



Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team
Overview

11 July 2024



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Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

1 April – 31 May 2024: Demand and performance headlines



- **Overall new demand is c12% higher so far during the first quarter of this year (1 April and 31 May 2024) compared to the same period in 2023. This represents an equal rise for public and private law children’s cases being 284 and 1,032 children respectively**
- **3,580 new S7 report requests were received in the period which represents an increase of c10% (316 more reports), which included 1,039 addendum reports, also an increase of c10% (90 more reports).**
- On average, we received **223 new children’s cases per working day**
- **Average social work caseloads have reduced further.** As of the end of May 2024 for long-term teams, the average is 19.0 (adjusted for FTE) compared to 19.9 at the end of May 2023. For work to first hearing teams in private law, caseload averages are 37.0; compared to the 38.0 in May 2023
- **In the last three months from 1 March to 31 May 2024 88% of eligible FCAs had a local Case File Audit** (undertaken for 935 FCAs against 1,063 intended). An additional 237 local audits were also undertaken in the same period as part of our quality assurance framework, **giving a total of 1172.**
- **At the end of May 2024, 4,331 private law children’s cases (6,821 children) were ‘court ready’,** meaning Cafcass has filed a report, and there is a hearing in the next 6 weeks. In addition, there were 1,904 private law children’s cases (2,948 children) where Cafcass had filed a report with a hearing listed for 6 weeks or more in the future, and 584 private law children’s cases (878 children) where Cafcass had filed a report with no future hearing listed.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



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

- In the last year there has been a **21% (2,902 fewer children)** decrease in children in proceedings lasting more than **52 weeks**. At the end of May 2024 there are **10,628 children (6,216 cases)** that have been open for 52 weeks and **3,356 children (1,996 cases)** that have been open for 100 weeks or longer
- In public law proceedings, there are **3,641 children (1,749 cases)** that have been open for 52 weeks and **601 children (272 cases)** that have been open for 100 weeks or longer. The number of children whose cases are open for more than 52 weeks has **reduced by 27% (1,347 fewer children)** and by **28% (232 fewer children)** in proceedings for more than 100 weeks compared to the end of May 2023
- In private law proceedings, there are **6,987 children (4,461 cases)** that have been open for 52 weeks and **2,755 children (1,724 cases)** that have been open for 100 weeks or longer. The number of children on cases running for more than 52 weeks has **reduced by 18% (1,555 fewer children)** and by **22% (786 fewer children)** in proceedings for more than 100 weeks compared to the end of May 2023.



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



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

- In the latest reportable period for these measures (cases closed 1 January to 31 March 2024):
 - **Final decisions were reached in 29.1% of section 31 care proceedings in 26 weeks or less (1,571 children) an 8.5% increase (335 more children) compared to cases closed 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023.**
 - **Final decisions in S31 cases took 43 weeks (4 weeks lower compared to the same period last year).**
 - **Section 8 child arrangements proceedings resolving in 26 weeks or less increased by 4.0% (1,667 more children) to 62.0% (16,664 children).**
 - In this period **Private law work completing at the first hearing took 11 weeks (2 weeks less than the same period last year)**
 - **Where further work is ordered at the first hearing, this took 58 weeks (2 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



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

- **9.2 working weeks (average) to file in public law cases, 0.5 of a working week higher compared to the same period last year**
- **4.0 working weeks (average) to file safeguarding letters, 0.2 of a working week less compared to the same period last year**
- **14.3 working weeks (average) to file Section 7 reports, 0.1 of a working week less compared to the same period last year**
- **c30% of S7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date, c7% 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 number of open children's cases

- At the end of May 2024, the overall number of open children's cases has reduced by 6.7% (2,142 fewer cases / -3,748 fewer children) compared to May 2023. This means that we are supporting 48,528 children (29,819 cases) in open proceedings compared to 52,276 (31,961 cases) in May 2023.
- This represents a reduction of 7.6% of public law children's cases (954 fewer cases / fewer 1,934 children) and a reduction of 6.1% private law children's cases (1,188 cases / 1,814 children)

2) Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work

- At the end of May 2024 there were 1,303 Employed FCAs. Headcount accords with demand overall and is adjusted in operational service areas where additional capacity is required. We continue to rely on the capacity of our flexible workforce, including 43 locum FCAs and 101 active Cafcass Associates
- Social work 12-month turnover is stable at 15.2%, compared to 14.8% in the previous year. 200 FCAs have left Cafcass in the last 12 months compared to 227 for the previous 12-month period.
- 8.8% of Family Court Advisers working in public law / private law work after the first hearing teams have caseloads of 25+ (31 May 2024), this has improved by 4.0% compared to the same time in 2023

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 May 2024, **98.2%** of children on applicable cases had a completed child engagement record, with **94.1% seen in person**. This is further improvement compared to the same period last year.
- For children in **public law proceedings**, **55%** of audited files showed personalised letters of introduction had been sent– a 17% increase on the previous year.
- For children in **private law proceedings**, **72%** of audited files showed personalised letters of introduction had been sent – a 10% 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 **63%** in the same period in 2023 to **69%** in May 2024
- The percentage of private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children has increased from **53%** in the same period in 2023 to **62%** in May 2024.



