

Cafcass Public Board Meeting

Chief Executive Officer
and Corporate Management Team Overview

30 April 2026



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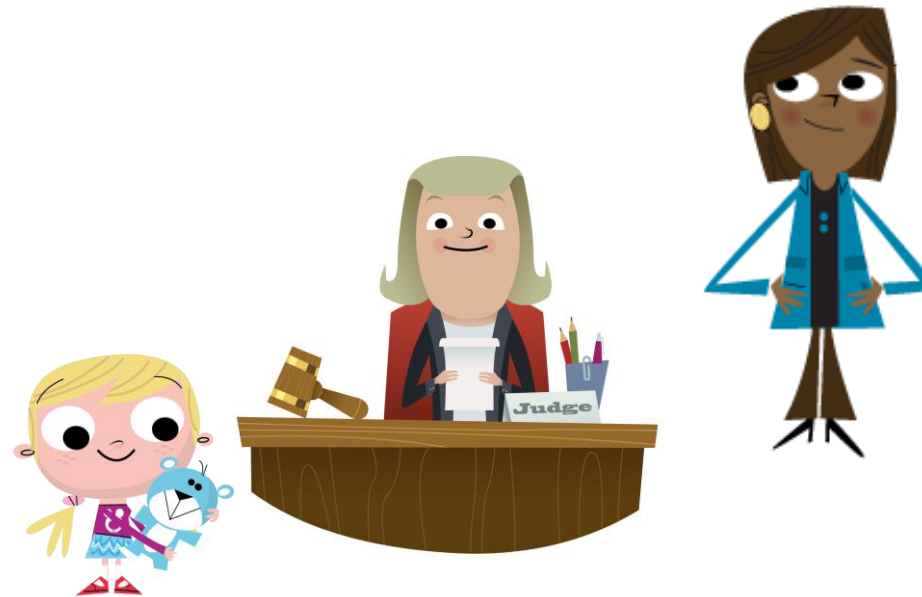
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Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April 2025 – March 2026: Full year demand and performance headlines



- Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, Cafcass received 59,147 total new children's cases featuring 91,061 children – an increase of 7.2% (+3,982 children's cases / +6,018 children) compared to the previous year
 - Public law demand was 4.7% higher (+769 children's cases / +1,284 children) and was consistently elevated throughout the year. *Section 31 care applications increased by 5.4% (+621 care applications / +1,149 children)*
 - Private law demand was 8.2% higher (+3,213 children's cases / +4,734 children), with highest demand in the second half of the financial year (1 October – 31 March) at 13.8% (represented by +4,067 children in +2,693 new cases)
 - 20,148 new Section 7 (17,294) and Child Impact Reports* (2,854) ordered compared to the same period last year 1,678 (+9.1%), including requests for addendum reports (a decrease of 16%)
 - 1,483 Deprivation of Liberty Applications (1,480 children). This represents an increase of 22.0% (+267 Deprivation of Liberty applications / +265 children) compared to the previous year
 - 234 new children's cases per working day received between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026.
- New demand increased across all operational service areas, but variation remains. The largest rises were in A10 (Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Rutland) at 15.0% and A17 (Kent) at 13.4%

* Assessment decision for a harm and/or welfare assessment of the child(ren)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April 2025 – March 2026: Full year demand and performance headlines (2)



- As of 31 March 2026, Cafcass had **29,313 open children's cases featuring 46,501 children**. This represents an increase in cases of **+6.5%** (+1,784 more children's cases / +2,285 more children) compared to the end of March 2025.
- **Social work caseloads in longer term teams have further reduced compared to last year.** At the end of March 2026, the average (adjusted for full-time equivalent) was **17.6** compared to 18 at the end of March 2025.
- For **work to first hearing** teams in private law, the average was **34.4** compared to 31.2 in March 2025.
- **In the last 3 months, 1,063 local audits were completed.** 91.1% (906) of eligible Family Court Advisers had at least one local case file audit.
- **876 'graded' national audits** were completed in the year, of which **79.3%** were graded as good or better and 2.1% were graded as inadequate for the safety of children. This is an improved result on last year.
- In total **5,319** case file audits (comprising national and local quality assurance audits) were completed in the year, of which **1.5%** were graded as inadequate for the safety of children. This is an improved result on last year.
- A total of **25,042 (57%)** (circa.38,000 children) Private Law children's cases in the year identified domestic abuse as a factor (*note this data is drawn from cases closed*).
- For children's cases, where domestic abuse was a factor, **14.5%** had a **16A (an urgent risk assessment for the court)** filed with the court.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

