

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team
Overview

29 February 2024



Contents



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice

1. Our operating context
2. Prioritisation - update
3. Learning, progress and further improvement priorities
4. Quality assuring practice: Quarter 3 overview

Part 2: And in other news...

1. Learning from children's complaints
2. Recommissioning the 'improving child and family arrangements service'
3. Making a child a party in their proceedings: Improving our 16.4 work
4. Changes to child safeguarding policy
5. Together – our partner film

Part 3: People & Workforce

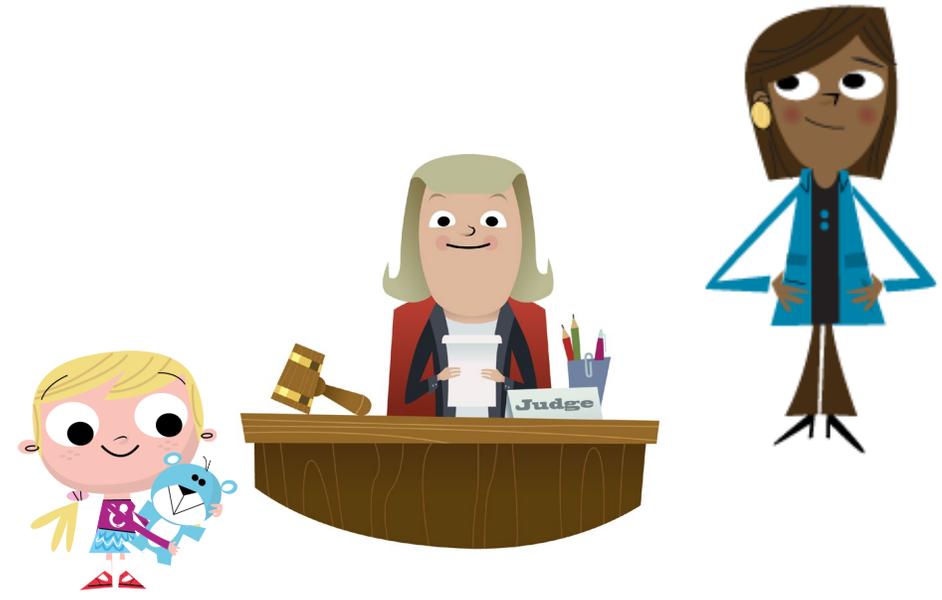
1. Staff survey 2023 – update on next steps
2. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2024/25
Revised objectives

Part 4: Priorities in the next period

1. Improving children's experiences in private law
2. Strategic planning – success measures



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Our operating context: Data (1)



- **Overall demand** this financial year to date (1 Apr 2023 to 31 Jan 2024) when compared to the same period in 2022-23 has **reduced by 0.4%**. We are receiving **c221 new children's cases every working day**
- This represents a **reduction of 2.1% in new public law cases** (706 fewer children) and **if only s31 care and supervision applications are considered, these have decreased by 5.9%** (819 fewer children).
- **New private law cases** accord with same point in previous year. However, **the number of section 7 orders received has increased by 3.5%** (601 more reports)
- At the end of January 2024, there were **30,096 children's cases open to Cafcass** representing **48,721 children**; compared to last year at this time (January 2023), this is a reduction of 9.5% / 3,144 fewer children's cases / 5,894 fewer children. The ongoing reduction of open children's cases brings us to Pre-Covid levels (March 2020).
- **The duration of closed children's cases remains high***
 - **S31 Care & Supervision Applications 43 weeks** (+7 weeks),
 - **Private Law (WTFH) 12 weeks** (+3 weeks),
 - **Private Law (WAFH) 59 weeks** (+20 weeks),
 - **R16:4 104 weeks** (+31 weeks).