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 last three months (1 March and 31 May 2024) Cafcass received 1,150 items of feedback from children and families from our audit or Digital Feedback system. 786 of these (68.3%) were positive.**
- Negative feedback themes include alleged bias, not understanding children's needs, and failure to engage with respect. Some children express unhappiness when family time is restricted or when communication falls short in explaining recommendations or a perception that the FCA is not considering their wishes and feelings
- Feedback is shared with staff to consider any learning with quarterly feedback reports provided to senior leaders setting out national learning themes with an action plan. Locally operational service area improvement plans include information on how feedback has been used to make improvements.

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 1,172 completed local audits In the last three months from 1 March to 31 May 2024, 500 were for public law and 672 for private law. 56.4% of public law audits and 65.9% of private law audits were collaborative**

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: London Prioritisation – Overview (1)



1. Prioritisation refers to the close oversight of our work for children that must be duty allocated for an extended period, pending the availability of a Family Court Advisor (FCA). Intended to identify the most urgent children's cases for immediate allocation, provide children and families with a single point of contact whilst waiting to meet their FCA, oversee new information, maintain the quality of practice, protect practitioner and manager workloads
2. Prioritisation was activated 25th September 2023 due to a combination of increased demand (24%) the additional work arising from delay, and reduced staffing capacity. At the point of activation, London private law was operating at 72% capacity. Arising from vacancies, staff absence, and a high proportion of new FCAs
3. Agreed with Judiciary and HMCTS that Cafcass will file section 7 reports in 14 weeks for children's cases presenting significant risk or urgent welfare issues. 23 weeks for all other work for children managed by the Allocation Hub, providing a single point of contact for children and families. Safeguarding referrals and reports completed earlier if safeguarding issue identified at any time.



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice: London Prioritisation – Overview (2)



4. 346 duty children's cases (529 children) in the Allocation Hub awaiting allocation to an FCA. While staff capacity is being supported by the appointment of locum FCAs and Cafcass Associates, it remains a barrier to de-activating Prioritisation
5. Around 1,010 children's cases (1,600 children) where Cafcass has reported to court are awaiting a future court hearing requiring oversight by Cafcass. This includes 210 children's cases in the Post Assessment Hub (336 children) with extended court hearing dates and children's circumstances require ongoing monitoring
6. The quality of practice for children and young people in London private law remains both a strength and focus for further improvement
7. To deactivate Prioritisation requires a systemic rebalance of demand, increased and stabilised staffing capacity, and a reduction of the additional work required because of delays
8. Next steps – meetings with senior Judiciary and HMCTS to review Prioritisation in London and agree a partnership response and plan of action



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

End of year practice improvement reset

** Denotes a priority improvement action in our post-inspection reset plan: Listening to Children – Lighting the Way.*



Overall

The National Practice Quality Audit in December 2023 showed a year-on-year improvement with 78.5% of audited practice being assessed as Good or Outstanding. The Practice Reviews of the 122 children's cases scrutinised by Ofsted inspectors found 84% of practice assessed as Good or Outstanding.

Practice

1. **Child engagement** (98.1%) sustained performance and children seen in person (93.1%) a 3% improvement*
2. **Well written and personalised letters** to children (57.1%) a 23% improvement*
3. **Sharing recommendations with children** (59.5%) a 30% improvement*
4. **No evidence of conflating or minimising domestic abuse** (92.4%) a 32% improvement*
5. **Effective use of the Assessment & Child's Plan** (77.1%) sustained performance*
6. **Delay for children in public law proceedings** lasting over 26 weeks (18.6% fewer cases)*
7. **Delay for children in private law proceedings** lasting over 26 weeks (15.1% fewer cases)*
8. **Reducing the proportion of children waiting for a decision for more than 52 weeks** (17.6%)*



