



2023-2024

# Annual report and accounts

**An executive non-departmental  
public body**

HC 478

Ambitious Together: Strengthened local accountability  
for the experiences of children, their families and carers.



# Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

## **Annual report and accounts 2023-24**

For the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Presented to Parliament pursuant to paragraph 12(3) of Schedule 2 to the  
Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

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HC 478



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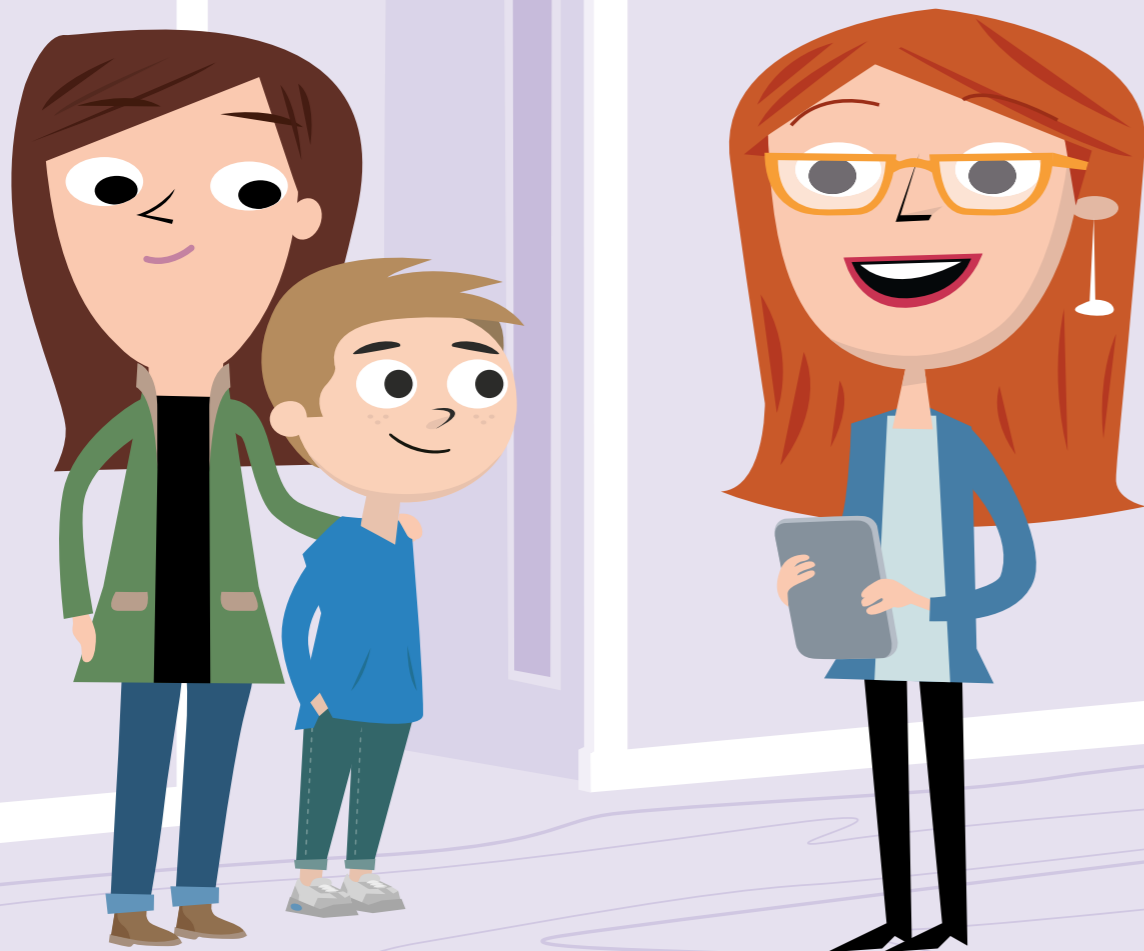
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# Introduction and overview



## Foreword from the Chief Executive and Chair of the Board

Every year, Cafcass is privileged to support around 137,000 children in family court proceedings. The social work practice and processes, infrastructure, data, systems and arrangements to fulfil and manage this responsibility, are complex, challenging, ever changing and critical to organisational health and effective practice. They fundamentally matter in allowing us to advise the family courts in England about what is safe for children and in their best interests.

We employed 2,258 hugely dedicated, expert staff at the end of the financial year 2023-24 – family court advisers and managers who undertake the direct and supervisory work that is required to provide advice to the family court, colleagues who answer calls and make first relationships with families, those who consider complaints about us, those who support our digital systems, those who manage our press and communications, our human resources colleagues, our recruitment teams, those who support the health and wellbeing of everyone at Cafcass, our analytics team, our national business centre teams, our estates and finance colleagues. Each of our people provide essential services in support of our statutory responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children in proceedings and to advise the court about their future best interests. We are proud to say that our leadership and our quality of practice for the children and families we support in public and private law proceedings was recognised by Ofsted in their January 2024 inspection as Outstanding in every category. They specifically reference the impact of our determined focus on the experiences of children and their families.

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB), who advise and challenge us on what matters most to children in proceedings and are embedded in improving many aspects of our work, have been integral to the Ofsted feedback process. We support and sponsor the FJYPB to be able to have a strong voice and meaningful impact in changing family justice for the better. Their priorities for children and young people are clear, particularly in reducing delay in proceedings and the consequential impact on their life and their future.

