



Our Strategy: 2019 - 2023

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We provide an independent voice for children in the family courts. We ensure that arrangements proposed to the court by local authorities (in public law) and parents or other family members (in private law) are in children's best interests.

Children and young people, and the people who matter most to them, are at the centre of our work and this strategy.

We want them to have a service which is right for their individual needs and leaves them in a better position than before our involvement.

* We use the term parent when referring to a parent or carer.

Strategic Context

We need to continue to innovate and invest in our staff, so that we respond effectively to changing demands on our service while maintaining quality, but with emphasis on working with our partners so that the family justice system works to make things better for children and their families.



Our Mission

We will ensure children, and the people who matter to them, are at the centre of our work. We will give them a service which prioritises their safety, voices their needs, and leaves them in a better position.

Our Vision

For every child, whose future is decided by the family courts, to have their voice heard and have a better life.

We do this by...

Providing information, advice and support services for children and families so they know their options and so that, where possible, they can work together in the best interests of their children.

Assessing what is going on for each individual child so that the court benefits from independent scrutiny of the arrangements put forward, making sure their safety is prioritised and their welfare promoted.

Giving family courts the independent advice, information and recommendations they need to make a safe decision about each child's future.

Arranging for children to have representation in court where needed.

Being an outstanding employer for our staff by supporting and enabling them to make a real difference to children's lives, and making a positive contribution to the social work profession.

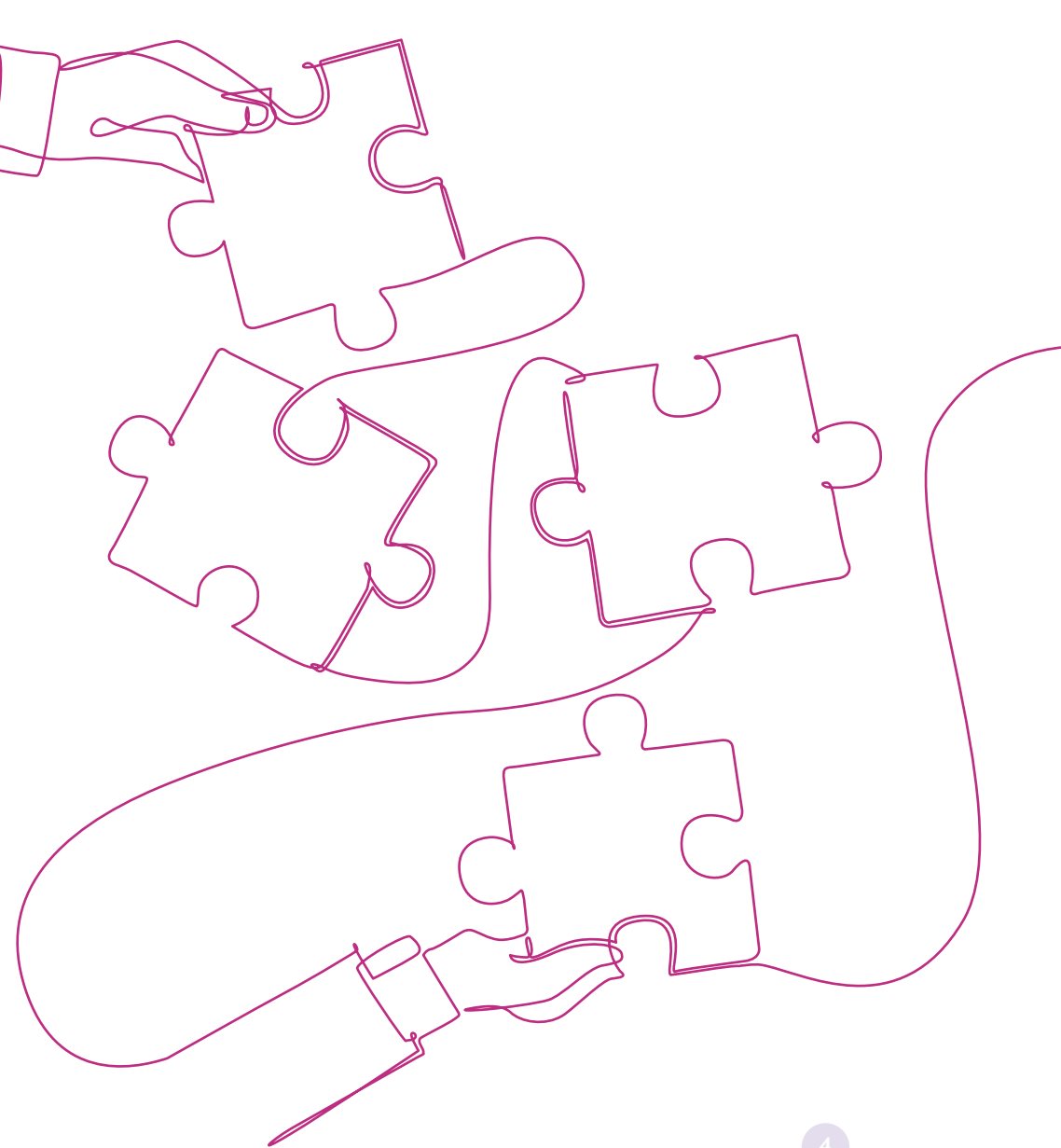
Using our understanding of the needs of children and families to influence how the operation of the family justice system works and to promote a public health approach to wider family policy.

