



Ministry
of Justice

Family Justice

Guide to Family Law Courts

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Background to the Family Court system

Family law is the area of law that deals with:

- Public law – local authority intervention to protect children;
- Private law – parental disputes concerning the upbringing of children;
- Dissolution of marriages or civil partnerships;
- Financial Remedy (formerly known as ‘ancillary relief’) – financial provisions after divorce or relationship breakdown;
- Domestic violence remedies;
- Forced marriage protection orders;
- Adoption;
- Court of Protection, and Office of the Public Guardian

Up until 22 April 2014, family cases were dealt with at Family Proceedings Courts (which were part of the magistrates’ courts), at county courts or in the Family Division of the High Court. These cases, as from 22nd April 2014, are now dealt with in the Single Family Court and the High Court. Most cases affecting children are dealt with under the Children Act 1989.

Public Law

Public law cases are those brought by local authorities or an authorised person (currently only the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) to protect the child and ensure they get the care they need. In these proceedings, the child is automatically a party and is represented by a Children's Guardian appointed by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). The Children's Guardian is an independent person who is there to promote the child's welfare and ensure that the arrangements made for the child are in his or her best interests.

A range of different orders can be applied for. The main types of order are a care or supervision order which determines whether the child should be looked after or supervised by the local authority, and an emergency protection order which allows an individual or local authority to take a child away from a place where they are in immediate danger to a place of safety. The majority (two thirds) of Public law applications are for care orders.

This link shows the main court processes for Children Act Public Law cases

www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/protecting-the-vulnerable/care-proceeding-reform/public-law-outline-flowchart.pdf

Timeliness of Public Law Care and Supervision applications

In the interests of the child, courts are concerned to minimise the length of time it takes for a case to be resolved. However a large number of factors can affect how long the case takes, such as the type of order applied for, the number of parties involved and how complex the child's situation is. In general there is a wide spread of case durations with many straight-forward cases being completed fairly quickly, more complicated cases taking longer and a few very complex ones taking a long time.

The care and supervision timeliness measure presented in this bulletin considers cases that began with a care or supervision application and measure the time from the application until the first of seven disposal types for each individual child. The seven valid disposal types for the purposes of this measure are a care order, a supervision order, a residence order, a special guardianship order, the application withdrawn, an order refused or an order of no order.

The bulletin presents the average, or 'mean', case duration, which can be quite heavily influenced by a few very long durations. We therefore also present the median timeliness which is the length of time within which a definitive disposal was reached for half of all children involved.

Mediation can be particularly beneficial where there will be a continuing relationship following dispute resolution – such as in family cases. Family mediation can help reduce hostility and improve chances of long-term co-operation between parents and couples, for example in agreeing arrangements for their children and financial matters.

Before applying to the Family Court, people will need to prove they've considered mediation first. They can do this:

- by showing they are exempt from having to consider mediation, for example, if domestic violence is involved; or
- by proving to the judge that they have been to a 'mediation information and assessment meeting' (MIAM) with a family mediator but that mediation is not suitable for them.

This was enacted in the Children & Families Act 2014:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

The Legal Aid Agency publishes figures on the number of publicly funded mediations