Throughout this report you will see thorough evidence of the focus we have had in this last year on stronger local accountability for the experiences of children and families who find themselves in private or public law proceedings. In the family justice system, complex and busy as it is, personal and unique experiences can be overlooked. We have therefore been determined to seek more feedback, to listen better, to use what we are learning to reflect on how children and families experience us and to be accountable for how well they report that we understand them and meet their needs. Given the significance and the enduring importance of the decisions made by the

court in matters concerning who children live and spend time with, there is little more important than whether those affected understand the reasons for and thinking behind the advice that Family Court Advisers and children’s guardians provide to the court. In attending to uniqueness in this way, we have learnt more about what matters to children and their families, what we still need to improve to do more consistently everywhere, and it has helped us to develop targeted local area improvement priorities and plans.

For 2023-24 we present this report with pride and with thanks to each and every colleague and partner. Our improvement work will continue with new energy and revised priorities.

For us both as Chair and Chief Executive, it remains a privilege to be able to influence family justice in England and to support the work that Cafcass colleagues undertake with such enduring commitment. Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report and accounts for 2023–24.



**Jacky Tiotto**  
Cafcass Chief Executive



**Sally Cheshire CBE**  
Cafcass Chair

## 1.2

# Foreword from the Family Justice Young People’s Board

Written by a FJYPB member

**We, the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB), are a group of young people with direct experiences of family court proceedings who commit to and feel passionate about ensuring that the voices of children are heard at, and influence, every level of family justice. Cafcass’ sponsorship of the FJYPB and our close work with them supports us in having real impact across family justice and family proceedings.**

One of our priorities continues to be our focus on reducing delay and the impact of this for children and young people who are in both private and public law proceedings. Over the last year, we’ve worked with Jacky Tiotto from Cafcass and Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division, and know they are equally as worried as we are. Within these meetings, we have reviewed actions being taken to reduce delay, and have been impressed. Similarly, we’ve worked with Cafcass and the Ministry of Justice to hear about the impact of the work being undertaken by them and have been reassured about the statistics showing how delay is reducing and the positive feedback being received about this.

New processes in the family court have also arisen, such as the pathfinder pilot, which we have worked closely with. The purpose of this new way of working is to try to reduce delay for families by seeing children before the first court hearing so that the Cafcass assessment more closely advises the court about what is in the child’s best interests. We have supported the development of leaflets and other resources to support families which for us is just as important, if not more so, than the actual process itself.

Last year Cafcass commissioned from the FJYPB a series of animated films for children called ‘Taking me seriously’, to help children understand what to expect if they are involved in family court proceedings. Following the success of the first film, the FJYPB has been developing the second in partnership with Cafcass around sharing recommendations with children. We have worked closely with the animators to try to communicate key messages that are relatable and understandable. Our objective is for the sharing of recommendations with children to become more consistently embedded in practice and for children to have the opportunity to say what they think about these to the court. We think this is critical for the judge to understand.



The theme of the 2023 Voice of the Child conference was “Building trust - To enable children and young people to participate in their family court proceedings in the context of delay”. This was held online to enable greater accessibility and we had excellent attendance with 434 professionals joining the conference. We shared our lived experiences and presentations with the audience, held a panel with lead professionals from across family justice and posed questions and challenges to attendees around how they build trust which starts with the child, stays with the child and ends with the child in all their work with us.

We look forward to continuing our work with Cafcass and partners over the coming year around a number of projects and issues, which include:

- Development of an app to help children and young people access information about their proceedings, and to give feedback on what they've experienced.
- Continuing our work with Cafcass to ensure the voice of every child is strongly promoted and heard.

- Improving children and young people's participation in proceedings.
- Safe contact for children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse and harmful parenting.
- Continuing to challenge delay and raising awareness of the impact of this for children.
- Continuing our focus on the impact for children and young people of abuse and harmful parenting including through our 2024 Voice of the Child Conference.
- Promoting the uniqueness of every child and young person including neurodivergent and multi diverse disabilities.



## Our statutory responsibilities

**Cafcass is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. We independently advise the family courts in England about what is safe for children and in their best interests.**

We work with around 137,000 children annually whose arrangements with their families are decided by the family court and we provide a service that prioritises their safety, understands their experiences, listens to their voices and their needs, and takes into full account their families and those who are connected to them. We operate within the law set by Parliament (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) and under the rules and directions of the family courts. Our role is to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- give advice to the family courts;
- make provision for children to be represented; and
- provide information, advice and support to children and their families.

We may be asked by the court to work with families in two main areas of law:

- **private law**, including arrangements for children after parents have divorced or separated. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a family court adviser (FCA). Their job is to provide information to the court about what is needed for a safe decision to be made about arrangements for whom the child lives and spends time with and what is in their best future interests.

- **public law**, including care applications where a local authority has serious concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. In these children's cases, a Cafcass social worker will be appointed by the court to act as a children's guardian. Their job is to work alongside the local authority to make sure that the plan for that child is in their best interests and will secure a safe outcome for them.

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, accountable to the Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice. As Accounting Officer, our Chief Executive is responsible for advising on appropriate objectives and targets agreed with our sponsor department, making regular assessments on risks and progress, intervening where necessary, undertaking an annual self-evaluation as required by the Ofsted inspection framework<sup>1</sup> and making an annual report to Parliament. They are responsible to the Cafcass Board on the effective discharge of our responsibilities, giving them assurances about performance, effectiveness, the wellbeing of colleagues and the management of public money. Cafcass also has a responsibility to contribute to wider government objectives relating to children, working especially closely with the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice.