April 2025 – March 2026: Child Focused Courts



Private Law Practice Direction 36Z, 'Child Focused Courts', is now active in Birmingham, Bournemouth/Dorset, Portsmouth, Stoke, West Yorkshire, Wolverhampton and Worcester court areas:

- On 1 April 2026, there were **2,348** children (**1,594** cases) in Child Focused Court proceedings (**8.8%** of ALL children in open private law proceedings).
- Current Child Focussed Court areas account for approximately **18%** of new private law demand (England).
- Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, the **average filing time** for a Child Impact Report (in cases where an **assessment decision for a harm and/or welfare assessment of the child(ren)** is ordered) was **8.3 weeks**.
- **The average duration** for children's cases where there was no welfare assessment but the case was subject to information, advice, and guidance sharing, was **11.8 weeks***.
- The **average duration** for children's cases where they were the subject of assessment advice for a harm and/or welfare assessment of the child(ren) was **21.1 weeks***.

** (cases closed between 1 October and 31 December 2025)*

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

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



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

- In the last year there has been a 14.4% decrease in children (1,174 fewer children) in proceedings lasting more than 52 weeks. At the end of March 2026, there were 6,969 children (4,132 children's cases) in proceedings open for 52 weeks or more, of whom 1,669 children (1,016 cases) had been open for 100 weeks or longer.
- In public law proceedings, there are 2,584 children (1,249 children's cases) whose proceedings have been open for 52 weeks or more, of whom 336 children (144 cases) have been open for 100 weeks or longer. This is a reduction of 8.6% (243) and 24.0% (106) children respectively.
- In private law proceedings, there are 4,385 children (2,883 cases) whose proceedings have been open for 52 weeks or more, of whom 1,333 children (872 cases) have been in proceedings for 100 weeks or longer. This is a reduction of 17.5% (931) and 24.0% (420) children respectively.

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective One: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (2)



2) Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks

- In the latest reportable period for these measures (cases closed 1 October to 31 December 2025):
 - **Final decisions were reached in 37.3% of section 31 care proceedings in 26 weeks or less** (1,294 cases / 1,574 children). This is an increase of 3.1%points (+69 cases / +223 children) compared to the same period in the previous year
 - **Final decisions in Section 31 cases overall took on average 38 weeks** . This is 2 weeks less than the same period in the previous year
 - **Fewer Section 8 child arrangements proceedings were closed overall in the period, but the percentage of these resolving in 26 weeks or less was 7% more at 65%** compared to the same period in the previous year
 - **Private law proceedings completing at the first hearing took an average of 10 weeks** (no change compared to the previous year)
 - **Where further work is ordered at the first hearing, this took an average of 47 weeks** (8 weeks less compared to the same period in the previous year)

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Family Justice System Objective One: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (3)



2) Increase the percentage of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks: Cafcass filing and extensions

From 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026:

- **34.3 weeks (average) to file final analysis reports in s31 care proceedings**, 3.0 weeks less compared to previous year (37.3 weeks)
- **4.7 working weeks (average) to file safeguarding letters**, 0.2 working weeks more compared to the previous year
- **14.4 working weeks (average) to file section 7 reports**, 0.1 working weeks less compared to the the previous year
- **29.6% of Section 7 reports extended beyond the first agreed filing date**; 0.2%points less compared to the previous 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 the number of open children's cases

- At the end of March 2026, **the overall number of open children's cases (29,313 cases and 46,501 children) had increased by 6.5%** (1,784 more children's cases / 2,285 more children) compared to the end of March 2025 – representing – **2.4% more open public law work** (+267 children's cases / +434 children) and **9.2% private law work** ((+1,517 children's cases / +1,851 children).

2) Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work

- There were **1,709 employed social workers** (1,537 FTE), of whom 335 (319.37 FTE) were **social work managers**
- We continue to rely on the capacity of our flexible workforce, including 81 locum Family Court Advisers and 92 active Cafcass Associates.
- **12-month social work turnover has reduced to 13.6%** (-1.5% compared to the previous year). Between 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026, 169 Family Court Advisers left Cafcass (46 less than during 2024/25). There were 261 new starter Family Court Advisers
- At 31 March 2026 , **32% of Family Court Advisers working in public law / private law work after the first hearing teams had caseloads of over 20**, (1% less than the previous year) . In order for child focused court throughput to comply with the timescales and requirements of the practice direction, Cafcass England will be working towards a resourced baseline for practitioners with caseloads of no more than 15 children's cases.