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

End of year practice improvement reset

** Denotes a priority improvement action in our post-inspection reset plan:
Listening to Children – Lighting the Way.*

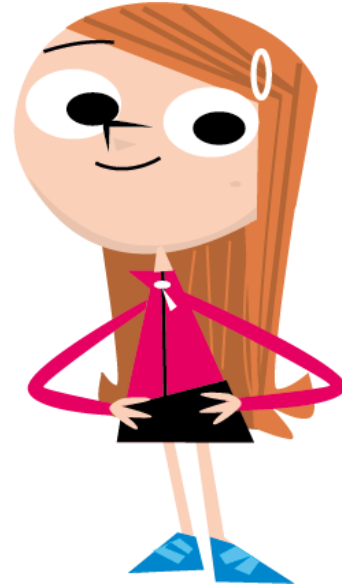


Management support, supervision, and oversight

1. **Management review** of Assessment & Child's Plan (91.7%) sustained*
2. **Recorded management oversight** (84.1%) a marginal reduction*
3. **Auditors assessing management oversight** as having an impact (62.1%) a 17% improvement*
4. **Recorded situational case supervision** (81.6%) a marginal reduction*
5. **Auditors assessing recorded situational supervision** as having an impact (64%) a 24% improvement*
6. **Local Quality & Impact audits** (90.5%) sustained*
7. **Collaborative QAI audits** (52%) a marginal improvement*
8. The **proportion of FCAs attending group supervision** (67.3%) an increase of 13.0%*
9. **Reduced average caseloads** (18.8) a reduction of 1.2 and a reduction in the proportion of FCAs with more than 25 children's cases (11%). Reduced reliance on agency social workers (3.7%) a reduction of 1%
10. **Increasing case progression and closure** (public: 111% and private: 114.5%)



Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from practice update

- Between 1 January and 30 March 2024, there were 80 significant incidents. They were all overseen by the Director of Operations or a Deputy Director.
- 62.5% (50) of the child/ren concerned were subject to a public law application and 37.5% (30), the application was in private law.
- Learning presented quarterly to the Performance and Quality committee
- Learning report to support practice learning and fulfil our commitment to being responsive to the experiences of children and families

Three learning themes identified from the 80 Significant Incidents (*when learning is identified in more than significant incident and features in learning from audits*)

1. When children are spending time with their parents in a hospital or residential units, FCAs need to fully scrutinise risk assessments for family time or supervised arrangements. It should not be assumed that medical or residential staff will undertake supervision tasks.

Action in response: Public Law Practice Quality Standard 2: Seeing and Engaging with the child is being revised to highlight the importance of all aspects of a child's care arrangements to safeguard them from further harm. Practice Quality Standards are used in supervision and as guided self-reflection.



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from practice update continued



2. Importance of making enquiries with adults in children's wider family or care networks including foster carers and adult children within the home.

Action in response: An update is being made to the Cafcass policy and guidance on Engaging with grandparents, wider family members and professionals to highlight the need to consider all connected adults.

3. Safeguarding children who are not subject to proceedings, for example a child injured by his mother's partner.

Action in response: A further practice alert was issued to reinforce our duty to safeguard all children. The safety of any connected child within the family must be considered.

- Our audits through 2024-2025 will provide us with more information on whether practice is Improving.



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from practice – National learning themes



1. Our feedback received digitally and through audit tells us **that the most common score is 5/5 (very satisfied)**. The comments often describe the quality of **relationship with the FCA or guardian** and feelings of trust in the practitioner putting the wellbeing of their child first
2. **Understanding domestic abuse** – Some Feedback reflects the improvements we see in our audits, whilst some confirms the need for further improvement:
 - the language used by some FCAs is very important with some having a perception that their experience and truth is dismissed or discounted because it isn't happening now, or the relationship is over, so it is no longer a current concern
3. **Working with fathers** – there is more negative feedback from fathers than from mothers. **This difference is not present when Domestic Abuse is not a factor**. We also have very positive feedback from fathers where we surpassed their expectations because they were treated fairly
4. The learning from feedback from adults and children is incorporated into practice alerts, individual practice learning reviews (PLRs), and operational service area improvement plans



Part 2: And in other news:

Improving practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is known or alleged – policy and programme update



- **4th annual domestic abuse audit with the theme of domestic abuse** - we are making progress, but still further improvement needed
- **Moderation exercise with volunteer members of the Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group**, (including people with expertise by experience, a representative of the DA Commissioners Office, academics, a magistrate and a lawyer). Internal audit findings were broadly validated and important learning taken into our improvement plan
- Our **domestic improvement plan is being adjusted** and developed in response to current insights and learning
- **Local leaders are held to account through our Performance and Accountability Framework** – including national audits, mid and end of year reviews and Performance Boards
- **Honouring the experiences of victims of domestic abuse** who bravely and generously share their experiences with us, we are introducing a domestic abuse practice policy, based on learning from their complaints, significant incidents and feedback **to make the requirements in practice more explicit and robust**