We are inspected by Ofsted, under His Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI) duty to inspect, as set out in sections 143-145 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

We develop and publish our own strategic plan that sets out our ambition and how we will achieve it. We report on our progress annually in the performance section of this report and regularly throughout the year to our Board and to the Ministry of Justice through the Business Assurance process. Our work is the subject of a formal audit programme administered by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA).

Our Chief Executive was supported during 2023-24 by three directors and two deputy directors. Our Corporate Management Team (CMT) is accountable for the leadership of the organisation and is in turn accountable to the Cafcass Board. CMT is assisted by a range of internal boards and groups set out in the accountability section of this report.



<sup>1</sup> Inspecting Cafcass: framework - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

## 1.4

# Our vision and ambition for children: Strategic planning, progress and reporting improvement

In November 2023, we published our new strategic plan for 2023-26 - **Ambitious for Children: exceptional experiences for every child, everywhere and every time**. This new plan builds on the firm foundations of our strategy for 2019-23 and adopts the same structure of three key ambitions in relation to our practice, our people and work with partners, underpinned by nine strategic priorities.

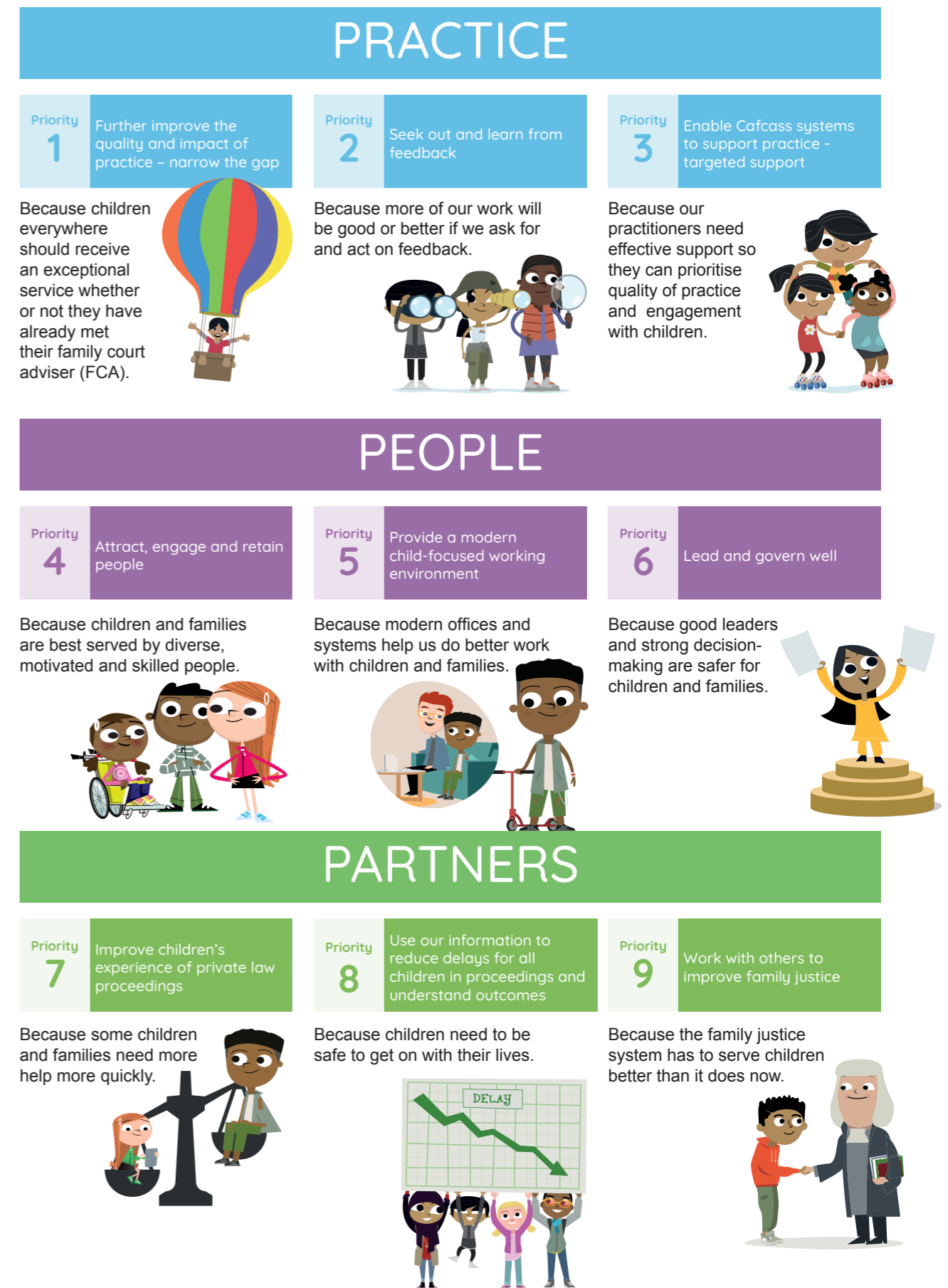
- Our **Practice** ambition is to provide all children with an exceptional experience of their engagement with us, everywhere and every time. We will be prioritising the provision of management support, supervision and oversight to family court advisers and children’s guardians. This will help them make effective and consistent use of our practice framework and associated practice aids, alongside developing confidence and competence against our practice quality standards.
- Our **People** ambition is to provide the leadership, professional development and working environment our people need. We will invest in career and learning pathways, maximise our reward, recognition and wellbeing offer and build capability to drive efficiency, further improvement and system reform.
- Our **Partner** ambition is to continue to collaborate and to work together on system recovery, specifically to reduce delay for children in proceedings. We will also seek the views and perspectives of partners on improving children and

families’ experiences of proceedings and associated support services. We will be prioritising the further trial and development of the pathfinder courts, designed to improve the experiences of adult and child victims living with domestic abuse, identifying risk to them earlier and finding earlier resolution to their proceedings.

