Authority rests with budget holders and is set out in Cafcass budget delegation letters.

The procurement team work on a cross functional basis with staff from other teams who are nominated Project Managers or Contract Managers. It is the responsibility of departmental budget holder's owners to manage their own contracts or to put delegated arrangements in place for contract management within their team.

Any contract that results in a payment being made by Cafcass is within the scope of commercial spend, except for employment contracts and contracts for the purchase or lease of property. In 2024/25 Cafcass external commercial spend was £27.3 million.

## Top Ten Areas of Spend 2023/24

|     | Spend                               | Team        |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1.  | IT and related services             | IT          |
| 2.  | Agency Staff                        | HR          |
| 3.  | National Commissioning              | NCT         |
| 4.  | Estates – accommodation and related | Estates     |
| 5.  | Training                            | HR/NIS      |
| 6.  | Office Services                     | Various     |
| 7.  | Telecoms                            | IT          |
| 8.  | Legal Services                      | Various     |
| 9.  | Travel                              | Procurement |
| 10. | Interpreters and translation        | NCT         |

Owing to the relatively small size of the organisation Cafcass doesn't have a formal category or supplier relationship management structure. Contract managers from the relevant teams manage the strategic relationships with key suppliers and work with the procurement team on longer term contract planning. IT, Temporary staff, NCT and Estates are the largest areas of spend and the following is an overview of the commercial approach for each of these teams.

### Commercial Management of IT Category

Everyone in Cafcass is dependent on reliable and effective IT services to do their job, up to date case information needs to be available to practitioners whenever and wherever they are. Data security and information assurance are also a priority, ensuring the quality of information and safeguarding the security of our most sensitive data relating to children and young people. Two key contracts are critical to the organisation:

- Version 1 for application support and development of our ChildFirst system
- Littlefish for our managed IT Service

These contracts were let on a competitive basis utilising CCS Framework Agreements and emphasise development and continuous improvement. The IT team has a dedicated Commercial Manager who is responsible for the commercial and contractual aspects of the IT Service.

### Commercial Management of Temporary Staff Category and HR Category

Agency staffing is managed by the Cafcass HR Resourcing team via a national preferred supplier list of 5 agencies. These agencies were selected on a competitive basis from an Eastern Shires Procurement Organisation (ESPO) framework agreement. Agency practitioners work alongside permanent staff and receive the same training and support. Current contracts expire in 2026 and options for alternative approaches to the management of both temporary and permanent agency staffing contracts will be considered prior to identifying a suitable framework for a new procurement.

The HR team also manage contracts for training and HR related services including Occupational Health; Staff benefits and Wellbeing services.

### Commercial Management of NCT Category

NCT works with the Ministry of Justice to commission services from partner organisations that assist families and children. These services are bespoke to Cafcass and support the work of Cafcass Operational Teams working in private law proceedings.

The main services commissioned are:

- Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA)
- Planning Together for Children

The commercial approach to ICFA and Planning Together for Children is to appoint lead contractors via competitive tendering with local sub-contracting to agreed standards.

The NCT team also manage the DNA Paternity Testing contract on behalf of family courts and the Cafcass contract for interpreters and translators which is part of a larger contract set up by MoJ.

### **Commercial Management of Estates Category**

This area of commercial activity directly supports Cafcass strategic priority of needing modern offices to enable our best work with children and families. Estates spend is split between upkeep of current offices and investment in fit outs and office moves. We also utilise estates related professional services contracts via MoJ agreements when needed.

The approach to current offices has been to consolidate contracts into a national Facilities Management (FM) Services contract to give consistency and improve the monitoring and management of services. This was tendered and awarded to Fisco in 2024, initially this covered cleaning and hard services and has since been rolled out to include other services as sub-contracts.

In the past office fit-outs have been tendered and awarded individually. Work is planned for this year to consider whether the use of a framework agreement to enable the development of longer-term supplier relationships would be beneficial to Cafcass.