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 March 2026, **97.2% of children eligible (23,729 children) had a completed child engagement record, with 94.0% (22,946 children) seen in person** – 1% increase (in person) on the previous year
- For children in **public law proceedings**, **74.5% of audited files showed well- written personalised letters had been sent** – a 12.3% increase on the previous year
- For children in **private law proceedings**, **84.0% of audited files showed well – written personalised letters had been sent** – a 5.0% increase on the previous year
- There has been **an increase in the percentage of public law children's files showing recommendations being shared with children**, from 77.4% in the same period in 2025 **to 80.5%** in March 2026
- The percentage of **private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children increased** from 75% in the same period in 2025 **to 77%** in March 2026
- **There has been a significant and intended rise in local quality and impact audits that are collaborative between the manager and the practitioner** – a range of 69 – 73%



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 year to date (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026), Cafcass received 6,004 reflections from children and families in audit or in the digital feedback system. 3,452 (57.5%) were positive.**
- Feedback from families describing experiences that are less than good is shared with local managers for follow up and a decision as to whether a complaint or early resolution conversation is required
- **Learning from complaints and feedback** often relates to children's cases where domestic abuse is a factor. Concerns relate to the quality of assessment with adults saying their experiences were not well understood or described clearly to the court. Communication, case management, and case recording are the three most commonly identified and repeat learning points from complaints, involving frustration about information not being shared, inaccurate information and a lack of understanding about what is happening
- Feedback is expected to be **incorporated in the form of adjusted improvement priorities** into regional plans and where there is a theme across more than one region, national priorities are adjusted so that the whole organisation is required to learn and report on progress

Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Progress report: Ofsted focused visit October 2025: Private law proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor



❑ Using inspection as a learning opportunity – we identified priority actions including:

Practice effectiveness priorities

✓ Training and guidance on working with **sexual harm and violence**

So far: *Thematic review* of significant incidents has commenced and training programme in development alongside

✓ Review of **seeing and engaging with children** policy (seeing children more regularly)

So far: *Amendment to the policy* - requirement to see children no less frequently than every 12 weeks throughout the proceedings.

Attested In February 2026

✓ Understanding **cumulative impact of risk in repeat proceedings**

So far: *revisions to forthcoming safeguarding and management oversight policies* – will set out that summaries must be on case files, discussed in supervision and information from previous proceedings included in reports to court for current proceedings

Practice leadership priorities

✓ Consistent use of the **domestic abuse policy**

So far: progress tested in *latest practice quality audit* – significant practice improvement and consistency

✓ National plan and associated **arrangements for work to first hearing** – including revisions to letter template (reporting domestic abuse)

So far: *Review of national allocation process for safeguarding checks and filing of safeguarding letters*, decision to amend safeguarding letter and section 7 reporting templates to include *clearer and explicit provision for the words of child and adult victims of domestic abuse to be directly included in letters and reports*



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Progress report: Ofsted focused visit October 2025: Private law proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor (2)



Practice leadership priorities (continued)

✓ **Work ordered to local authorities and Cafcass in parallel** - revisions to national protocol – S7/37 and r16.4 appointments

So far: *Revisions proposed to protocol* with local authorities – partnership with ADCS to consider how the respective roles of local authority social worker and Cafcass guardian /FCA are specified by the court

✓ Mandatory training on use of **practice direction 12J** in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor

So far: sessions offered in all 19 service areas by end April *using specialist trainer. Use of the PD being tested in all audits*

Corporate leadership priorities

✓ Timely and effective resourcing priorities in all areas where **sickness and increased demand** is compromising operational capacity

So far: *Monthly review of workforce capacity in all OSAs. Targeting support at areas with highest vacancies and sickness absence.* Live recruitment campaigns in most areas – including child focused court areas

✓ Active leadership to **secure timely order production** through the courts and HMCTS

So far: In discussion with HMCTS on *high number of orders processed to Cafcass where there is no work ordered.* Also seeking agreement on timely order dispatch to us.