Inviting feedback and learning from the experience of children and families to help improve our service.



Our Values - Which unite and drive our work

- ✓ **Always looking for the strengths and risks**
Through our relationships, we make balanced decisions.
- ✓ **Believing in respectful relationships**
We listen and act with care and understanding.
- ✓ **Decision making is clear and reasoned**
We work with risk and uncertainty to create better and safer outcomes for children.
- ✓ **Holding children and families at the heart of our practice**
We promote the safety and welfare of children.
- ✓ **Wanting to know more about you and what is important in your life**
We respect, value and respond to the uniqueness and diversity of each child, family and colleague.



What do children and their families need from Cafcass?

When facing changes to their family

For parents to understand the impact of their behaviour on their children and to know where to seek help, in order to make the best decisions on behalf of their child and keep them safe.



Ahead of the case

For our first contact with parents and children to be as tailored as possible, recognising they may already have had a traumatic experience. They should be made clear about our role, what is ahead of them and what they will need to do to prepare.

During their case

An empathetic and transparent approach which ensures that everyone involved in the court process fully understands the needs and preferences of each individual child. Where appropriate, access to services and interventions to resolve issues which are impacting negatively on children.



After the case

To be equipped so that arrangements made are sustainable, safe and meet the long terms needs of the child, and know what to do if that is not the case.

Throughout

To know how to contact us if they have questions, a problem, or want to offer us feedback. To be confident that they will get a timely, helpful response. To trust us to keep their information secure and to be compassionate throughout our involvement with them.



How have we done so far?

Our last strategy was published in 2015. We worked with an average of **125,000** children in new and existing cases each year, of which just under one third (an annual average of over **43,000**) were in public law cases and nearly two thirds (an annual average of around **83,000**) were in private law cases.

Our key achievements under our last strategy were:

Quality

The proportion of our casework judged as good or outstanding continued to increase and we achieved an overall rating of outstanding in our most recent Ofsted inspection.

Efficiency & Effectiveness

We met or exceeded all our key performance indicators despite substantial increases in: the numbers of new cases; the number of children we worked with; and in the average amount of work required in each case. This was only possible through investing in our staff: by providing them with: tools; learning and development; and an enhanced health and wellbeing service.

Diversity

As part of our new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy we improved our diversity monitoring for the children we work with and our staff, and strengthened our frameworks for analysing its impact on each child. We introduced practice experts with specialist knowledge on emerging issues, and have invested in a range of diversity training packages. Our staff diversity networks were set up to provide the opportunity for colleagues to support each other and help inform best practice, and they continue to flourish.

They help us to improve services to children and families and help shape staff policy by championing the rights of particular groups of people and advising us on how we can be more inclusive.