www.gov.uk/government/collections/legal-aid-statistics

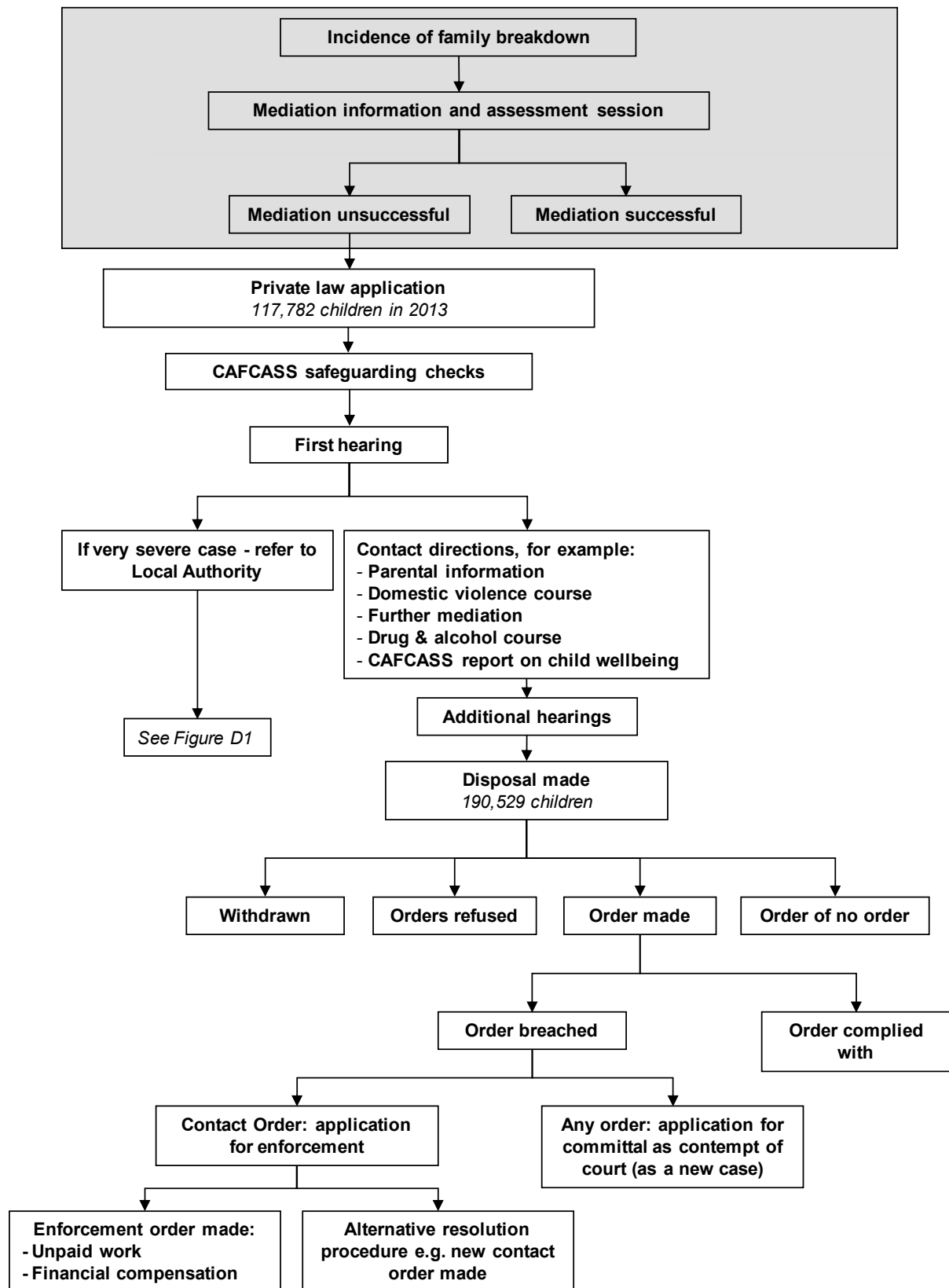
Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012

This created the Legal Aid Agency, an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, on the 1st April 2013, following the abolition of the Legal Services Commission. The Act removes some types of case from the scope of legal aid funding, and other cases will only qualify when they meet certain criteria. Funding is no longer available for private family law, such as divorce and disputes over arrangements for children. Family law cases involving domestic violence, forced marriage or child abduction will continue to receive funding. The impact of these changes can be seen in Table 6 of the Family Court Statistics Quarterly bulletin.

Private Law

Private law cases are those court cases between two or more private individuals who are trying to resolve a dispute. This is generally where parents have split up and there is a disagreement about who the children should live with and have contact or otherwise spend time with. A range of different types of court order can be applied for, including "Section 8" orders (referring to the relevant section of the Children Act 1989), parental responsibility, financial applications and special guardianship orders. The vast majority of Private law applications are for Section 8 orders, which include a child arrangements order determining who the child should live with and when and who a child should have contact with or spend time with. Figure 1 shows the main court processes for Children Act Private Law cases.

Figure 1: The main court processes for Children Act Private Law cases



Disposal of Public and Private Law applications

There are four ways in which an application can be disposed of:

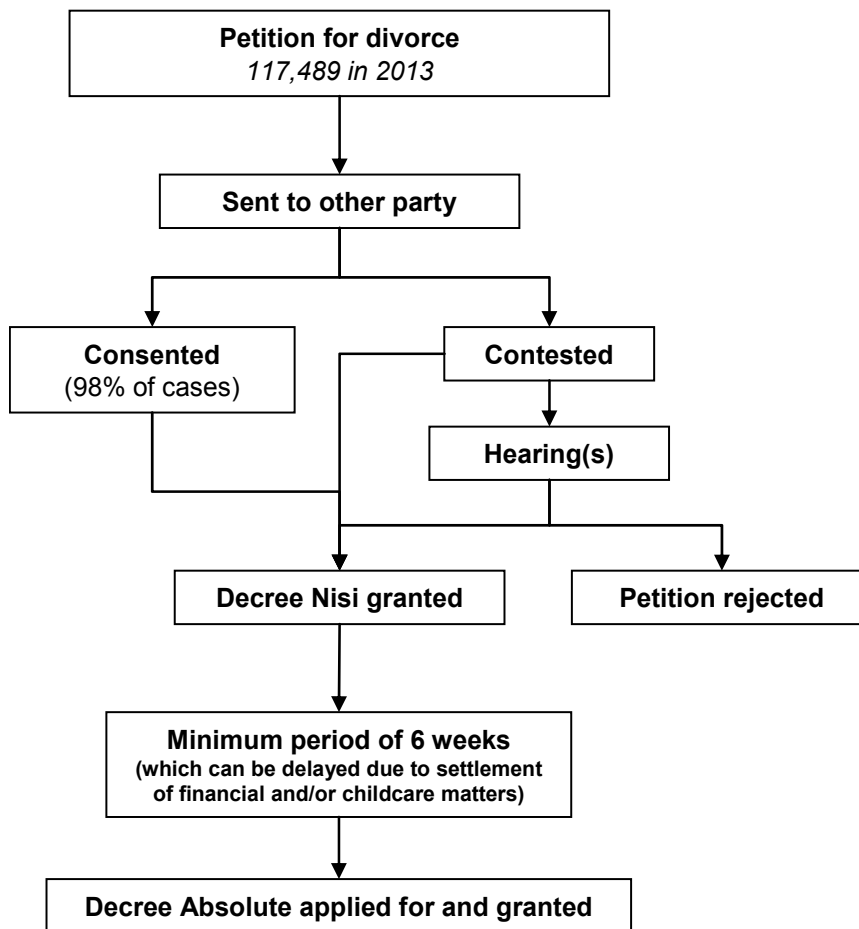
- withdrawn applications – applications can only be withdrawn by order of the court
- order refused – in public law proceedings an order is refused if the grounds are not proved and the court has dismissed the application. In private law proceedings the court may refuse to make an order or make an order of no order
- order of no order – this is made if the court has applied the principle of non-intervention under section 1(5) of the Act. This provides that the court shall not make an order unless it considers that doing so would be better for the child than not making an order at all
- full order made – the type of order made may not be the same as the type of application that was originally applied for. An order is made in favour of one of the parties (Local Authority, parent or Other Guardian) however this is not recorded on the central Familyman database.

If a child arrangement order is breached, a party may apply to the court for an enforcement order to be made. Since December 2008 contact orders (and subsequently child arrangement orders) routinely contain a warning notice stating the consequences if a party fails to keep the requirements of the order. For earlier orders, the party seeking enforcement must first apply to the court to have a warning notice attached to the order, and the relevant party informed that a notice has been attached. The enforcement order generally requires the person who has breached the order to undertake unpaid work, although if a party has suffered financial loss as a result of the breach they may apply for financial compensation. If other types of order are breached it is possible for a party to apply for committal, so the breach is dealt with as contempt of court; however, this is very rare.

Matrimonial cases

There are two ways to legally end a marriage or a civil partnership. An individual can apply for a divorce which will give them a decree absolute, ending a valid marriage or civil partnership – this occurs in the vast majority of cases. Alternatively, an individual can apply for a decree of nullity, which declares that the marriage or civil partnership itself is void, specifically no valid marriage or civil partnership ever existed; or voidable, specifically the marriage or civil partnership was valid unless annulled. No application can be made for divorce within the first year of a marriage or a civil partnership. An alternative to divorce is a decree of judicial separation or a decree of separation of civil partners, but this does not allow them to remarry or enter into a civil partnership. Figure 2 shows the main court processes for divorce or dissolution cases.

Figure 2: The main court processes for divorce cases



Financial remedy (formerly ‘ancillary relief’) – financial disputes post-divorce/ separation

During a divorce, a marriage annulment, a judicial separation, or the dissolution of a civil partnership there may still be a need for the court to settle disputes over money or property. The court can make a financial remedy order, formerly known as ‘ancillary relief’. These orders include dealing with the arrangements for the sale or transfer of property, maintenance payments, a lump sum payment or the sharing of a pension. Orders for financial provision other than for ancillary relief are not dependent upon divorce proceedings and may be made for children.

The Child maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008 led to the creation of the Child Maintenance Enforcement Commission (CMEC) which replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA), although the CSA retained its existing caseload. The Act also removed the requirement for all parents in receipt of benefit to go through the CMEC even if they could reach agreement. Parents who were not on benefit were previously allowed to come to courts for consent orders. This change is likely to increase the number of parties that come to court for maintenance consent orders.

If an order is breached several options are open to the aggrieved party to seek enforcement of the order. For money orders, proceedings can be instituted in the family court where a variety of remedies such as attachment of earnings may be

available. However if arrears of more than one year are owed, the person seeking payment must first get the court's permission to make an enforcement application.

Domestic violence

Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996 provides single and unified domestic violence remedies in the family court and the High Court, with the vast majority carried out in the former. Figure 4 shows the main court processes for domestic violence cases.

A range of people can apply to the court: spouses, cohabitants, ex-cohabitants, those who live or have lived in the same household (other than by reason of one of them being the other's employee, tenant, lodger or boarder), certain relatives (for example, parents, grandparents, in-laws, brothers, sisters), and those who have agreed to marry one another.

