



**Family Justice Board Meeting
19 March 2024**

Attendees

Members

David Johnston 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
 Fran Oram/Sophie Langdale (Portfolio Director, Children's Social Care Reform, DfE)
 Ed Lidington, (Director, Courts, Criminal and Family Justice, MoJ)
 Isabelle Trowler, (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families)
 Teresa Williams (Director of Strategy, Cafcass)
 Nigel Brown, (Chief Executive, Cafcass Cymru)
 Sarah Johal (National Adoption Lead)
 Nick Goodwin (Chief Executive, HM Courts and Tribunals Service)
 Jason Latham (Head of Business Architecture, HM Courts and Tribunals Service)
 Helen Lincoln (Executive Director for Children, Families & Education (DCS), Essex County Council)
 Albert Heaney (Director, Social Services, Welsh Government)

Apologies

Jacky Tiotto (Chief Executive, Cafcass)

Observers

Sir Andrew McFarlane (President of the Family Division)
 Representatives of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)
 Edward Timpson MP

Meeting

Item 1: Co-Chairs' Introduction and Opening Remarks

1. Minister David Johnston (DJ) and Lord Christopher Bellamy KC (LB) welcomed attendees, setting out the agenda for this meeting, and thanking those present for their contribution over the previous months to papers they circulated in advance of the board meeting.
2. LB introduced Edward Timpson MP (ET) to the board, who outlined his advisory role to LB and DJ and noted he will meet members of the FJB and other key stakeholders in the family system to inform his advice.

Item 2: Minutes and Actions from the Previous FJB

3. MoJ officials guided the Board through the previous meeting's minutes and actions, with no comments raised.



Item 3: Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) Presentation

4. DJ introduced representatives from the FJYPB to discuss their recent work.
5. The FJYPB presented their priorities and recent achievements. This included recruitment of 15 new members, work with the Judicial College and Ofsted and a meeting with DJ. The date for the next Voice of the Child Conference (25 July) was shared with the board.
6. Members noted the importance of engaging with young people at all levels and asked about the level of contact the FJYPB have with local family justice boards (LFJBs). The FJYPB representatives explained they have attended LFJBs upon invitation to share their experiences, including with relation to delay.
7. Members thanked the FJYPB for their presentation and their recent address at the Family Justice Council.

Item 4: New approach to family justice system leadership and priorities

8. LB introduced the discussion on the family justice system arrangements and priorities. Thanking members for their contributions over the previous months, he explained the FJB needed to provide clear direction for the family justice system by agreeing a new set of national priorities.
9. LB noted the difficult choices and trade-offs in agreeing the strategic aims, draft arrangements and priorities, the need to review these as they progress through the year and the importance of LFJBs being engaged to make these real in their own contexts given that these are a national set of priorities.
10. MoJ and DfE officials provided an overview of the context and principles underpinning the suggested priorities. The initial focus for the new priorities is to reduce delay, with specific priorities aimed at reducing the longest-running cases over 100 weeks old for both public and private law. The priorities are action-focussed and a sequential approach to delivery was suggested to ensure the right level of focus. Officials noted it would be vital to work with local areas to support the priorities and confirmed that a launch event with LFJBs is planned for 30 April.
11. DJ brought in representatives from the FJYPB to give their views first. FJYPB noted their support for the priorities, and reiterated the importance of hearing and learning from children, in particular for private law priority 3 on improving the system's understanding of children as victims of domestic abuse.
12. Members agreed with and were supportive of the suggested priorities and aims – noting their clarity and ease of retention in memory, along with positive comments on the approach taken in creating them. Members also agreed with the initial focus on longest running cases, and agreeing to support of work to address these.
13. The Board discussed whether the targets for timeliness in public law were ambitious enough since the very long running cases are concentrated in a few courts which would impact the national average. Officials discussed the balance to be struck between making targets ambitious but achievable – the



- ambition is based on the level of reductions achieved after the Public Law Outline came into effect in 2014.
14. Officials also made clear that we want to keep the priorities under review and, for example, set more ambitious targets where previous ones are achieved either nationally or with local areas. For public law priority one, for example, this could be reduced over the course of the year once the 100-week cases are closed.
 15. The Board discussed whether the reduction in open private law cases (private law priority two) would require a focus on listing / timetabling. Members flagged the positive impact of this in Birmingham as part of the preparation for Pathfinder, with suggestions that other DFJ areas could learn from this directly and address their own outstanding cases using similar methods. Members also suggested it would be useful to retain a measure of average case duration in private law cases, similar to the proposed target for public law which would be presented alongside the priority on reducing the overall caseload by 10%.
 16. Members discussed the link between public and private law – for example the positive impact tackling private law timeliness may have in creating increased capacity for public law, and that other priorities will have similar interactions we may not be aware of.

Delivering Priorities

17. Officials outlined the intention for focussed activity in five 'areas of focus' facing particular challenges in terms of delay. The Policy and Delivery Group (PDG), which reports to the FJB, will monitor progress in these areas on a monthly basis. Members agreed to the approach though raised concerns about local authority capacity given financial context and queried whether LFJBs are resourced to take this on without support.
18. Members discussed the importance of collective messaging, given interdependencies in delivering against these priorities. Members agreed the importance of identifying the contribution of each agency towards achieving priorities, the impact these actions may have, any known gaps or trade-offs. Officials noted substantive discussion on this is planned for the next PDG. Members further agreed the need to play their part in supporting delivery and the principle of greater direct involvement with LFJBs.

Item 5: Any Other Business

19. LB and DJ thanked the board for their considered contributions and insights. They shared his view that this work will support us in gaining and maintaining a more strategic grip of the system and allow us to better work with local areas to drive improvements. They welcomed the collective commitment of members of this Board to take the necessary action as leaders within the system and that he is keen to hear the specific measures proposed by individual agencies at PDG. LB and DJ further noted that, in the context of a system with difficult operating environments, it is only by working together and pulling in the same direction that we can hope to make progress.



Annex A: FJB Priorities 2024-2025

Strategic Aims

what are we trying to change as a whole system

- PRIMARY FOCUS** 1) Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (**delay**)
 2) Ensure the system runs effectively and efficiently with the resources available (**efficiency, capacity**)
 3) Ensure children's wishes and feelings are heard, and they understand what is happening, when, and why (**experience**)

Public Law Priorities

24/25 SMART priorities centred around delay - the primary strategic aim

All priorities will apply from 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025 for England and Wales

Public Law priority 1: no open public law cases longer than 100 weeks currently 252 cases

Public Law priority 2: average timeliness for care and supervision cases 32 weeks currently 43 weeks

Public Law priority 3: 83% of all new care and supervision cases in the system completed within 26 weeks currently 64%

Private Law Priorities

24/25 SMART priorities centred around delay, supported by demand reduction and improved experience

All priorities will apply from 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025 for England and Wales

Private Law priority 1: no open private law cases longer than 100 weeks currently c.10% cases

*Private Law priority 2: reduce the number of private law cases in the system by 10% currently 44,869 cases.
 Reducing demand, resolving cases earlier and increasing throughput*

Private Law priority 3: improve the experiences of children and survivors of domestic abuse involved in private law proceedings.