Part 2: And in other news:

Improving practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is known or alleged – policy and programme update (2)



- **Secondment of our Safe Lives colleagues extended** for a second year – their work is helping significantly
- **Experts by experience practice reference group** are dedicated to enabling the improvements in our plan through their insights and challenge
- **Domestic abuse practice champions (c100)** are working every day to support practitioners with the challenges of this work and holding group supervisions to enable the application of the national training into practice
- **Domestic abuse practice pathway and guidance**, introducing a bespoke *Cafcass DASH risk indicator checklist* which supports the implementation of the domestic abuse policy
- **Updating our guidance in the Child Impact Assessment Framework** on ‘alienating behaviour’ emphasising the understanding that this can be a further form of coercive control
- **Strengthening our induction and support** to colleagues joining Cafcass from Local Authorities so that our practice expectations are clear and understood



Part 3: People & Workforce



People & Workforce

Workforce overview and update: April - July 2024



- Turnover for social workers remains high at 15% ,down on peak of 15.7% in Sept 2023 and lower than the Local Authority average of 16%
- Corporate & Business Services turnover was 8.5% in May 2024
- Challenges to recruit and retain people remain in specific parts of the country
- Social Work vacancy rate is 9.6% (*the latest comparable national Local Authority figure is 18.9%*)
- Locum social worker use remains low at 2.5% of the national workforce - significantly lower when compared to most local authorities (17.4%)
- In the 12 months to May 2024, sickness absence for social workers is 5.9%, which is a slight increase from March 2024 when it was 5.8%. 78.2% of sickness absence for social workers is due to long term sickness
- Our first in-person Annual Recognition celebratory event took place on 4th July



Part 3: People & Workforce

Health and Safety strategic priority (1)



- We are prioritising the safety of staff, children and families, contractors and visitors
- We want to build a strong health, safety and security culture at Cafcass, making information and processes accessible and embedded into day-to-day working practices.
- The estates and health and safety team will be undertaking a programme of work over the year to cover:

Court security

- ✓ A shared approach with HMCTS, sharing details of court security matters to increase our internal court security awareness
- ✓ Meetings will be arranged with senior leads across HMCTS to maintain the dialogue and progress we are making.
- ✓ The Professional Users Access Scheme (PUAS) - the court fast pass system will continue to be promoted and reviewed to ensure that our staff gain the maximum benefit

Cafcass office security

- ✓ Prioritising security audit processes for our offices. Agreed to trial this approach at our London, Croydon and Birmingham offices. The results and action plan for roll out in September



Part 3: People & Workforce

Health and Safety strategic priority (2)



Health and safety continued

- ✓ A review of all policies, procedures and the development of any new to include security guidance is ongoing – including intranet updates.
- ✓ The policy on managing unacceptable behaviour and lone working guidance will be reviewed first and will be relaunched during practice week – October 2024
- ✓ The development of essential H&S and security training for all staff is currently underway. The first training tutorials relating to reporting incidents is ready to share. Staff will receive a personal letter from the Chief Executive to launch the training in July. The letter will also include key reminders to staff regarding managing unacceptable behaviour and the need to make sure they are registered and using our online H&S management system AssessNET to report all matters.
- ✓ A new health and safety adviser has been recruited in support of this new programme of work



Part 3: People & Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – update



- The **Leadership and Commitment Objective** within our Diversity Strategy is due to be reviewed. As part of our Diversity Strategy, we will progress the commission of a new programme of learning and development focused on leaders and managers from across the whole organisation
- The responsibilities and work of our **Staff Networks** are being reviewed. The connections between staff networks and the support provided by **Peer Practice Specialists** will also form part of the review.
- Our commitment to **Young Carers** was highlighted at the last steering group when a member of the FJYPB shared their experiences. We plan to review processes in place to identify young carers and assess how well we are meeting their needs in proceedings. We will also explore the potential for establishing a network for young carers.
- **New guidance on working with young people and their gender identity** is being finalised. This will be followed by the launch of the **‘Getting to know me’ spinner** - a practice aid to support FCAs in understanding the uniqueness of children