We have updated our nine strategic priorities to align with these revised ambitions and to respond to the feedback we have received from children and families, our colleagues and our partners.

Our new strategy is more specific about what exceptional means for children, across our work in practice, with people and alongside our partners. During this first year of the new strategy, which is covered in this report, we are placing particular emphasis on further improving the quality of practice, while at the same time achieving greater consistency across operational service areas, between practitioners and during each and every child and family engagement with us.

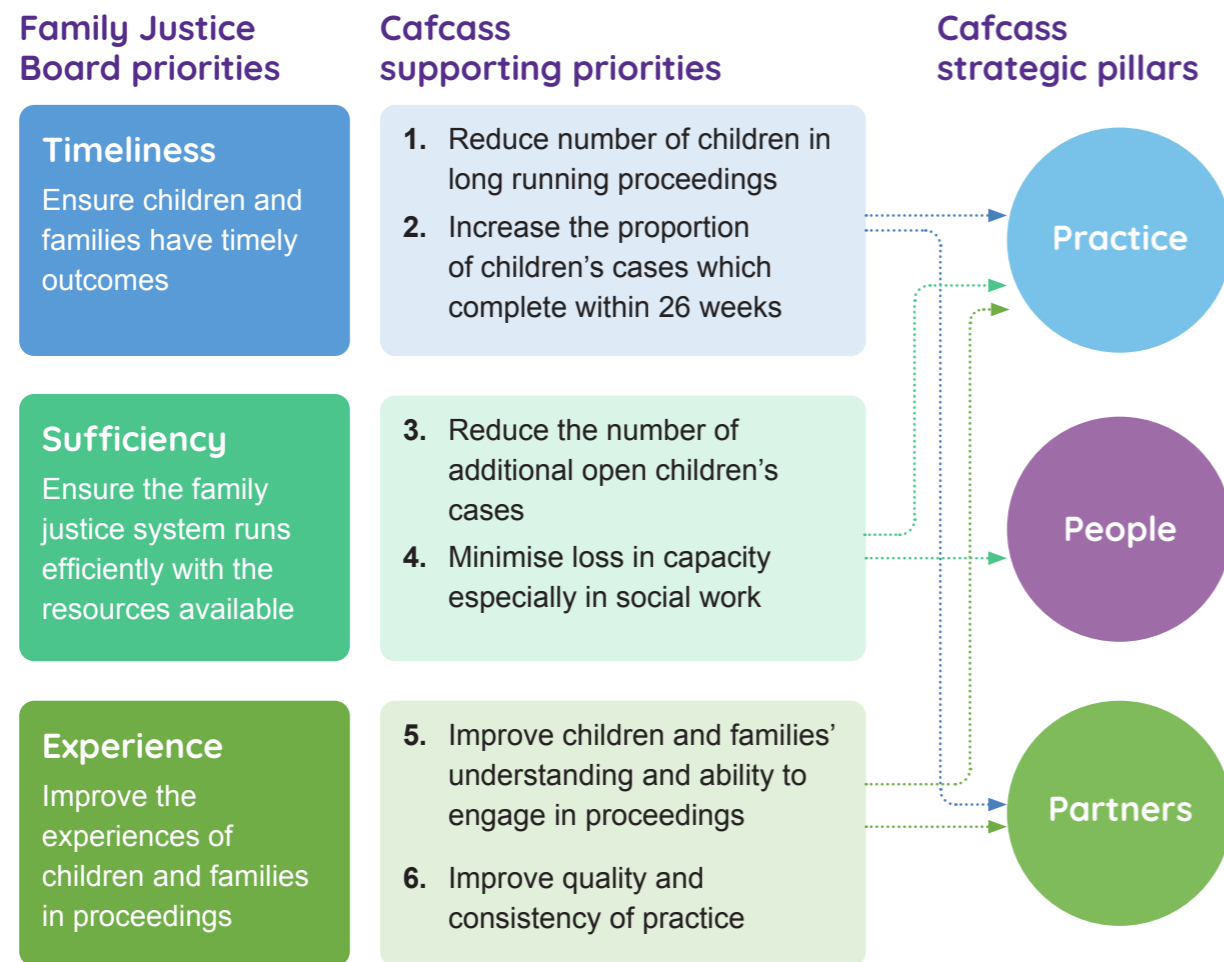
Figure 1: Our Practice, People and Partners pillars





In addition, we have developed a clearer suite of success measures which include and expand upon the four 'key performance indicators' by which we have traditionally been measured. See pages 34 and 35. Our programme of work more explicitly contributes to the agreed priorities that the Family Justice Board has set for the family justice system as a whole – timeliness, efficiency and improved experiences for children and families. These family justice system priorities are set out below showing how the supporting priorities in our strategic plan contribute to whole family justice system improvement. Our success against the broader suite of performance measures is set out on pages 69 to 75 of this report.

**Figure 2: Mapping Cafcass supporting priorities to the family justice system (FJS) objectives and strategic plan pillars**



The specific work programmes to deliver these priorities are for the most part a continuation of existing work but there are some new elements, such as a programme of work to improve processes for case progression and closure, and enhanced work to address threats to the safety of our people. We update our strategic work programmes and associated improvement programmes each year in response to feedback, our own self – evaluation, and our learning and in response to priorities identified through engagement with Ofsted, including the most recent inspection – see section 2.1.