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Our operating context: Data (2)



- In public law there are **3,965 children** (1,966 open children's cases) open 52+ weeks, of whom **643 children** (300 children's cases) have been in proceedings lasting 100+ weeks. Between 1 October and 31 December 2023 **31.2%** care and supervision children's cases closed in less than 26 weeks, an increase of 10.2% compared to the same period in 2022.
- In private law there are **7,223 children** (4,610 open children's cases) open 52+ weeks., of whom, **2,930 children** (1,865 children's cases) have been in proceedings lasting 100+ weeks.
- **92% of our work is allocated to operational service area teams**, 2.5% awaits allocation on duty, 3.5% is overseen in Post Assessment Hubs (awaiting a hearing) and 2% are overseen in Allocation Hubs in areas with active prioritisation. **This is how we balance the responsibility to see the children most at risk of harm most quickly, protect social work caseloads and manage additional open work.**
- **Average S7 Filing times are to timescale agreed with the court in 98.3% of the work.**
- **36.3% have an extension agreed** to complete the work before the listed hearing or to avert need for an addendum report



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Prioritisation update



1. Prioritisation successfully deactivated by the end of 2023 as planned in Greater Manchester and Norfolk/Norwich court areas
2. Now active in 4 court areas, Essex/Chelmsford, Greater London private law in the West, Central and East court areas
3. Prioritisation in private law across Greater London activated in September 2023 due to a combination of demand, including the additional work associated with delayed proceedings (updating safeguarding letters and addendum s7 reports) and challenges in sustaining capacity across the system. The challenge in capacity includes our ability to retain and recruit social workers to exclusively private law work
4. The terms of prioritisation in London were negotiated and agreed with the judiciary and other family justice partners. The Allocation Hub has been established in accordance with that agreement and the prioritisation protocol for screening information, prioritising allocation of cases where the welfare or safety of the child is at risk, communicating with children and families, providing a single point of contact for them, management oversight of new information, and time limits for allocation
5. The challenges for the Essex/Chelmsford court continue, and it is unlikely that prioritisation will be deactivated sustainably in the next 6 months
6. Review Challenge Meetings are held with the National Director and Deputy Director every 3 months to review progress in rebalancing demand and capacity



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Learning, progress, further improvement, and priorities from mid-year reviews of local improvement plans (1)



1. **All Operational Services Areas (OSA) have an improvement plan** that is rooted in our collective and accumulated learning about the quality and impact of practice and performance. That learning derives from the continuous scrutiny of local and national performance data, the findings from practice quality audits, feedback from children and families, and learning from significant incidents, child record and learning reviews.
2. **The OSA Improvement Plans set out the baseline performance of the area, sets targets and identifies the outlier teams**, where further analysis of the causal factors, support and challenge are given to make further progress.
3. **Targeted Support Plans with additional Practice & Leadership Review Meetings are in place** for those OSAs where further progress is particularly challenging
4. The **Mid-Year Review Meetings**, held by the National Director triangulate evidence from performance data, the findings from practice quality audits, and feedback from children, their families, and other professionals.
5. **The meetings have provided clear evidence of further overall progress and improvement in the quality of practice and performance, with the gaps being narrowed in most areas.** There were no surprises. Many aspects of practice and performance showed improvement between 10-30% - many from an already strong base. In some respects, sustaining the quality of practice that was already good or making gains of just 1-5% was recognised as a notable achievement.



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: Learning, progress, further improvement, and priorities from mid-year reviews of local improvement plans (2)



- **Notable further progress and improvements overall, including narrowing the gap.**
 - Seeing children (98%) with arrangements to follow up when children not recorded as seen
 - Seeing children in person (92.3%) with monitoring and challenge when children are not seen in person
 - Well written and personalised letters to children (68%)*
 - Sharing recommendations with children (50.2%)*
 - Completing mandatory domestic abuse practice training (97%)
 - Responding to the child's uniqueness in recommendations (98%)
 - Management review of Child Plans (92.4%) and updates of Child Plans (84.1%)
 - Auditors rating the behavioural detail in plans and assessments (72.6%)*
 - Auditors rating the reasoning underpinning risk assessments (75.2%)*
 - Reducing the proportion of children waiting for a decision for more than 52 weeks (17.6%)
 - Recorded management oversight (96%)
 - Local Quality & Impact audits on target (90.5%)* with collaborative QAI audits on target (51.6%)*
 - Recorded situational case supervision (87%) with auditors assessing recorded situational supervision as having an impact (49.6%)
 - Reducing average caseloads (19.3) and reduced reliance on agency social workers (2.7%)