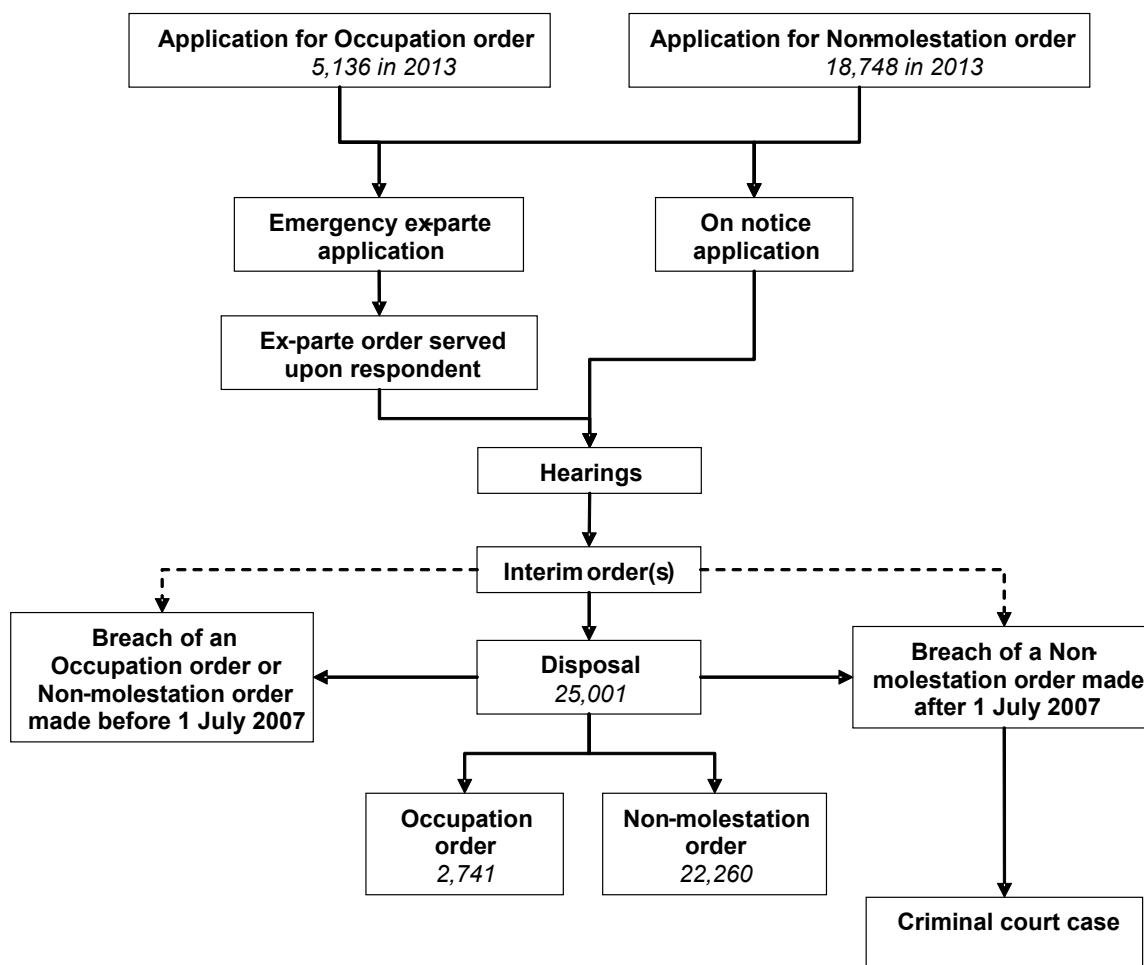
Two types of order can be granted:

- a non-molestation order, which can either prohibit particular behaviour or general molestation by someone who has previously been violent towards the applicant and/or any relevant children; and,
- an occupation order, which can define or regulate rights of occupation of the home by the parties involved.

In July 2007, section 1 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 came into force, making the breach of a non-molestation order a criminal offence. A power of arrest is therefore no longer required on a non-molestation order but instead it includes a penal notice. The court may also add an exclusion requirement to an emergency protection order or interim care order made under the Children Act 1989. This means a suspected abuser may be removed from the home, rather than the child.

Where the court makes an occupation order and it appears to the court that the respondent has used or threatened violence against the applicant or child, then the court must attach a power of arrest unless it is satisfied that the applicant or child will be adequately protected without such a power. If there is no power of arrest attached to the order, and the order is breached, this is dealt with as contempt of court. The court may then impose a fine or make a committal order whereby the person who breached the order is imprisoned or put on remand until the next hearing.

Figure 3: The main court processes for domestic violence cases



Forced Marriage Protection Orders

Applications for a Forced Marriage Protection Order can be made at designated locations of the family court. This court, as well as the High Court, is able to make Forced Marriage Protection Orders to prevent forced marriages from occurring and to offer protection to victims who might have already been forced into a marriage.