The three tables set out below describe the progress we have made in this reporting year with our strategic priorities and their associated work programmes.

For operational **practice**, we have planned to continue sharpening and targeting our focus on children's cases where the advice to the court and the assessment of what is in the child's best interest is not yet good enough. Additionally, our focus will be on operational service areas where performance is not yet considered to be consistent with the best we have to offer children.

The national and local improvement planning programme (described from page 54) sets the next phase of progression as we pursue exceptional experiences for all children, everywhere and every time.

Our **people** priorities in the year ahead will have the addition of a programme of work on the health, safety and security of the people who work for Cafcass. This will include working with partners, including the judiciary, HMCTS and the Ministry of Justice to secure safe access to all courts and personal security in court for all Cafcass staff who attend. It will also include hard revisions to our policies about our response to families who threaten and harass us in our work with them as well as security in our offices.

With **partners**, our priorities in the year ahead will coalesce around reducing delay for all children in family proceedings and specifically improving children's experiences in private law proceedings. This will mean that the next phase of the pathfinder court (which commenced in Birmingham and Solihull in May 2024) will require significant resourcing as we work through the extent to which it is both scalable and more effective than current arrangements for private law. Our rule 16.4 improvement work in cases where children are joined as a party to their proceedings will also involve significant work with partners to secure a realistic timetable with the court and better outcomes for children in these complex cases.



**Figure 3: Our progress on Practice, People and Partners in 2023-24**


### PRACTICE: Year 1 progress...

<b>Priority 1</b>	Further improve the quality and impact of practice – narrow the gap
<b>Priority 2</b>	Seek out and learn from feedback
<b>Priority 3</b>	Enable Cafcass systems to support practice - targeted support


Because children everywhere should receive an exceptional service whether or not they have already met their family court adviser (FCA).



Because more of our work will be good or better if we ask for and act on feedback.



Because our practitioners need effective support so they can prioritise quality of practice and engagement with children.



### What did we do?

- We introduced a private law improvement programme. This included the introduction of private law practice quality standards which set out the professional expectations of family court advisers who work for Cafcass and who are independently appointed by the court to provide advice in proceedings.
- Committed to further improvement in working with families where domestic abuse is raised by establishing a new Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group.
- We introduced and evaluated the impact of the reconfiguration of management oversight and supervision arrangements.
- Continued with our dedicated 'learning from practice' programme through national improvement conferences, practice alerts and local service area learning and training events.
- Continued to develop our new feedback strategy by increasing opportunities for children and families to provide feedback through QR codes, online forms and local audits where families are contacted.
- Established a new Complaints and Correspondence function separate from operational practice, published new adult complaints policies and appointed a dedicated Children's Complaints Manager to support children's complaints.
- Further strengthened our approach to learning from significant incidents by introducing organisational learning reviews to complement National Improvement Service reviews of local and national practice.
- Introduced improvement plans for each Operational Service Area, and reviewed progress 6 monthly to track progress in each area against past performance and best performing areas on a range of indicators.
- Introduced a case-progression and closure programme to support our priority that children will only remain involved with Cafcass as long as they need to be.

### What was the impact?

- Increase in the % of work assessed as good or better from 73% in November 2022 to 78.5% in November 2023.
- Audited practice assessed as good or better in families where domestic abuse is raised remained steady at 70.5%.
- Additional roles were created and the % FCAs with a caseload of 25 and over in long term teams has reduced from 14.8% (March 2023) to 9.2% end of March 2024.
- The % of assessment and child's plans with a management review increased to 91.3% (from 85.2% 2022-23) in public law and 91.2% (88.9% 2022-23) in private law.
- Average caseloads for FCAs and Children's Guardians have successfully reduced to below pre-pandemic levels.
- In public law, feedback received through audit increased from 500 records in 2022-23 to 788 records in 2023-24. Where indicated 80.3% was positive.
- In private law, feedback received through audit increased from 1,190 records in 2022-23 to 1,744 records in 2023-24. Where indicated 66.3% was positive.
- Increased the number of children's complaints from 12 to 24 (we are actively seeking out children's feedback).
- Learning identified from adult and child complaints is shared with local managers and influences their local action plans. National learning is reported into our Next Steps in National Learning Panel, to consider options for change and implementation.
- For public law there are 3,801 children in open proceedings 52+ weeks (26.2% reduction from 2022-23).
- For private law there are 7,109 children in open proceedings 52+ weeks (of which 2,772 have been open 100+ weeks). This is a 20.4% reduction from 2022-23. 28.7% (2,040 children) of these long-running private law cases are 'court ready' (Cafcass has filed a safeguarding letter or the section 7 report and awaiting instructions from a hearing in the next six weeks or outstanding safeguarding checks).


### PEOPLE: Year 1 progress...

<b>Priority 4</b>	Attract, engage and retain people
<b>Priority 5</b>	Provide a modern child-focused working environment
<b>Priority 6</b>	Lead and govern well

Because children and families are best served by diverse, motivated and skilled people.