*** Denotes a priority improvement action for the next 6 months**

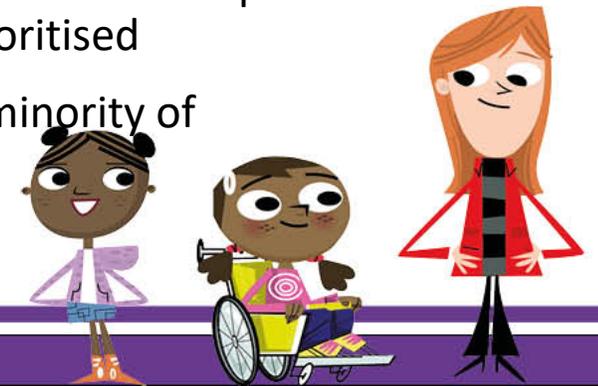


Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

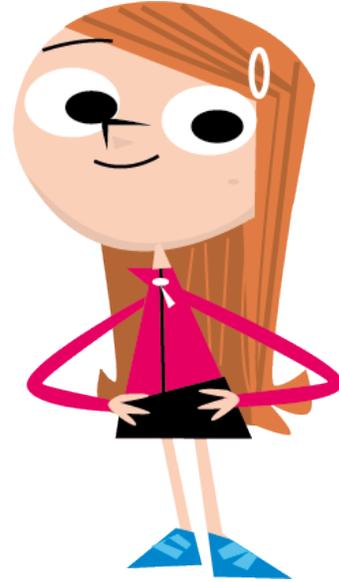
Quality assuring practice: April – December 2023 overview (1)



1. Audits judge overall that 78% of cases sampled, practice is good or better – **National Improvement Service**
 - Between April – November 2023, **the total of all audits (graded and not graded) was 4019, comprising 3372 Quality and Impact audits (local), 400 national Practice Quality Audits and 247 Performance Board Quality & Impact audits**
 - **1802 of all audits (53.4%) were undertaken collaboratively** with the Family Court Adviser.
 - **1,780 of all audits (44.3%) included feedback** from children and families
 - **A record of management oversight (where it is expected) in 2470 audits (82%)**
 - **A record of supervision was found in 2031 audits (78%)**
 - **1,364 practice observations, 379 moderations by Heads of Practice**
1. Emerging themes include: evidence of sharing recommendations with children and their response has improved by 20% points, personalised letters being sent to children is an improving picture across the year rising 10% to 78%.
2. Evidence of management oversight on children's records continues to improve and is mirrored in supervision shown in 66% of sampled cases - an increase of 3.5% points. Delay is remains well – prioritised
3. Learning relates to the need to consistently assess concerns about sexual abuse and a minority of records remain where domestic abuse is not assessed sufficiently well



Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news...

Learning from children's complaints



- Twenty child complaints in the year to date (11 in the whole of 2022-23). All have an in-depth conversation with our dedicated children's complaints manager to understand and respond to their concern.
- Some complaints are motivated by the views of adults and the welfare of the child is always our primary consideration in how we approach our work
- 8 complaints upheld fully or in part. Most common concern is not feeling listened to, or that their wishes and feelings have not been shared in the report.
- Learning and action points are reported directly to relevant managers, and key themes shared and considered by the National Learning Panel
- Learning and action points from children's complaints have included:
 - Greater consideration about what is shared in goodbye letters to children and the potential impact of this (action point for an FCA)
 - The importance of keeping children updated about when we will next visit them, what will happen next, and supporting them to understand what is happening for them (learning point from multiple complaints)
 - The need to prioritise responding to communication from a child (action point for an FCA)
 - The new Children's Complaints Policy will be published in March



Part 2: And in other news...

Recommissioning the Improving Child & Family Arrangements Service

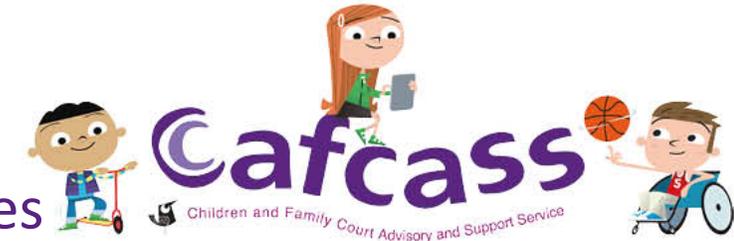


1. Cafcass commissions support services for families in private law proceedings, on behalf of Ministry of Justice.
2. The contracts to deliver the services run between 3-5 years. One of these services, the Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA), is due to be recommissioned.
3. ICFA is a court ordered service which provides families with a tailored programme of work to help them agree safe, beneficial, and sustainable contact/family time.
4. ICFA launched in May 2021. 1762 referrals were supported in 2022-23.
5. The Cafcass National Commissioning Team has undertaken a service review and made recommendations to the MoJ for a re-design of the service.
6. Timeline for recommission agreed:
 - Market engagement – February 2024
 - Tender opportunity advertised – early 2025
 - New service launched – November 2025
7. We will continue to make improvements to the service under existing contracts



Part 2: And in other news...

