



Department  
for Education



Ministry  
of Justice

**Family Justice Board Meeting  
28 June 2023**

**Attendees**

*Members*

Claire Coutinho MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Education) Co- Chair

Lord Christopher Bellamy KC (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice) Co- Chair

Ed Lidington, (Director, Court Recovery, Criminal and Family Justice, MOJ)

Isabelle Trowler, (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families)

Jacky Tiotto (Chief Executive, Cafcass)

Louise Taylor, (Deputy Director, Family Policy including Child Maintenance, Department of Work and Pensions)

Nigel Brown, (Chief Executive, Cafcass Cymru)

*Apologies*

Albert Heaney (Director, Social Services, Welsh Government)

Helen Lincoln (Executive Director for Children, Families & Education (DCS), Essex County Council)

Jason Latham (Head of Business Architecture, HM Courts and Tribunals Service)

Sarah Johal (National Adoption Lead)

*Observers*

Sir Andrew McFarlane (President of the Family Division)

Gemma Gerrish (Director of Children's Social Care, Children & Families Services, Cheshire West and Chester Council)

Representatives of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)

**Meeting**

**Item 1: Co-Chairs' Introduction and Opening Remarks**

1. Minister Claire Coutinho (CC) and Lord Christopher Bellamy KC (LB) welcomed attendees, noting the fast pace of the agenda for this meeting, and thanked those present for the papers they circulated in advance of the board meeting.
- LB introduced Gemma Gerrish, Director of Children's Social Care at Cheshire West and Chester Council and Chair of the Cheshire and Merseyside Family Justice Board as an observer at the meeting. This followed agreement at the March Board that it would be helpful to have a representative from a Local Family Justice Board routinely attend the

meeting to provide a local perspective and improve the connection between the national and local boards.

- CC introduced Daniel Foster, who has replaced Sarah Jennings as Deputy Director for Adoption, Family Justice and Alternatives to Care in DfE.

### **Item 2: Minutes and Actions from the Previous FJB**

2. MoJ officials led the Board through the previous meeting's minutes with no further comments. Owing to time pressures, it was agreed to reshare the minutes and actions outside the meeting to allow members further opportunity to comment.

### **Item 3: Update from the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)**

3. LB introduced representatives from the FJYPB to update on recent work they have been undertaking.
  - FJYPB updated the Board on their current portfolio of work, including meetings with Cafcass and joint work on the recent Cafcass Children's Day, their support of the Resolution National Conference and their presentation at the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households.
  - FJYPB further updated the Board on their work with DfE to develop resources for schools to support students experiencing family court proceedings. Notably, the PSHE Association have agreed to support this work, and FJYPB shared their hope that this will have an impact beyond the children directly involved.
  - FJYPB shared further details for the next Voice of the Child Live Event (27<sup>th</sup> July, online) and details on the agenda, which features a panel session and interactive presentations.
  - LB asked whether FJYPB members felt their voices were being heard in key decision-making forums. The FJYPB representative noted that they did, and that this has improved, but that all stakeholders in the system have a key role to play in continuing to boost this voice.

### **Item 4: KPI Performance**

4. MoJ officials provided an update on the latest KPIs as of June 2023 for both public and private family law.
5. Members commented on the largely positive trends indicated by the KPIs. Regional and local differences were raised by members, along with interest in seeing any potential changes instigated by the launch of the Public Law Outline. Members queried whether there were specific data on the impact of complex care cases, including those which require deprivation of liberty (DOL) orders.

6. LB noted the importance of developing our understanding on the data with regards to DoL orders, and local level data, and asked officials to consider these issues further.

#### **Item 5: Family Court Trajectories Modelling**

7. MoJ officials shared early work on modelling trajectories around family law caseloads and timeliness, noting that despite the work being in its early stages it is already able to provide some valuable insights. MoJ officials also shared the planned stages and next steps for this work.
8. Members suggested the importance of linking this work to the family justice cross-system strategic plan in the future. It was also noted that because a high volume of open cases requires increased resources to manage, this impacts on the system's ability to reduce the backlog, so should be factored into any system modelling work. The President offered his assistance with this work to MoJ officials.

#### **Item 6: Cross System Strategic Plan**

9. MoJ and DfE officials took the Board through the revised cross system strategic plan and discussed top initiatives in the system along with work-streams where there are risks of delay. MoJ officials noted there remain areas of the plan that are yet to reflect the breadth of activity carried out by all partners in the system. Members were invited to feedback on this – both in the meeting and following it.
10. Members noted the following points:
  - Private Law delay doesn't feature prominently in the plan currently. It was agreed that the Board would return to this issue and have a more substantive agenda item at the October Board meeting.
  - Members noted a need for a language distinction when discussing independent court-appointed experts and professional experts, such as social workers, who are part of the children's social care team around the child.

#### **Item 7: Readiness and Expert Assessment Checklists**

11. LB introduced this item to the board. The MoJ/DfE officials presenting this item secured agreement from the board to take this work to the Family Procedure Rule Committee for final approvals to proceed with the pilot.

#### **Item 8: Mutual Ventures Ltd. project - development and rollout of a financial model that quantifies the impact of delay and provides insights into the key local drivers of delay and potential solutions to address these.**

12. LB thanked representatives from Mutual Ventures Ltd. (MV) for attending the board and the work they have done to develop a financial

model quantifying the financial impact of delays in public law proceedings.

13. MV discussed the key objectives, themes, and observations of their project and noted the breadth of cross-system engagement conducted, including rolling out the tool in 104 Local Authorities and consulting with the Judiciary, HMCTS, Cafcass and ADCS.
14. MV noted the importance of system-wide trust, the need for a culture shift through 'one system' working, the transparent use of data to challenge assumptions, and empowered local system-leadership.
15. LB and members noted the particular importance of the theme of trust, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic, and the appetite for change and co-working that followed it. The Public Law Outline relaunch was cited as an example of the benefit of this style of working. LB asked for the report to be shared with the Board when finalised and requested advice from officials following further consideration of the findings at working level.

#### **Item 8: Any other business**

16. LB noted the material shared by the Family Justice Council in advance of the board, and members reflected on encouraging visits to the Pathfinder pilots and their wish to see these grow.