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



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



### What did we do?

- Made a higher pay award and secured clearance to pay it earlier than previous years.
- Undertook our second national staff survey, securing record levels of engagement (84% response rate).
- Developed career and learning pathways for all professional groups at Cafcass.
- Redesigned our induction programme for launch in May 2024.
- Continued our development of the annual performance and learning review programme including more training and new materials.
- Developed and launched our recruitment allies scheme.
- Recommissioned the second year of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Talent programme.
- Opened the third of our new regional children and family hubs in London – our Grays Inn Road office.
- Launched the new Cafcass website.
- Made further releases and improvements to our case management system, ChildFirst.
- Agreed principles for our long-term estates strategy and the immediate priorities in the year ahead.
- Introduced new Management Quality Standards for our social workers and our corporate and business services professionals.
- Reviewed and reissued our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for its third year.
- Participated in the government Public Sector Bodies review programme and secured positive findings.
- Undertook a functional standards review, strengthening our assurance in risk management.

### What was the impact?

- The social work vacancy rate in 2023-24 stabilised at 8.1% (7.7% 2022-23) whilst the Corporate and Business Services vacancy rate increased slightly to 5.4% (4.3% 2022-23).
- The 12-month turnover for Social Work professionals remained steady at 15.1% in 2023-24.
- For Corporate and Business Services staff, turnover reduced in the latest 12-month period; it was 7.9% for April 2023 - March 2024 compared with 12.0% in 2022-23 and pre-pandemic.
- Greater diversity and range of skills on recruitment panels.
- Greater opportunities for colleagues on the talent programme to access and be visible much more widely at Cafcass.
- Provision of high-quality accommodation for children and families to visit and for colleagues to work.
- Improved look and feel for users and better organisation of content.
- Continuous improvement in the ease with which social workers report their access to case records and management.
- Clearer principles to guide decision making on type and location of premises across the country so that we serve children, families and our colleagues well.
- Managers have a consistent framework for management practice.
- Combination of new and continuing objectives to improve our understanding of uniqueness in the workplace and our practice.
- Improving discipline of self-assessment and action planning for improvement.

## PARTNERS: Year 1 progress...

**Priority 7** Improve children's experience of private law proceedings

Because some children and families need more help more quickly.



**Priority 8** Use our information to reduce delays for all children in proceedings and understand outcomes

Because children need to be safe to get on with their lives.



**Priority 9** Work with others to improve family justice

Because the family justice system has to serve children better than it does now.



### What did we do?

- Undertook an internal review of our learning from the Dorset Private Law Pathfinder Court.
- Designed and developed a new model and associated arrangements for providing early advice to court in private proceedings. This is being tested in a new pathfinder site in Birmingham.
- Evaluated our pilot for new practice in private law proceedings where a r16.4\* guardian is appointed. The model will be implemented nationally in 2024-25.
- Local managers have performance data dashboards to oversee delay and Cafcass intervention to minimise the impact on children.
- Undertook a third national snapshot of public law delay and implemented six national commitments to support the relaunch of the Public Law Outline.
- Commenced a review of Deprivation of Liberty as we prepare evidence for Ofsted and DfE about our understanding of the needs of the children.
- Continued with our fortnightly internal Cafcass recovery board, now also focused on improvement beyond Covid – 19 baselines.
- Developed a success measures framework closely aligned to the national family justice board priorities.
- Developed our new partners strategy.
- Reviewed our data sharing agreements with courts and police authorities and agreed design of auto sharing of case information with the courts through the public and private law portals.

### What was the impact?

- Learning about benefits of seeing some children before the first hearing and preparation of principles to manage new arrangements – including advice tracks and earlier identification of harm and risk of harm to children.
- Evidence of earlier appointment of the guardian for a r16.4 child's case and shorter proceedings in pilot areas.
- Reductions in delay: reduced numbers of children in longest running proceedings over 100 weeks.
- Early evidence that s31 durations are reducing as a result of the renewed focus on our 6 Public Law Outline commitments.
- Sharing our data has improved the national system's understanding of the impact of Deprivation of Liberty applications; DfE led work on short notice applications; judicial working group on the 10% of private law applications made by non-parents.
- Data is clearly available for Cafcass to report its contribution to national success measures for family justice.
- It is intended that new and more consistent engagement with partners will support our strategic priorities and our improvement work.

\* Appointment of a children's guardian in private law proceedings to conduct the proceedings on behalf of and in the interests of the child.

To support progress with our strategic ambitions and priorities, we continued implementing our national improvement plan for the second year (2023-24), including the practice and leadership priorities embedded within it.

Practice improvement priorities	Leadership improvement priorities
1. <b>Seeing and engaging respectfully with every child</b> – throughout their proceedings.	1. <b>Compelling leadership in the consistent use of 'Together with Children and Families'</b> – our unified model of practice.
2. <b>A detailed understanding of the nature and impact (harm and risk) on child victims of domestic abuse</b> – reflected in advice to the court.	2. <b>Effective management support, supervision, and oversight</b> – in the implementation of policy and the consistent achievement of the practice and management quality standards.
3. <b>An understanding of the impact of a child's uniqueness</b> – reflected in advice to the court.	3. <b>Evidence of actively seeking feedback, learning from feedback, and making adjustments to further improve practice.</b>
4. <b>Effective use of the Assessment and Child's Plan to analyse harm and risk to the child</b> – with a timetable for concluding proceedings within 26 weeks.	4. <b>Understanding and evidencing the positive impact of leaders on children, families, and carers</b> – reflected in applied learning from feedback and significant incidents.
5. <b>Reducing delay for children</b> – understanding the causes, the impact on the child, and taking action to get a decision.	5. <b>Demonstrating a detailed and accurate understanding of performance and the quality of practice</b> – at every point in the performance and accountability cycle.

The National Improvement Plan takes its priorities from our collective and accumulated learning about the quality and impact of practice and performance. The learning derives from the scrutiny of local and national performance data, practice quality auditing, feedback from children and families, significant incidents, complaints, and case record and learning reviews.