✓ Review of processes to **secure timely level 1 and 2 police information**

So far: Review of guidance for practitioners and *testing of a new process in place* subject to CMT clearance for May



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Practice quality audit January 2026 – The quality and effectiveness of practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor



- **Sixth annual Domestic Abuse Practice Quality Audit** - 300 children's cases
- Judged practice effectiveness and the impact of the domestic abuse policy
- Further improvement since the 2025 audit - 83% of work judged good or better

Strong practice characterised by:

- **Seeing, hearing and understanding the lived experience of child and adult victims of domestic abuse**
- **Consistent and effective child engagement** – All children were seen in person, and babies were directly observed with their primary carer. Children engaged creatively and with kindness through using the Cafcass 'How it Looks to Me' materials and other age-appropriate approaches to understand what was working well and what needed to happen next
- **Use of domestic abuse practice aids** - practitioners engaging well with parents to understand the risks and harm of domestic abuse on them and their children. Practitioners informing the court of the impact on children and giving advice to the court supporting children's safety
- **Application of Practice Direction 12J and protective decision-making** - including clear reasoning on when to stop, suspend or recommend no spending time arrangements, and explicit consideration about risks for the victim parent in facilitating contact
- **Information-gathered from other professionals who know the children and included in risk assessment and advice to the court**
- **Appropriate and timely safeguarding action** – including referrals to local authorities and risk assessments to court that clearly set out harm, risk and protective concerns and recommended next steps



Part 1: Demand, performance and operational practice:

Practice quality audit January 2026 – The quality and effectiveness of practice in proceedings where domestic abuse is a factor (2)



What needs to strengthen further in practice:

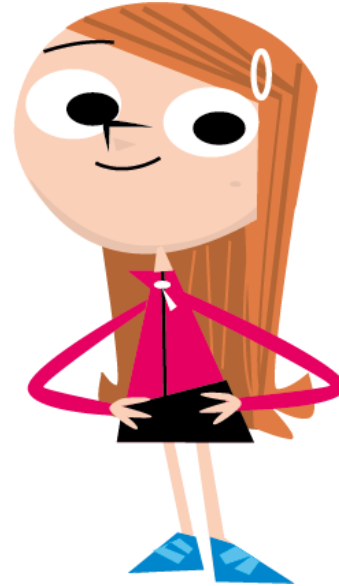
- **Continued recognition of children as victims of domestic abuse** – maintain focus so that reports to court consistently recognise and analyse the needs of children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, rather than primarily through the experiences of the adults
- **Sharing recommendations with children AND including the child's views** on these recommendations in reports to court
- **Reflective supervision** - the quality of recorded reflective supervision requires further strengthening
- **Setting out clearly in reports how police information has informed the assessment and Recommendations to the family court**

In policy:

- Explore the **options in child focused court areas for specialist children's IDVAs**
- Consider **'what else' in assessment (including direct work materials about domestic abuse) for children so that there is additional thinking and analysis about them as a victim if an adult discloses domestic abuse in a court application**



Part 2: And in other news...



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from feedback and practice – Headlines



Learning from significant incidents this year has included:

- **Multiple risk factors**, accumulating harm and risk of further harm over multiple proceedings
- **Children reunified or remaining with parents** – effective challenge of local authority care plans and strength of evidence about capacity of parents to sustain positive change – more to do to secure consistency all the time
- **Supervision to support reflective thinking** about harm and risk of future harm to children – consistency and effectiveness of supervision part of improvement plan
- Incidents involving adult suicide, attempted adult suicide, and murder-suicide highlight the importance in understanding the severity and implications of parental mental ill-health for children's safety – including the **impact of the court decision about contact and living arrangements**



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from feedback and practice – Headlines (2)



Key themes in feedback:

1. Being listened to – and believed – can often matter as much as the outcome:

Adults repeatedly describe the quality of *listening* as the single biggest factor in whether their experience felt fair and legitimate. Procedural correctness alone does not build confidence. Adults need to experience *relational fairness*—feeling heard, understood and respected—even when decisions are not the ones they would want from the court

“You listened to what I was saying and made me feel like I was believed. That made all the difference in how I coped with the process, even when it was difficult.”

2. **Clarity and transparency:** the process (court and Cafcass), what information is shared, what recommendations are made? When practitioners are not clear and transparent, we see the impact as perceived bias, unfairness, mistrust.

“You explained everything clearly and told me why you were recommending what you did. I didn’t agree with all of it, but I understood it—and that helped me move forward.”

3. **Bias or impartiality:** inconsistencies in what is said in person and what is then reported to the court

“It felt like my side didn’t matter. Once that trust was gone, nothing in the process felt fair—even when you were trying to help.”