Making a child a party in their proceedings: improvement priorities



- In 2022, it was agreed with the President of the Family Division and approved by CMT to introduce a new approach to practice for 16.4 appointments, building on the success of the Cafcass Positive Parenting Programme
- The model **aims to reduce drift and delay establish a consistent model of practice, providing better and sustainable outcomes for children.** The model has three key components:
 1. *Establishing a timescale for the proceedings from the outset with a final hearing six months from commencement.*
 2. *Holding a planning meeting with the family within 28 days, producing a plan owned by the parents to narrow the issues, involving the family in setting out how the Guardian will work with the family and the preferred outcomes for the child(ren).*
 3. *The Guardian choosing from a range of options, the most appropriate methods for undertaking an assessment and/or engaging with the family to bring about positive change.*
- The model has been **piloted in 4 service areas**, the evaluation of the impact of the objectives is positive with a significant reduction in delay and duration and positive feedback from judges, families, managers and FCAs.
- The national roll out of the model is agreed and is one of the 6 workstreams in the **Private law improvement programme.**
- The national roll out is being planned in all areas and will commence in **June 2024.**



Part 2: And in other news...

Changes to our child safeguarding policy



- The Child Safeguarding Policy was refreshed and reissued in December 2023 based on consolidated learning from feedback, practice quality audits, significant incidents, child record and learning reviews.
- The current version builds on, brings up to date and adjusts the established practice supported by the previous version (March 2020).
- **The Child Safeguarding Policy is supported by a guidance document and is reinforced by the Management Support, Supervision, and Oversight Policy, and specifically the triggers for situational case supervision in those circumstances where children are most at risk of harm.**

Changes to the policy include:

- Clarifying the responsibilities for FCAs relating to **when a 16a risk assessment is required**
- The requirements for **elective home education**
- **Private fostering**
- **Finding of fact hearings**
- **Vulnerable adults**
- **Registered sex offenders**
- **DBS checks for special guardians, enhanced and international police checks**

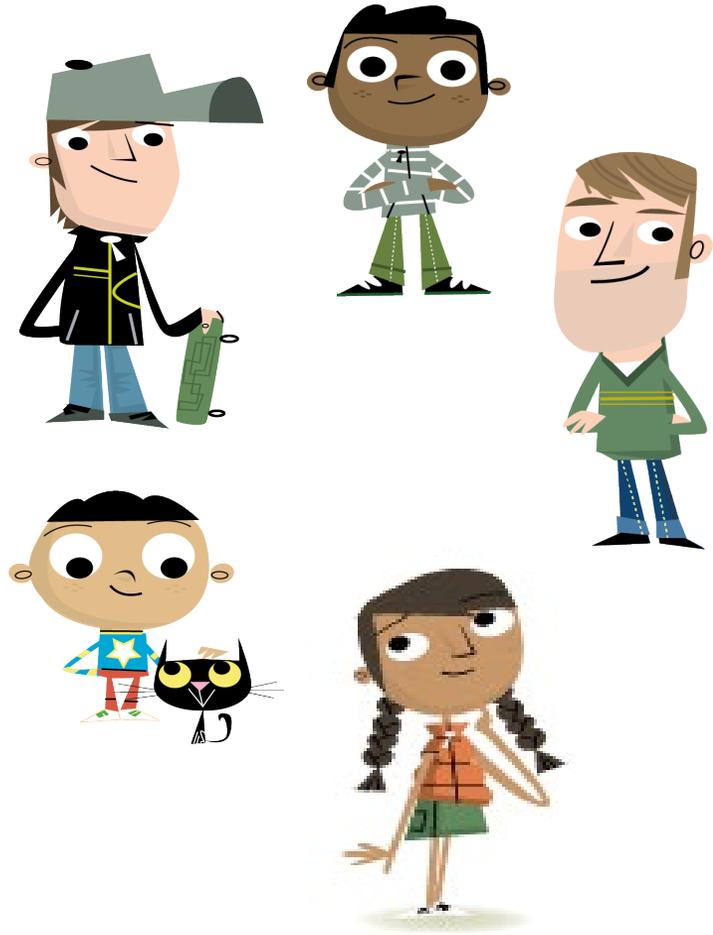


Part 2: And in other news...