People & Workforce

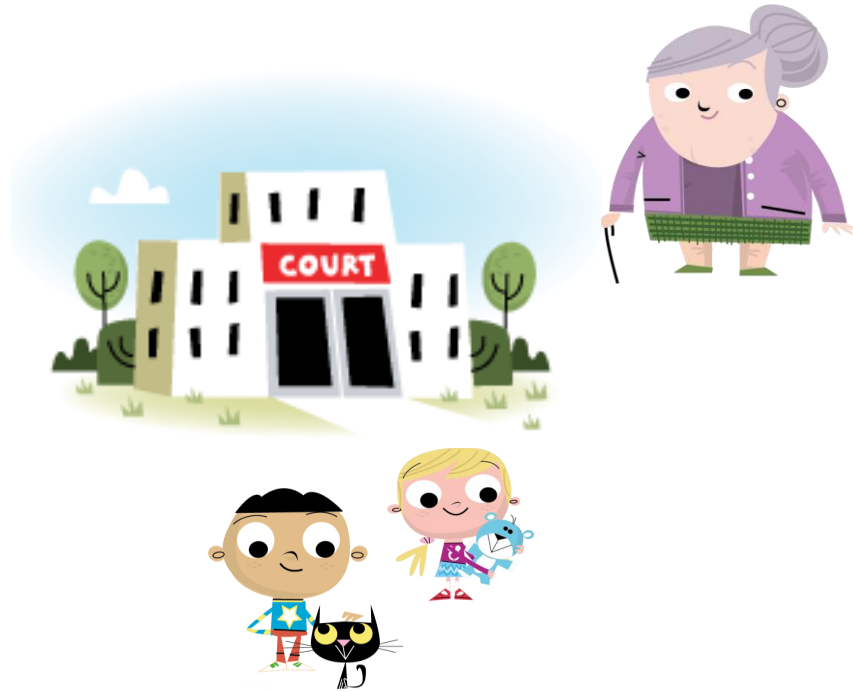
Leadership Conference June 2024



- ***'Ambitious Leadership – exceptional experiences for children and families'***
- Interactive sessions on
 - Ambitious Leadership – *The requirements of managers and leaders in an organisation that focuses on safeguarding children from harm*
 - Ambitious for our people – *The Health & Safety of our people and the characteristics of a connected organisation*
 - Ambitious for Children – *Leading your Improvement Plans to listen to children and amplify their voices*
- **450 Leaders** - Social Work & Corporate and Business Services
- Hybrid event mixing in-person and remote attendance
- Senior leaders hosted 12 In-person Cafcass hubs across the country



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Improving children's experiences in private law – early learning for Cafcass from the Birmingham pathfinder court and next steps



The pilot for improving children's experiences in private law (Pathfinder), led by MOJ, launched on **28th May 2024** in Birmingham & Solihull.

At June 2024, there are 42 children's cases in the new process. 7 of these have now closed to Cafcass.



We are already seeing examples where we are responding to children's needs much sooner in the new process



Local teams & partners and the Cafcass project team are working hard together to embed new ways of working & learn what works best

The pilot is due to run for a minimum of 12 months. Evaluation evidence is being collected on whether the arrangements offer the anticipated benefits for children & families.



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Practice week 2024



- Practice Week 2024 scheduled for 26 September - 2 October
- Whole organisation thinking, listening and learning together
- **This year a key focus for practice week:**
‘understanding the needs of children harmed by domestic abuse’
- Welcome to Practice Week 2024 opening session, which will feature a keynote speech from Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of Family Division and include a Q&A
- **A mix of required learning and a range of elective learning events** focused on debate, professional development, health and wellbeing, and connecting with our networks
- **For social workers and social work managers**, required learning sessions will focus on
 - Working with victims and analysing risk of perpetrators of domestic abuse who sexually offend
 - The Assessment and Child’s Plan - a transparent record of how professional judgement was achieved
 - Seeing and engaging with children to help them understand thinking and recommendations about their lives
 - Learning from national practice alerts and protecting children from harm
- **For colleagues in business and corporate services**, required learning includes Health and safety for managers, protecting personal information and managing sickness absence



VOICE OF THE CHILD 2024



Join us on
Thursday the 25th
July 2024

The Family Justice Young People's Board are excited to share with you the details of our child and young person led 2024 Voice of the Child Conference and invite you to register your attendance for this online, interactive event. This year our theme is:

Childhood lasts a lifetime: Turning up the volume of the voices of children and young people who have experience of domestic abuse and harmful parenting.

The event will run over 2 sessions, the 1st at 10:00am and 2nd at 1:00pm and will include:

- INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS led by children and young people.
- PANEL SESSION with key stakeholders
- KEY MESSAGES from FJYPB members.
- IN MY SHOES - hearing from children and young people about their experience of family law proceedings.



Register here

Please take a minute now to register and secure your place at the conference by scanning the above QR code or emailing us at:

FJYPB@cafccass.gov.uk