Part 2: And in other news:

Learning from feedback and practice – Headlines (3)



Feedback from Children, key themes:

1. Children need to feel genuinely heard, not just spoken to...

"You listened to me and told the judge what I said. It made me feel like I mattered."

2. Feeling safe and comfortable enabling honesty...

"You made me feel safe and not scared to talk. That helped me say what I really felt."

3. Children notice outcomes – not just conversations. Their feedback often links their conversation to what happened afterwards. Did we listen and do what they asked and how do they feel now?

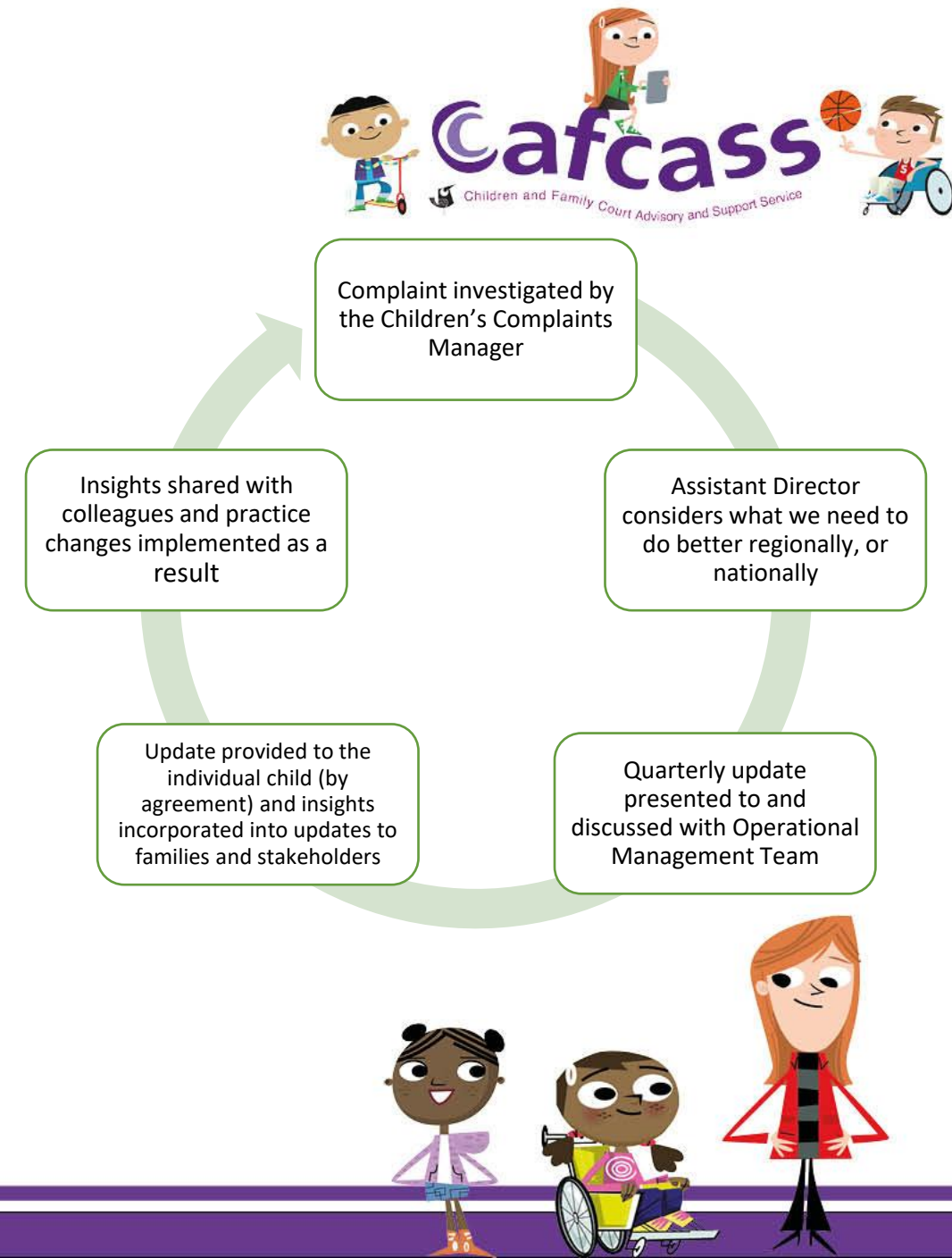
"You helped make things better. I feel happier now and not as worried anymore."