Together – our partner film



Part 3: People & Workforce



Part 3: People & Workforce

Staff survey 2023 – update on next steps



Pay & Benefits



- Secure maximum pay award, paid as early as possible
- Continue with option of additional paid work following pilot
- Buy and sell annual leave
- Continue to promote additional staff benefits

Social Work workloads



- Caseloads reduced to pre-covid levels
- Reliance on locum social workers is low
- Increase in manager capacity and capability
- Flexible working policy
- Comprehensive wellbeing programme

Learning & Development



- New career and learning pathway for social work
- New career and learning pathway for Corporate and Business Services
- Core skills pilot workshops for Corporate and Business Services

Leaders visibility in leading change



- 5-6 national in-person events led by CMT members
- Continuation of regular leadership live meetings
- In discussion on options about what 'connection' and office presence means for efficiency, effectiveness and for children

Induction



- Review and reduction of core learning materials by 40%
- Professionally designed induction guides to improve accessibility
- Increased frequency of virtual induction days
- New protected time principle
- More support for managers

Supporting Staff when the behaviour of parents towards them is unacceptable



- Streamlining the Health & Safety training and reporting system
- 'think-in' about the flashpoints in proceedings.
- Policies to provide the highest level of support
- Prioritise in one to ones , PLRs and general meetings

- Six national priority areas are being progressed (as above) with senior sponsorship
- Local Area Action planning starting in March
- Leadership Live - full update in March with further full update in September
- Individual Areas will have their own communication timetable



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2024/25 - revised objectives (1)



Performance against priorities since last Board meeting

- Key learning themes have started to emerge from children’s feedback, including the importance of sharing recommendations. QAI and digital systems with QR codes are now being use more consistently which is enabling this information to be captured and analysed more effectively.
- A series of new Family Court Adviser and Service Manager diversity reports were shared during Practice Week (Oct 23). Roll out planned in April
- Positive evaluation of learning and engagement activity has included a workshop during Practice Week on the theme of ‘intersectionality’; Black History Month (Oct 23) programme included a research webinar ‘How might ethnicity affect our experience of the family justice system?’ attended by over 100 colleagues with a speaker from Nuffield Foundation; Launch of new Neurodiversity staff network during Disability History Month (Nov/Dec 23).
- Accessibility and impact of diversity wheel ‘Together tool’ have been improved by developing the concept into a physical ‘spinning wheel’. Further work is taking place prior to formal launch to consider the ages and understanding of children and also guidance on its use in family work



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2024/25 - revised objectives (2)



Performance against priorities since last Board meeting (continued)

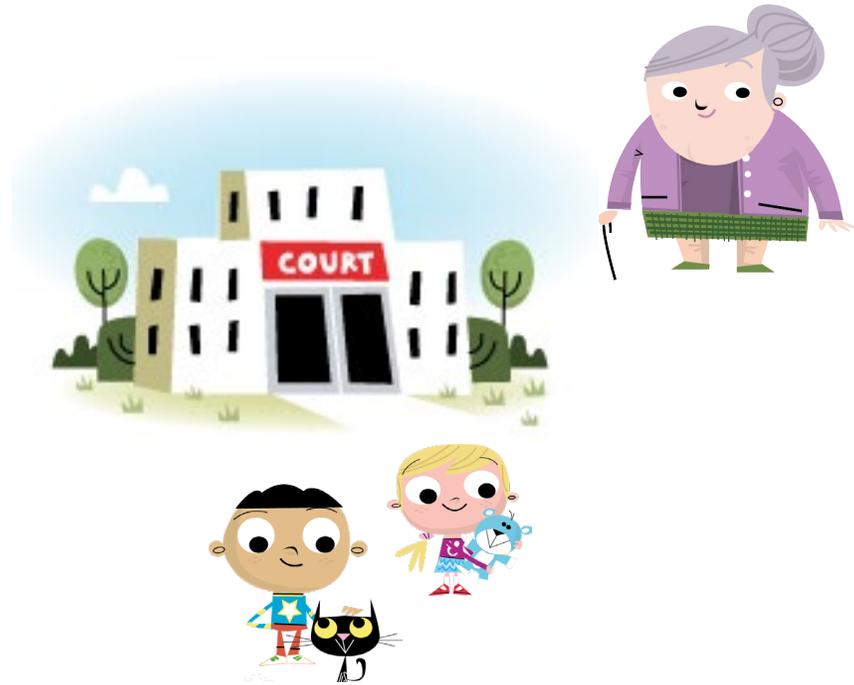
- New recruitment and selection training has continued with a growing pool of ‘recruitment allies’. Hiring managers can approach recruitment allies to bring additional diversity, insight and experience to their panel.
- Data is showing that characteristics are being recorded more consistently which is strengthening analysis of the child’s uniqueness and how this impacts on their life. This is now an established improvement priority within practice quality standards, reflected in practice audits and an item in the spotlight reports to Operational Management Team (OMT).