Legal representation and its relationship with timeliness

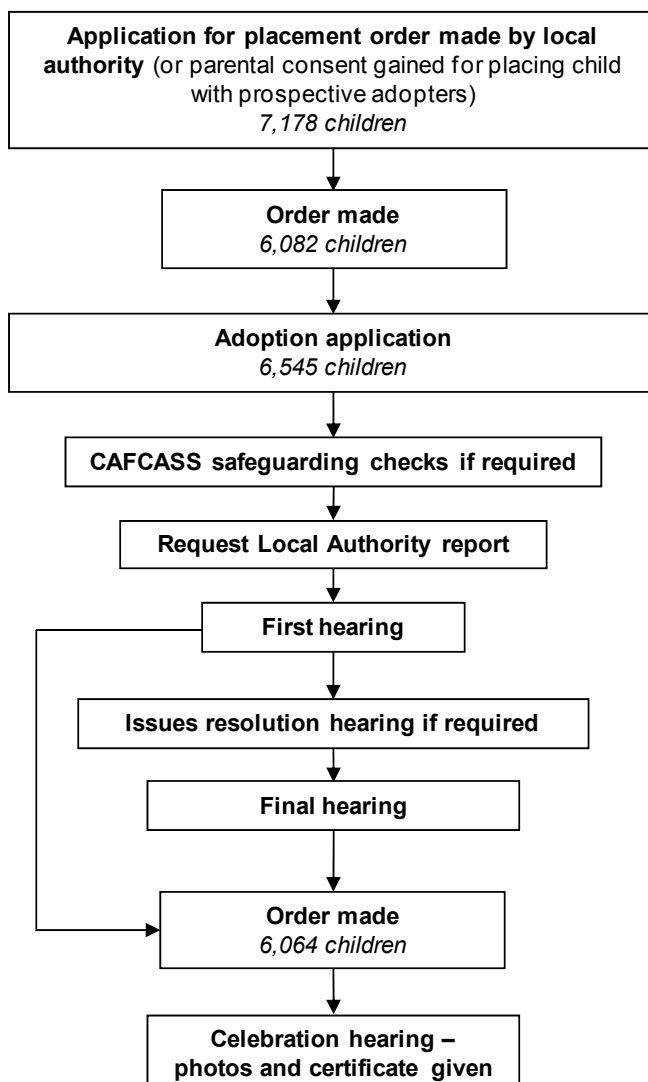
Different types of cases tend to take different lengths of time to complete – in general public law cases for children take longer than private law cases and divorce cases tend to be quite lengthy due to set time limits, whereas domestic violence cases are usually completed in a fairly short time due to the nature of them. Another factor that may influence how long a case takes is whether one or both parties had a legal representative or alternatively represented themselves. This may also be affected by whether the parties consent to the application or are contesting it which in turn may reflect the complexity of the case.

Adoptions

Prior to making an adoption application, a placement order is generally made to place a child with prospective adopters. If the placement is being made by an adoption agency, by a High Court order, or by the child's parent, the placement period is 10 weeks before an adoption application can be made. For a step-parent the placement duration is six months, while for local authority foster parents it is usually one year. In other cases the courts generally require the child to have been living with the prospective adopters for three out of the preceding five years. An application for adoption can be made to the family court in the area in which the child is living.

An adoption order made by a court extinguishes the rights, duties and obligations of the natural parents or guardian and vests them in the adopters. On the conclusion of an adoption the child becomes, for virtually all purposes in law, the child of its adoptive parents and has the same rights of inheritance of property as any children born to the adoptive parents. The figure below shows the main court processes for adoption cases.

Figure 4: The main court processes for adoption cases



The Court of Protection and the Public Guardian

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 provides a statutory framework to empower and protect vulnerable people who are not able to make their own decisions. It makes it clear who can take decisions, in which situations, and how they should go about this. It enables people to plan ahead for a time when they may lose capacity.

The Act created two new public bodies to support the statutory framework, both of which are designed around the needs of those who lack capacity.

- The Court of Protection
- The Public Guardian, supported by the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG)

The Court of Protection

The Court of Protection makes specific decisions, and also appoints other people (called deputies) to make decisions for people who lack the capacity to do this for themselves. These decisions are related to their property, financial affairs, health and personal welfare. The Court of Protection has powers to:

- make declarations about a person's capacity to make a particular decision, if the matter cannot be decided informally;
- make decisions about serious medical treatment, which relate to providing, withdrawing or withholding treatment to a person who lacks capacity;
- make decisions or orders about the personal welfare and property and affairs of people who lack capacity to make such decisions themselves;
- authorise deprivation of liberty in relation to a person's care and residence arrangements;
- appoint a deputy to make ongoing decisions for people lacking capacity to make those decisions in relation to their personal welfare or property and financial affairs;
- make decisions about a Lasting Power of Attorney or Enduring Power of Attorney, including whether the power is valid, objections to registration, the scope of attorney powers and the removal of attorney powers.