Part 2: And in other news:

Closing the gap – learning from children's complaints

- A new process to **strengthen learning from child complaint** investigations
- The Children's Complaints Manager works with Assistant Directors to reflect on **wider organisational learning** from child complaints and what will change as a result
- This is not limited to learning where something has gone wrong; **it is learning to make children's experiences even better**
- All child complaint investigations, and what is happening in response, **considered quarterly** at Operational Management Team meetings
- **Improved insights available** to share with individual children



Part 3: People & Workforce



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce: overview and update: Headlines



Headcount (Permanent – including covering locum social workers)

- At 31 March 2026, there were **2,287 employed colleagues** (2,079.28 FTE) (+78.14 FTE compared to last year)
- There were **1,709 employed social workers** (1,537 FTE), of whom 335 (319.37 FTE) were **social work managers**
- There were 578 (542.07 FTE) **employed corporate and business services colleagues**
- In addition, there were 81 **locum family court advisers (4.5% of the social work workforce)** and **92 active Cafcass associates**

Turnover

- **Social work turnover continues to reduce** being **13.6% at end year** - a **reduction** of 1.5.% compared to last year, with variation ranging from 28.6% in Cheshire and Merseyside to 4.3% in Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Sussex)
- **Corporate and Business Services turnover has also decreased** by 0.1% compared to last year and is **9.7%** at 31 March 2026

Wellbeing and looking after our people

- **Social work sickness absence is reducing**. At 31 March 2026, **average working days Lost (AWDL) due to sickness was 14.9 days (reduced from 16.1 days at its peak)**
- Average working days lost for **Corporate and Business Services teams has also reduced to 10.8 days**
- Both remain too high and are corporate and leadership improvement priorities



Part 3: People & Workforce

Workforce: Colleague Survey 2026



- Our **Colleague Survey 2026** was live from Monday 9 March - Friday 27 March
- 1674 colleagues completed the survey, with an **overall response rate of 76%**
- This year, we are working with an **external provider** who is now supporting us to independently analyse the feedback from colleagues across the organisation

- Our **survey themes** are



- We will be sharing our results with colleagues in June 2026 and requiring local improvement plans to address local priorities. Corporate directors with the Chief Executive will hold national priorities for improvement and report quarterly on progress to the People Committee



Part 3: People & Workforce

Leadership priorities: Sickness absence, recruitment and retention



- At 31 March 2026, there were **184.4 FTE social work vacancies**
- 38 have **locum cover**. 107 have a **new joiner** confirmed against a vacant position. The remaining vacancies (and the locum posts which total 78) are the subject of live recruitment campaigns
- There are 33 known future leavers whose positions are also included in recruitment initiatives
- In addition, there is a recruitment demand for **75 FTE for the Child Focused Court implementation during 26/27**

Recruitment activity:

- Priority focus areas include **A7 (Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire), A16 (Surrey and Sussex), A15B (London Private Law)** and Child Focused Court areas (specifically **A12 Birmingham, Black Country and Staffordshire**)
- A further targeted campaign nationally progressed in January 2026, supported by **live events** and **incentives**, including professional referral payments, professional retention payments and professional incentive payments, alongside regular **reward benchmarking**

Sickness Absence:

- **Monthly sickness case reviews** are led by Heads of Practice, working alongside their business partner. This includes targeted work in areas with the highest sickness absence
- We are preparing strengthened guidance to support the leadership of absence management, including stronger intervention for both short and long -term absence



Part 3: People & Workforce

Health, safety and security: update



Court security

- It remains a priority with His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) to finalise arrangements for sharing information on **potentially violent adults** within proceedings
- Variation remains in local responses to **managing security of Cafcass colleagues and other professionals in proceedings**. This is a senior leadership priority for improvement
- Our use of the **Professional User Access entry** arrangements to court premises remains necessary, valuable and protective

Cafcass office security

- **CCTV installations** are nearing completion to increase the protection and safety of colleagues
- Core offices have **reception and office staff** cover in place
- Completion of our **daily and weekly office checks** are logged and reported and monitored through the fortnightly Recovery and Improvement Board

Aggression and threats of violence against Cafcass staff

- We continue to see **increased reporting of incidents of violence and aggression** with quarter 3 in 2025/2026 carrying 49 such incidents
- Learning is informing the next update to our guidance for **Managing Unacceptable Behaviour and Lone Working**
- Our Executive Team continue to **follow up on a sample of incidents each month** and now have an **immediate escalation process for the most serious incidents**
- Our strategic plan for working with partners includes a priority to **secure respectful proceedings for the family and all professionals involved**