Influence

We supported the Family Justice Young People's Board to promote the Voice of the Child across the family justice system. We are active members of the national and local family justice boards. We improved the quality and accessibility of data to enhance understanding of how the family justice system is working, and made it available for academic research.

Innovation & Reform

We piloted a range of initiatives and new interventions to make things better for children. This included the development of digital applications to support our direct work with children.



Where next?

How will we make this happen

Our strategic objectives describe how we will work towards our vision and meet the needs of children and families.

In this strategy period, we will focus our efforts under three key areas: Our Practice, Our Partners and Our People.

Our Practice

Our goal is to deliver the best quality social work and support services in each case, to improve children's lives wherever they live.



Our Partners

Our goal is to share our knowledge, learn from others and use our collective influence to improve the family justice system and wider family policy.



Our People

Our goal is for our staff to have the support, resources and working environment that enable them to sustain excellence in challenging times.



Our Practice



We want	Over the next three years, we will...	
<p>High quality assessment and recommendations tailored to meet each child’s unique needs, whoever they are and wherever they live.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continue to improve the quality of work in both public and private law cases. ▫ As far as our role and pressures on the system allow, focus our social work resource on understanding and conveying the voice of the child and changing their lives for the better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Extend our approach to sharing good social work practice through peer review and access to practice experts. ▫ Maintain and increase the national proportion of good or outstanding casework, and take targeted action to improve performance which falls short.
<p>A more transparent service so that children and families understand what will happen to them at each stage of their case, with better options available to them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Review and improve the way we communicate to children and families at each stage of their case, including better access to self-help information and resources. ▫ Continue to extend the menu of evidence-based services and interventions that can be ordered by the courts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Improve case transparency by enabling children and families to access information about the progress of their case, and ensure children know the outcomes of their case (where appropriate) in a way that is right for them.
<p>To better understand the difference our involvement makes so we can improve our service to the diverse range of children and families we work with.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Further improve opportunities for children and families to provide feedback during their Cafcass journey and after it ends. ▫ Publish thematic reports on what we have learned and the action we have taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continue to work with the Family Justice Young People’s Board to ensure children and young people are at the centre of everything Cafcass does. ▫ Establish a Cafcass Family Forum to improve our engagement with adult service users and involve them in the development of new services.

Our Partners



We want	Over the next three years, we will...	
<p>A seamless service for children and families, regardless of where they live or which agency they are involved with.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Make sure children, families, judiciary and other partner agencies understand the role of Cafcass and the contribution it makes to the courts and family justice system. ▫ Build knowledge of the diverse needs of children and families in proceedings, as well as the services and support that are available from partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Work with the judiciary and others to agree and implement improvements to protocols in public law (the Public Law Outline) and private law (the Child Arrangements Programme). ▫ Make sure our case records are accurate and up-to-date. Share information required by other agencies in a secure and timely way.
<p>To extend and deepen relationships with our partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Deepen our positive relationships with existing partners, including government departments, the judiciary, the court service, the legal profession, local authorities, our regulators and the providers of our commissioned services. ▫ Extend our partnerships – for example to police, schools, health services and third sector providers of family and relationship services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Promote two-way feedback so we can exchange knowledge and learning and understand the improvements that others want us to make.
<p>A joined-up approach to managing demand and resources across the system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continue our active membership of multi-agency partnerships at national and local levels. ▫ Work with partners to design, test and implement system level improvements in public and private law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Work with our partners to better understand how resources are spent within and between cases, and how they can be spent more effectively across the system to promote early intervention. ▫ Promote a public health approach to family justice to improve access to early help, and design services which prevent family problems from escalating.
<p>A shared knowledge base to support improvements in the family justice system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Improve two-way feedback between Cafcass and its partners. ▫ Work with Cafcass Cymru and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory to strengthen research on family justice issues and understand children's lived experiences through improved access to our data, analysis and practice insights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Ensure the Cafcass position on key policy and practice issues is supported by evidence and use this to support improvement at local and national levels. ▫ Establish a 'Centre of Excellence in the Voice of the Child' as a repository to exchange practice resources and standards across the sector and internationally.