The majority of applications to the court are decided on the basis of paper evidence without holding a hearing. In around 95 % of cases, the applicant does not need to attend court. Some applications such as those relating to personal welfare, objections in relation to deputies and attorneys, or large gifts or settlements for Inheritance Tax purposes may be contentious and it will be necessary for the court to hold a hearing to decide the case

Office of the Public Guardian

The Office of the Public Guardian (OPG), an agency of the Ministry of Justice, was established in October 2007, and supports the Public Guardian in registering Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPA), Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA) and supervising Court of Protection (COP) appointed Deputies.

The OPG supports and promotes decision making for those who lack capacity or would like to plan for their future, within the framework of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. The role of the Public Guardian is to protect people who lack capacity from abuse. The Public Guardian, supported by the OPG, helps protect people who lack capacity by:

- setting up and managing a register of LPA and EPA
- setting up and managing a register of Court appointed Deputies, supervising Court appointed Deputies, working with other relevant organisations (for example, social services, if the person who lacks capacity is receiving social care);
- receiving annual financial reports from all primary Deputies under their supervision; and;
- dealing with cases, by way of investigations, where concerns are raised about the way in which Attorneys or Deputies are carrying out their duties.

Data Sources and Data Quality

Timeframe and Publishing Frequency of Data

All the data covered in this guide are mostly published on a quarterly basis, the exception being additional information on the appellate courts which is only produced annually. The latest quarter is to be treated as provisional, and may be revised in future publications. This is because most of the data is extracted from live administrative databases.

Each quarter the latest reference period will be published so statistics will be for the year ending March, June, September or December. For upcoming publications please see the MoJ publication schedule:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/statistics#publication-schedule

Family cases

The data on the family related court cases is principally sourced from the court administrative system FamilyMan, used by court staff for case management purposes and containing good quality information about a case's progress through the family courts. Some data are also sourced from the HMCTS Performance database. Statistical quality assurance procedures include the identification and removal of duplicate entries for the same case on the administrative systems, and checks that data have been collated for all courts to ensure completeness.

Some points to note about counting rules in the statistics:

A disposal which occurs in one quarter or year may relate to an application which was initially made in an earlier period. And, an application of one type may lead to an order of a different type being made.

The statistics on matrimonial, financial remedy and domestic violence proceedings are counted by case. The statistics on public law and private law proceedings relate to the number of children which are subject to applications: for example if two children are the subject of a single case then the children would be counted separately in the statistics. Different types of orders may be made in respect of different children involved in a case.

Public law and private law Children Act figures have been sourced from FamilyMan. For earlier years, FamilyMan provided data for county courts and for the Family Proceedings Courts which share premises and administrative systems with county courts; data for other Family Proceedings Courts was provided on electronic summary returns submitted to HMCTS Business Information Division on a monthly basis. Figures prior to 2007 for Family Proceedings Courts were weighted estimates based on data from a subset of courts. There are known data quality problems with these, which are likely to be an undercount.

Starting at the end of 2009, an upgrade to the administrative system in all county courts and Family Proceedings Courts was rolled out nationally. This upgrade was completed in December 2011 following a staggered rollout. During subsequent compilation of figures for public and private law applications, issues were identified concerning the way in which cases that are transferred between courts are being counted. This issue resulted from the system upgrade which now records transfers between courts differently to ensure that no duplicate records of these transfers are held in the system. The methodology to count public and private law applications has been reviewed and updated to ensure that transfers are counted accurately and, as such, previously published data for 2011 for FPCs have been revised.

In addition, a review of the data compilation methodology for counting public and private law disposals was conducted to develop a more accurate process. As a result a new methodology was introduced which incorporates a more robust and well-understood process for calculating the number of disposals. This methodology provides a more effective method for avoiding the double-counting of duplicate entries and compiling the statistics directly from the data and tables held within the family court administrative database.

Statistics on the number of divorces occurring each year in England and Wales are also published by the ONS www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Divorces

The Ministry of Justice's divorce statistics are sourced directly from the FamilyMan system, while the ONS data are compiled from 'D105' forms used by the courts to record decrees absolute, which are supplied to ONS for compiling the central index of decrees absolute. There are small differences between the number of divorces as recorded by the two sets of statistics. Statisticians at the Ministry of Justice and ONS worked together with HM Courts and Tribunals Service to understand these differences and reconcile where possible. Please see the joint statement produced by the MoJ and ONS on the differences in these divorce statistics at Annex C in:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217546/court-stats-quarterly-q1-2012.pdf

The information on Forced Marriage Protection Orders is taken from the HMCTS Performance database. This is a regularly updated, web-based performance system which enables aggregation to national level of returns from individual courts.