## **4. Wider Policy Objectives**

Although not interacting directly with children and families, commercial staff play our part in promoting the values set out in the Cafcass Together Framework. As well as being important to social work practice the principle of developing trusting relationships, where listening, understanding, clear reasoning, respect and integrity are prioritised is also applicable to our relationships with external stakeholders and suppliers.

Whilst being mindful to adhere to the core remit of Cafcass to support some of the most vulnerable children and families in society we also work within wider government commercial policy priorities as set out in the National Procurement Policy Statement in February 2025: -

- **Delivering value for money** is the overarching priority in public procurement. This must include consideration of outcomes and quality to avoid waste. We must optimise the use of public funds to balance effectiveness, efficiency and economy over the life cycle of the contract.
- **Driving economic growth** by opening up competition to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs). Contracting authorities also need to ensure that suppliers provide high quality jobs and good conditions for workers. Contracting authorities should work collaboratively and have a pro innovation mindset.
- **Delivering social and economic value.** Contracting authorities should deliver social value that supports the Government's missions and must have regard to maximising public benefit. The Government expects the highest standards of integrity, ethical standards and environmental sustainability in commercial arrangements
- **Building commercial capability to deliver value for money and stronger outcomes.** This includes acquiring goods and services through fair and open competition. Managing contracts effectively to deliver sustainable long-term outcomes and ensuring that staff involved with procurement and contract management activity have the right capability, skills and expertise.

The information issued in Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs) by the Cabinet Office is implemented as applicable although Cafcass is sometimes too small to be in scope.

The Procurement team is required to provide regular returns to the MoJ and in support of government transparency rules we also publish monthly spend information and details of contracts awarded on the Cafcass external website

Standards for commercial activity within central government bodies and arm's length bodies are set out in detailed guidance in Government Functional Standards **GovS 008**: Commercial and in **GovS 014**: Grants. Given the small size of the organisation, the principles are followed proportionately. The Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework (CCIAF) has been completed for internal use, actions have been identified for improvement so that all relevant standards will be good or better by the end of 2025.

## **5. Moving Forward 2025-2026**

We have demonstrated that it is possible to effectively manage the commercial function within Cafcass on a de-centralised basis. Strategically the intention is to continue with this approach, using government wide frameworks where possible and supporting contract and project managers in separate departmental teams. This includes ongoing business as usual activities and areas for planned improvement as described below: -

### **Business as Usual (BAU)**

- Continue to review and update the Procurement Manual, PMO processes, documentation and intranet to make them easier to use and thus encourage compliance with procedures.
- Provide training and advice to staff involved in commercial roles and in line with operational policies spending as much time as possible actively engaged with staff undertaking procurement and contract management, working across functions and geographical areas.
- Continue to attend and contribute to collaborative groups both within Cafcass and externally with the aim of keeping up to date with government and sector specific market developments and to influence decision making. These groups are likely to change over time but currently include MoJ, CCS, The Contract Management Capability Programme (CMCP) and the Government Commercial Function (GCF).
- To continue with CIPS Ethics Training for teams involved with commercial activity and to continue to show our commitment to ethical behaviour by maintaining a place on the CIPS Ethics Register
- To continue with the use of the ProContract e-procurement system and to further implement the use of the Proactis system for contract management
- Continue to adopt a commercial mindset and actively pursue opportunities for joint working outside of the organisation where this aligns with our corporate values and brings commercial benefits

### **Planned Improvements**

- To continue to review and update processes and undertake training in line with new public procurement regulations which came into effect in February 2025.

- To further encourage staff to undertake and maintain professional development including CIPS membership and CMCP contract management accreditation. Encourage sharing of training across teams.
- Improve the consistency of contract management across all teams by better communicating the use of standard processes and encouraging completion of contract data. Improve reporting within the contract management system with a view to developing a contracts dashboard.
- Work with external partners to promote opportunities for the delivery of social value and improve processes for the internal reporting and management of social value commitments in contracts.
- To evidence our commercial success by strengthening recording of efficiency savings, mitigation of cost increases, added value and continuous improvement gains.

Melissa Smith, Head of Procurement.