Part 3: People & Workforce

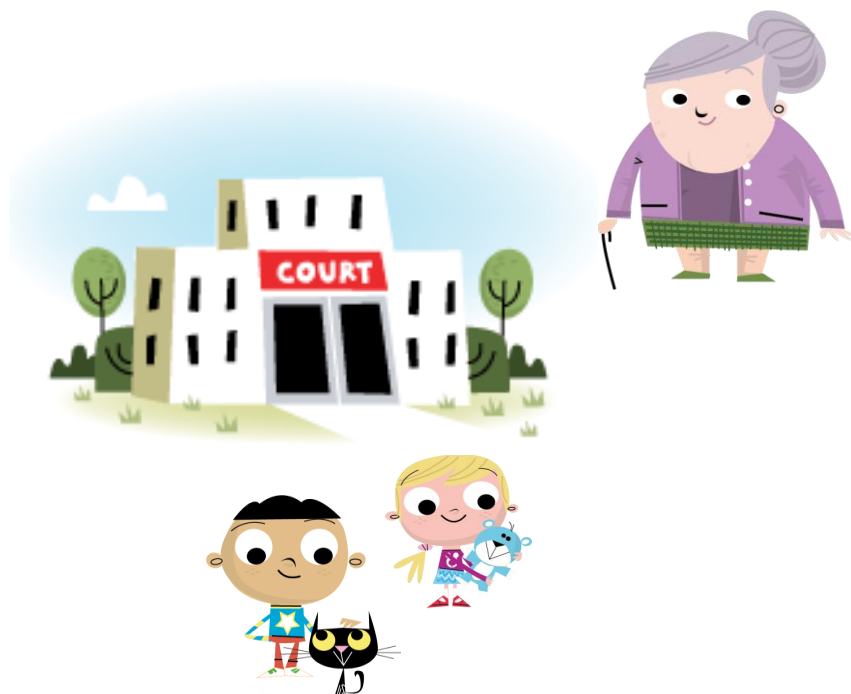
Annual recognition awards



- **Annual recognition in person event** will be held on **25 June 2026**
- **Our shared values** underpin everything we do, reflected in our award categories, with **190 nominations** highlighting how our values are part of the culture at Cafcass. In addition, **37 monthly winners** are being considered
- Judging panels have been held across our award categories:
 - **Individual categories:**
 - Holding Children and Families at the heart of our practice
 - Always looking for the strengths and risks
 - Believing in respectful relationships
 - Wanting to know more about you and what is important in your life
 - Decision making is clear and reasoned
 - Promoting Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
 - Supporting Stars (*Corporate and Business Services colleagues*)
 - People Manager of the Year
 - **Team categories**
 - Greatest impact for children and families (*Social Work Teams*)
 - Greatest Innovation
 - We couldn't do it without you (*Corporate and Business Services Teams*)



Part 4: Priorities in the next period



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Sustaining ambition for children, accelerating progress 2026 – 2029



- Since October 2025, **consultation with colleagues and key partners** to develop a new three-year strategy
- **11 engagement events** between January and March 2026, involving **over 600 Cafcass colleagues and 35 partners from across the family justice system** to gather feedback and views on the proposed priorities and programmes. Events have been hosted in-person around England and online
- Separate discussions have also been held with **Family Justice Young People's Board members, Family Forum and Family Voices members and the Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group**

Timeline for publication:

- **18 May 2026**, accompanied by a simplified version of the report and animation to explain the key messages and priorities of the strategy



All on one page

Our vision

For every child whose current and future living arrangements are decided by the family court, we seek to provide an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time.



Our four cornerstones

Exceptional experience for all children in proceedings

Listening to children and families' experiences

Safety and welfare of children in proceedings

Reduce local variation

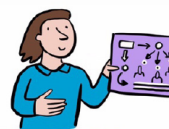
Our five values



Always looking for the strengths and risks



Believing in respectful relationships



Decision making is clear and reasoned



Holding children and families at the heart of our practice

What's important to you?



Wanting to know more about you and what is important in your life

Our three pillars

PRACTICE

Our practice ambition is to provide all children with an exceptional experience when they engage with us, everywhere and every time.

- 1 Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation
- 2 Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children's experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)
- 3 Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children's experiences

PEOPLE

Our people ambition is to attract, retain and keep colleagues well at work, to offer professional development and sustain a working environment that enables our people to thrive.