There are nineteen Operational Service Area (OSA) plans with the same ten priorities and with additional local ambitions and targets drawn from specific pressures and areas for improvement.

The senior leadership teams for each OSA have continuous access to a rich set of performance data, audit results and feedback to enable them to monitor progress and improvement from their baseline and to make comparisons with national averages and 'Best for Children' measures. Local OSA leaders are supported and challenged through the comprehensive performance and accountability cycle, including:

- supervisions between the Assistant Director (who oversees one or more OSA) and the Cafcass National Director or Deputy Director;
- weekly meetings of the Assistant Director group, covering all OSAs;

- consideration of a key challenge Spotlight Report at the monthly meeting of the full Operational Management Team;
- the fortnightly meeting of the Cafcass internal recovery and improvement board;
- the six weekly performance and learning meeting of the Corporate Management Team;
- the eight annual regional performance boards;
- the mid-year reviews of the senior OSA teams in-person with the Directors and Chief Executive to review progress and improvement in preparation for the annual self-evaluation; and
- the self-evaluation required for the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted.

Performance and progress are also scrutinised regularly throughout the year by the full Cafcass Board, through its sub-committees and by the Ministry of Justice at the quarterly business assurance meetings. These plans form the operational infrastructure of both our strategic and improvement plans.

Looking ahead to 2024-25, we will be specifying clearer improvement priorities for our business and corporate services functions in order to secure the focus that is needed for the whole organisation to lift the experiences of children and families to the level of the best everywhere. These are set out in section 3.4 of this report.

Finally, in this reporting year, we set out above how we have been able to improve the alignment of our strategic and improvement priorities with the priorities of the National Family Justice Board, led by the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education. Together with core partners, including Cafcass, Cafcass Cymru, the judiciary, HMCTS and local authority family justice leads, the Family Justice Board has set out its priorities to target delay and to improve the experiences for children and their families in family court proceedings.

Section 2.2 (from page 28) brings together data and progress reporting against the national family justice board priorities, underpinned by Cafcass headline performance measures and supporting evidence of improvement. These are overseen and managed in our fortnightly internal recovery and improvement board. The data additionally set out our improvement intentions and how progress against these measures is reported to our Cafcass Board and in our quarterly Business Assurance Meetings with the Ministry of Justice.



# Performance and impact report



## 2.1

### Ofsted inspection 2024

Following last year's focused inspection visit with the theme of 'managing demand', Ofsted conducted a full inspection in January 2024.

The inspection was carried out in accordance with the published framework.<sup>2</sup> Introduced in April 2021, this framework sets out how Ofsted inspects the quality and effectiveness of our private and public law practice with children and families and the impact of our leaders on private and public law practice with children and families. In evaluating the impact of our service, the inspection also evaluates how well we positively influence the effectiveness of the family justice system both locally and nationally.

The inspection had a wide scope which included:

- four weeks of live inspection, of which two were on site;
- discrete inspection teams in ten of our nineteen operational service areas and the National Business Centre;
- examining children's files to consider the effectiveness of practice and the experiences of circa 680 children;
- interviewing or observing circa 380 Cafcass staff;
- interviewing members of the Family Justice Young People's Board; and
- consulting on the effectiveness of our partnerships with local authorities, the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Education, the Judiciary, and the President of the Family Division.

In the final report published on 2 April 2024, Ofsted judged Cafcass as 'Outstanding' across all judgement areas, and particularly praised improvements in practice and leadership since the previous full inspection in 2018.

Judgment	Grade
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with children and families	Outstanding
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with children and families	Outstanding
The impact of leaders on private and public law practice with children and families	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding



<sup>2</sup> Inspecting Cafcass: framework - ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-cafcass-framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-cafcass-framework))

## Summary of key findings:

### Navigating complex work with great skill, respect and rigour

Since the previous inspection, inspectors found a change in culture across the workforce stemming from our new relationship-based model of practice, 'Together.' They found that the model has been embraced by an overwhelming majority of staff and has been instrumental in promoting practice that is kind, sensitive and respectful, with children's welfare and safety at the forefront of thinking.

*'There is a palpable change in the way practitioners are talking more about, and thinking about, children, placing them at the forefront of their work.'*

In addition, inspectors concluded that both the practice framework and practice and management quality standards are well understood and valued by our skilled workforce and that improvement priorities are intrinsically linked to the practice quality standards.

Ofsted observed the complexity of the work we undertake in private law, noting that FCAs are making a positive impact to children's lives by offering robust assessment and high-quality advice to court. They commended FCAs' ability to navigate the emotive and challenging nature of the work with great skill, respect, and rigor.

*'The quality of private law practice has continued to improve, and this is making an exceptional difference to children's experiences.'*

In our public law work, Ofsted found that Children's Guardians bring skill and expertise to their work with children during care proceedings, allowing them to quickly build trusting and meaningful relationships. They saw evidence of Children's Guardians focusing on the safety and wellbeing of children to make 'consistently meaningful, evidence-based and invaluable' recommendations to the family court. This work was reported as having a tangible and positive impact on children's lives. Ofsted found that, since the previous inspection, practice has continued to improve from an already strong base.

*'Children and their families... receive an outstanding service from skilled and compassionate children's guardians who bring skill and expertise to their work.'*

They reported that senior leaders are credible, visible and highly respected by the workforce because of their relentless child focus and straightforward approach. They reported that they inspire managers and staff to perform well, that they are not satisfied with good enough and are constantly striving for better all of the time. Strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders were reported as extremely strong.