An adoption order made by a court extinguishes the rights, duties and obligations of the natural parents or guardian and vests them in the adopters. On adoption the child becomes, for virtually all purposes in law, the child of its adoptive parents and has the same rights of inheritance of property as any children born to the adoptive parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 was implemented on 30 December 2005, replacing the Adoption Act 1976. The key changes resulting from the new act are:

- alignment of adoption law with the Children Act 1989 to ensure that the child's welfare is the most important consideration when making decisions
- provision for adoption orders to be made in favour of unmarried couples

- the introduction of Special Guardianship Orders, intended to provide permanence for children for whom adoption is not appropriate.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published adoption figures annually here, until 2012:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/adoptions-in-england-and-wales/index.html

Explanatory notes

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The statistics in this bulletin relate to cases in the family courts in England and Wales. Calendar year statistics are also provided.

Breakdowns of many of the summary figures presented in this bulletin, such as splits by case type or by HMCTS area, are available in the Comma Separated Value (csv) files that accompany this publication.

Revisions

In accordance with Principle 2 of the Code of Practice for Office Statistics, the Ministry of Justice is required to publish transparent guidance on its policy for revisions. A copy of this statement can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministry-of-justice-statistics-policy-and-procedures

The three reasons specified for statistics needing to be revised are;

- changes in sources of administrative systems or methodology changes
- receipt of subsequent information, and;
- errors in statistical systems and processes. Each of these points, and its specific relevance to the criminal justice statistics publication, are addressed below:

1. Changes in source of administrative systems/methodology changes

The data within this publication comes from a variety of administrative systems. This technical document will clearly present where there have been revisions to data accountable to switches in methodology or administrative systems. In addition, statistics affected within the publication will be appropriately footnoted.

2. Receipt of subsequent information

The nature of any administrative system is that data may be received late. For the purpose of this statistics publication, the late data will be reviewed on a quarterly basis but, unless it is deemed to make significant changes to the statistics released; revisions will only be made as part of the final release containing the calendar year statistics. However should the review show that the late data has a major impact on the statistics then revisions will be released as part of the subsequent publication.

3. Errors in statistical systems and processes

Occasionally errors can occur in statistical processes; procedures are constantly reviewed to minimise this risk. Should a significant error be found, the publication on the website will be updated and an errata slip published documenting the revision.

The statistics in the latest quarter are provisional, and are therefore liable to revision to take account of any late amendments to the administrative databases from which these statistics are sourced. The standard process for revising the published statistics to account for these late amendments is as follows:

An initial revision to the statistics for the latest quarter may be made when the next edition of this bulletin is published. Further revisions may be made when the figures are reconciled at the end of the year. If revisions are needed in the subsequent year this will be clearly annotated in the tables.

Symbols and conventions

The following symbols have been used throughout the tables in this bulletin:

- .. = Not applicable
- = Not available
- 0 = Nil

Legislation coming into effect in the reporting period

The legislation described below relates mainly to legislation that came into force since 2000. It is only a short summary of the sections that may have affected the published statistics. The following web site has details of all legislation that has come into force in the intervening period. www.legislation.gov.uk/

The coverage of the statistics in this volume may have been affected by the following legislation:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
- Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007

The **Adoption and Children Act 2002** made amendments to the law in relation to the adoption of children. The first stage of the Act deals with Local Authorities duties to provide an adoption service and support services. The second stage relating to inter-country adoptions and the third stage relates to Adoption Support Services. Changes to parental responsibility and the adopted children register were also made.

The **Civil Partnership Act 2004** grants civil partnerships in the United Kingdom with rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriage. Civil Partners are entitled to the same property rights as married opposite-sex couples, the same exemption as married couples with regard to social security and pension benefits, and also the ability to get parental responsibility for a partner's children, as well as responsibility for reasonable maintenance of one's partner and their children, tenancy rights, full life insurance recognition, next-of-kin rights in hospitals, and others. There is a formal process for dissolving partnerships akin to divorce.

The **Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004** concentrates upon legal protection and assistance to victims of crime, particularly domestic violence.

The **Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007** seeks to assist victims of forced marriage, or those threatened with forced marriage, by providing civil remedies. The Act created the *forced marriage order*. A person threatened with forced marriage can apply to court for a forced marriage order. The court can then order a range of appropriate provisions to prevent the forced marriage from taking place, or to protect a victim of forced marriage from its effects, and may include such measures as confiscation of passport or restrictions on contact with the victim.

The subject of a forced marriage order can be not just the person to whom the forced marriage will occur, but also any other person who aids, abets or encourages the forced marriage. A marriage can be considered forced not merely on the grounds of threats of physical violence to the victim, but also through threats of physical violence to third parties (for example, the victim's family), or even self-violence (for example, marriage procured through threat of suicide.) A person who violates a

forced marriage order is subject to contempt of court proceedings and may be arrested.

The Crime and Courts Act 2013 established the single Family Court, replacing the previous three-tiered system under which cases were heard in family proceedings courts, County Courts and the High Court.