Refreshing our objectives

- Continuing with current priorities until they are fully embedded and having the intended impact
- New areas subject to consultation include: understanding the responses in the staff survey against protected characteristics, complete level 3 of the Carers UK Accreditation, continue to build our new neurodiversity network, increase our understanding of menopause, extend the number of diversity champions, review our estate for physical access, extend our understanding of the impact of socio-economic background for staff and children and families



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Improvement in the next period

Further improving children's experiences in private law



Cafcass is undertaking a change programme, adopting a 'test and learn' approach aimed at improving the experiences of children in private law proceedings:

- enabling early engagement with children;
- giving priority to applications where the welfare and safety of children is at risk;
- reducing duplication of effort and the number of times that children and families have to tell their story;
- making early referrals to appropriate services; and
- delivering timely family justice.

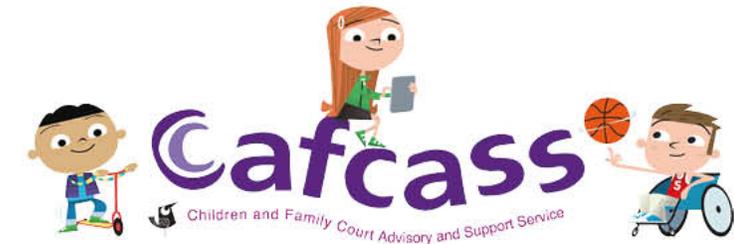
The programme is informed by feedback from children & families, the extensive experience of colleagues, ongoing consultation with partners across the family justice system, learning from pilots, and learning from Significant Incidents.



Part 4: Improvement in the next period

Further improving children's experiences in private law:

The 'Pathfinder' pilot in Birmingham and Solihull



In partnership with the Ministry of Justice, Cafcass and other partners will be piloting a new model for private law. Cafcass' change programme will align with these 'Pathfinders' (as well as delivering a range of other smaller internal trials designed for us to find out if we can achieve early benefits)

- In England, one 'Pathfinder' has been running in **Dorset** since early 2022
- Another is due to launch in **Birmingham & Solihull** in May 2024
- Pathfinders also operate with Cafcass Cymru & partners in Wales (currently in **North Wales and Cardiff** due to launch in 2024)

For Pathfinder areas, specific communications and materials will be designed for children and families which explain what is going to happen. There will also be direct engagement with local partners. Local Implementation Groups are in place, chaired by the local Designated Family Judge



Part 4: Improvement in the next period

Strategic planning – success measures



- Proposed success framework published in full version of our Strategic Plan 2023-26 – *Ambitious for Children*
- Our measures support wider Family Justice System objectives
- We will publish Year 1 performance against baseline/benchmarks in our Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24
- We will also use child and family feedback to assess our progress

- An increase in audited practice that is judged good or better
- Increased use of 'Together' practice materials
- Evidence impact of management supervision and oversight
- Increase volume of feedback and % that is positive
- Improved efficiency and consistency in case progression

Practice

- Reduced staff turnover
- We will have attracted, developed and retained talent and diverse people
- Optimised caseloads
- Improved opportunities for career progression
- Improved employee engagement and feedback

People

- Reduced number of children in long duration proceedings
- Earlier engagement of children in private law
- Clearer arrangements for safe contact, especially where domestic abuse is known or alleged
- Progress in expanding the Private Law Pathfinder (investigative approach) to additional areas
- Greater clarity on how outcomes will be communicated to children

Partners