Our People



We want	Over the next three years, we will...	
<p>The remit and resources to allow us to do the work that we and our partners think is necessary in a challenging environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Work with the Ministry of Justice to secure a safe minimum budget in each year of this plan in order to be able to deliver a sustainable service with manageable caseloads. ▫ Identify whether legislative change is needed in the longer term to enable us to do the necessary work to meet the changing needs of children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Ensure staff are clear on how to prioritise where demand outstrips resources, and that work is proportionate to the needs of each child and the professional time available.
<p>To attract, develop and retain a skilled, motivated and diverse workforce across all levels, functions and service areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continue to deliver a workforce strategy which attracts high calibre staff across our service, and enables us to deploy flexible specialist resource to help manage demand. ▫ Support and actively engage with all staff by acknowledging and celebrating their individual uniqueness, and by promoting flexibility to be productive and achieve work-life balance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Draw on the rich experience across staff networks to improve the design of information, training, tools and resources. ▫ Ensure our staff meet or exceed the relevant sector and industry standards for their profession.
<p>A modern physical and technological working environment to support wellbeing for both our staff and our service users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continue to deliver an estates strategy which provides staff and visitors with a modern service hub which facilitates all aspects of the Cafcass remit. ▫ Continue to deliver a technology strategy to upgrade our systems for managing cases and data, and sharing our knowledge, and improving virtual working connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Sustain investment in our wellbeing offer to ensure staff can continue to give their best service.
<p>A positive culture which promotes continuous improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Provide visible, accessible and supportive leadership across all parts of the organisation. ▫ Continue to innovate, celebrate and build on our successes, and learn from our mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Harness the full range of experience and expertise we have across the organisation to improve how we work. ▫ Ensure staff at all levels embody the Cafcass values in all their interactions.

This strategy has been developed through engagement with staff, the Family Justice Young People’s Board and wider stakeholders.

Our Board and our senior management team are committed to making this strategy a reality in practice. They will monitor progress against the three areas, which will be reported to parliament in our published Annual Report and Accounts. We will complement formal reports of progress with annual summaries of feedback received from children and families, and action taken, as well as quarterly newsletters to our stakeholders.

<p>We will be successful in Our Practice if:</p>	<p>We will be successful through Our Partners if:</p>	<p>Our People will be successful if:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ We continue to improve the quality of our work and limit practice which does not meet our high standards. ▫ We can better evidence the difference we make to children and families. ▫ Children and families have access to the information they need throughout their case, and at the end understand why Cafcass carried out the work it did. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ We can show that we have used our knowledge and relationships to improve the wider family justice system as well as our own service. ▫ We raise our public profile and improve our reputation with partners and wider stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ We have a highly skilled and motivated workforce, from a diverse range of backgrounds. ▫ They are supported to sustain high quality work in challenging times, and have access to technology which enables them to work productively. ▫ Our staff feel their health, wellbeing and professional development is valued, that they are trusted, and their full potential is realised.
<p>We will measure and report on progress by:</p>	<p>We will measure and report on progress by:</p>	<p>We will measure and report on progress by:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Continuing to audit the quality of our practice and service – both internally and by our regulator, Ofsted. ▫ Seeking, analysing and acting on feedback from the children and families who use our service. ▫ Monitoring and reporting on key performance indicators for casework, service standards and, where possible, the difference we make to children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Evaluating our partnership work to demonstrate that it had a clear purpose, and that we make effective use of partner feedback. ▫ Monitoring our public profile in the media, social media and other public affairs channels. ▫ Increasing use of our unique real-time national case-data to improve understanding of the wider system. ▫ Working with partners to enhance measurement and reporting on what is being done to make children’s lives better and using this information to improve services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Using our local strategy champions to engage staff in reviewing progress against delivery priorities. ▫ Monitoring key measures relating to our staff wellbeing and performance. ▫ Improving mechanisms for staff feedback through Performance Learning Reviews, anonymous ‘pulse check’ surveys and other channels.

At Cafcass:

- ✓ We respect everyone
- ✓ We are open and honest
- ✓ We join forces to makes things better for children and their families
- ✓ We focus on getting it right

Follow us



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