The Children and Families Act 2014 made a number of changes affecting public law family cases. In particular, it introduced a 26 week time limit for completing care and supervision cases. It gave the family court the discretion to extend cases by up to 8 weeks at a time should that be necessary to resolve proceedings justly. The Act also removed the need to review interim care orders and interim supervision orders as frequently, allowing the courts to set interim orders in line with the timetable for the case. In relation to private law matters, the Act introduced a 'child arrangements order', replacing residence and contact orders. It also removed the requirement for the court to consider arrangements for children as part of the court processes for divorce and dissolution of a civil partnership.

Directory of Related Internet Websites on the Family Court

The following list of web sites contains information in the form of publications and/or statistics relating to the family justice system that may be of interest.

Justice, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/statistics. This site provides information on the organisations within the justice system, reports and data, and guidance.

Details of **Ministry of Justice Statistical and Research publications**, most of which can be viewed on-line, can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/statistics

The **Attorney General's Office**, www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk Provides information on the role of the department including new releases; updates; reports; reviews and links to other law officer's departments and organisations.

The **Welsh Assembly Government**, www.wales.gov.uk Gives information on all aspects of the Welsh Assembly together with details of publications and statistics.

The **Scottish Government**, www.scotland.gov.uk gives information on all aspects of the Scottish Executive together with details of publications and statistics.

UK National Statistics Publication Hub, www.statistics.gov.uk. This is the UK's home of official statistics, reflecting Britain's economy, population and society at national and local level. There are links to the Office for National Statistics and the UK Statistics Authority.

Glossary

Application: The act of asking the court to make an order.

Child Arrangements Order A child arrangements order regulates the arrangements for who a child is to live with, spend time with or otherwise have contact with when parents separate. It effectively combines residence and contact orders and reduces the feeling that one parent has more say in the upbringing of the child because they have a residence order. The order contains a warning notice about failure to comply with the order and will be subject to enforcement in the same way as a contact order is currently. The child arrangements order replaced residence orders and contact orders from 22 April 2014.

Convention Adoption: An adoption carried out under the terms of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. This is an international treaty designed to protect children from child trafficking, and requires signatory countries to establish safeguards to ensure that any inter-country adoption is in the child's best interests.

Decree Absolute: This is the final order made in divorce proceedings that can be applied for six weeks and one day after a decree nisi has been given. Once this is received, the couple are no longer legally married and are free to remarry.

Decree Nisi: This is the first order made in divorce proceedings and is given when the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting the divorce. It is used to apply for a decree absolute.

Dissolution: The legal termination of a marriage by a decree of divorce, nullity or presumption of death or of a civil partnership by the granting of a dissolution order.

Divorce: This is the legal ending of a marriage.

Financial Remedy: Formerly known as Ancillary Relief. This refers to a number of different types of order used to settle financial disputes during divorce proceedings. Examples include: periodical payments, pension sharing, property adjustment and lump sums, and they can be made in favour of either the former spouse or the couple's children.

Judicial Separation: This is a type of order that does not dissolve a marriage but absolves the parties from the obligation to live together. This procedure might, for instance, be used if religious beliefs forbid or discourage divorce.

Non-molestation Order: This is a type of civil injunction used in domestic violence cases. It prevents the applicant and/or any relevant children from being molested by someone who has previously been violent towards them. Since July 2007, failing to obey the restrictions of these orders has been a criminal offence for which someone could be arrested.

Nullity: This is where a marriage is ended by being declared not valid. This can either be because the marriage was void (not allowed by law) or because the marriage was

voidable (the marriage was legal but there are circumstances that mean it can be treated as if it never took place).

Occupation Order: This is a type of civil injunction used in domestic violence cases. It restricts the right of a violent partner to enter or live in a shared home.

Order: The document bearing the seal of the court recording its decision in a case. Some examples of orders are below:

Care orders: A care order brings the child into the care of the applicant local authority and cannot be made in favour of any other party. The care order gives the local authority parental responsibility for the child and gives the local authority the power to determine the extent to which the child's parents and others with parental responsibility (who do not lose their parental responsibility on the making of the order) may meet their responsibility. The making of a care order, with respect to a child who is the subject of any section 8 order, discharges that order.

Supervision orders: A supervision order places the child under the supervision of the local authority or probation officer. While a supervision order is in force, it is the duty of the supervisor to advise, assist and befriend the child and take the necessary action to give effect to the order, including whether or not to apply for its variation or discharge

Emergency Protection Orders: An emergency protection order is used to secure the immediate safety of a child by removing the child to a place of safety, or by preventing the child's removal from a place of safety. Anyone, including a local authority, can apply for an emergency protection order if, for example, they believe that access to the child is being unreasonably refused.

Petition (for divorce): An application for a decree nisi or a judicial separation order.

Private Law: Refers to Children Act 1989 cases where two or more parties are trying to resolve a private dispute. This is commonly where parents have split-up and there is a disagreement about who their children should live with and who their children should have contact with, or otherwise spend time with and when.

Public Law: Refers to Children Act 1989 cases where there are child welfare issues and a local authority, or an authorised person, is stepping in to protect the child and ensure they get the care they need.