- 4 Attract, engage and retain people
- 5 Provide a modern, safe and child focused environment that works for our colleagues
- 6 Lead and govern well

PARTNERS

Our partner ambition is to collaborate with other professionals to improve the experiences of children and families in family law proceedings.

- 7 Improve children's safety and experiences of proceedings
- 8 Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings
- 9 Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts

CHILD FOCUSED COURTS

System objective: Improve experiences for children and families, particularly child and adult victims of domestic abuse, including enabling their safe participation in proceedings that resolve more quickly for them.

- A Implement the Child Focused Model across all English court areas – prioritising effective and timely outcomes that are safe for child and adult victims of domestic abuse.
- B With our partners, resource and lead the transformation programme.



An overview of our new priorities

PRACTICE

Priority
1

Further improve the quality and impact of practice and reduce local variation

Because children everywhere should receive an exceptional service from everyone they engage with at Cafcass.



Priority
2

Seek out and learn from feedback – (including children's experiences of family conflict, abuse and harm and sharing their messages with family justice system leaders)

Because children deserve the opportunity to tell us how we influence their lives and the difference we make.



Priority
3

Enable Cafcass systems to support practice and target support where it is needed to improve children's experiences

Because our practitioners need effective support so they can prioritise the variety of their work and engagement with children.



Priority
4

Attract, engage and retain people

Because children and families are best served by diverse, well-supported and skilled people.



Priority
5

Provide a modern, safe and child focused environment that works for our colleagues

Because modern offices and systems help us do better work with children and families.



Priority
6

Lead and govern well

Because good leaders and strong decision-making are safer for children and families.



PARTNERS

Priority
7

Improve children's safety and experiences of proceedings

Because children and families need support from professionals to protect them from harm and the risk of further harm.



Priority
8

Collaborate and influence to reduce delay in proceedings

Because the family justice system needs to work more decisively together so that outcomes for children improve.



Priority
9

Collaborate and influence to lead and implement Child Focused Courts

Because child and adult victims of domestic abuse deserve earlier and better help and protection.



CHILD FOCUSED COURTS

System objective

Improve experiences for children and

families, particularly child and adult victims of domestic abuse, including enabling their safe participation in proceedings that resolve more quickly for them.

Because we need to consider what works well and what we might need to develop further to provide a better experience for children and families.



Priority
A

Implement the Child Focused Model across all English court areas – prioritising effective

and timely outcomes that are safe for child and adult victims of domestic abuse.

Because the family justice system needs to work together more efficiently and effectively.

Priority
B

With our partners, resource and lead the transformation programme.

Because transformation only happens with resource, leadership and good governance.

Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Child Focused courts – overview and update



- 2026/2027 - the beginning of a programme of fundamental change across the family justice system
- Requires significant practice and culture change replacing the existing child arrangements programme for **private law proceedings with Child focused courts – training is a significant aspect of implementation**
- A more investigative and problem-solving approach that prioritises earlier information gathering, earlier assessments for children who are seen before the single decisions hearing and within 8 working weeks of the order to Cafcass
- The experiences and needs of child and adult victims of domestic abuse being better than they are now is central to the implementation programme - including the provision of local IDVA services where this is required
- We are agreeing operational team processes and structures that prioritise continuity of practitioner for children throughout their proceedings and that enable public and private law children's cases to be effectively allocated within agreed timescales
- We are working to achieve a steady state for areas already live which means securing permanent social workers and more of them *and* ensuring the next go live areas are well prepared and well-resourced
- We will embed the Child Impact Report through a high-quality, child-centred assessment assessing harm and the risk of future harm
- Evaluating the experiences of children and families in each new area



Part 4: Priorities in the next period

Cafcass' 25th Anniversary Celebrations



- Cafcass has been in existence for 25 years this year. We will be celebrating this milestone throughout 2026-2027 with colleagues and partners
- We will be using our intranet news, blogs and podcasts to look back at the last 25 years and ahead to the future. Our focus, as always, will be on children and families, exploring how we can continue to improve their experiences based on our knowledge and progress in the last 25 years
- On 16 June 2026, we will be celebrating with colleagues, partners, and Board members at a special Leadership Live Anniversary Event, streamed live from Gray's Inn Road. There will also be a celebration event at the Royal Courts of Justice later the same day.
- 24 colleagues who are celebrating 25 years of service have been sent a recognition letter from the Chief Executive; they have also been invited to our Annual Recognition Awards (25 June) and to our celebration event



Discussion and questions.....