*'Leaders are consistently ambitious in seeking out innovative ways, not only to sustain the highest quality services for children and families, but to continually improve them.'*

Inspectors observed the National Business Centre (NBC) handling exceptionally large numbers of court applications daily from across the country and they praised 'confident and competent staff' in the highly skilled intake team who process these applications promptly and efficiently.

### Knowing ourselves well, knowing when we get things wrong and taking proactive steps to improve

In respect of our statutory responsibilities, Ofsted reported that:

*'Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted through the actions and recommendations of Cafcass.'*

Their assessment of overall effectiveness considered how well we evaluate our performance, learning and associated improvement priorities. They reported that leaders not only identify areas for improvement but also actively understand and address the issues well. This reflective approach was said to be supported by an open, honest, and transparent culture within Cafcass - acknowledging when things aren't working and taking proactive steps to rectify them.

*'Cafcass responds appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies and new demands, and is resilient when presented with new challenges.'*

Our commitment to openness and accountability was said by inspectors to apply to how we evaluate our work as well as how we regularly assess the quality of advice given to the family courts. Ofsted found that lines of accountability are clear and effective and that we have a clear framework of evaluation, learning and improvement.

*'Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement in the quality of advice given to the family courts.'*

Since the inspection, and as required in accordance with the framework, we have reviewed and reset our improvement priorities nationally for operational service areas and in respect of our corporate functions. These are set out in section 3.4 (page 108).



## 2.2

# Our year in numbers: National performance comparisons for 2022-23 with 2023-24 and national family justice system success measures



### How many children?

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 we worked with a total of **137,347 children and young people**, a decrease of 6,122 children (-4.3%) compared with the previous year. Approximately **a third (44,848) of the children with whom we worked were in public law proceedings and two thirds (92,499) were in private law proceedings.**

Of the 137,347 children with whom we worked in 2023–24, **86,419 children or 62.9% were new cases in year.** We worked on **16,057 (for 25,816 children) new public law cases** in this reporting year which is a decrease of 1.2% compared to the previous year (191 fewer children’s cases, 489 fewer children).

**68.7% (11,036 children’s cases, 18,682 children) of these new public law cases included a lead application that was section 31 care** (where a child is looked after by a designated local authority). The number of unique care applications has decreased by 4.3% on last year. (Applications can be received on both new and existing cases).

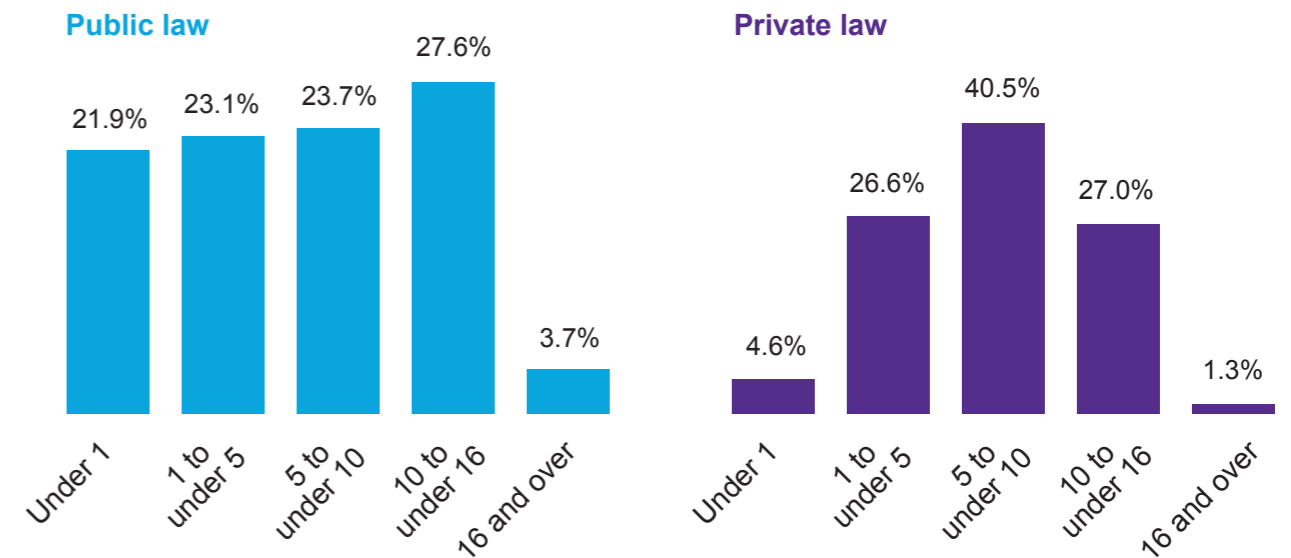
We worked on **39,773 new private law cases (for 60,603 children).** This is a small decrease of 0.4% when compared to the previous year (178 fewer children’s cases, 377 fewer children).

Of these new private law cases, **80.7%** (32,090 children’s cases, 49,276 children) contained a lead application relating to who the child lives or spends time with.

### Who are the children?

The age profiles of children and young people in public and private proceedings are different within law types, as well as when compared to the age profile of all children in England. In general, children involved in public law proceedings are younger, with nearly half (45.0%) aged under five. More than one in five (21.9%) children involved in public law proceedings are infants under the age of one year. This proportion is similar to last year and is substantially higher than in private law proceedings (where just 4.6% are under the age of one year) and higher than the wider UK population where the proportion of children aged 0-18 years is 4.5%.<sup>3</sup>

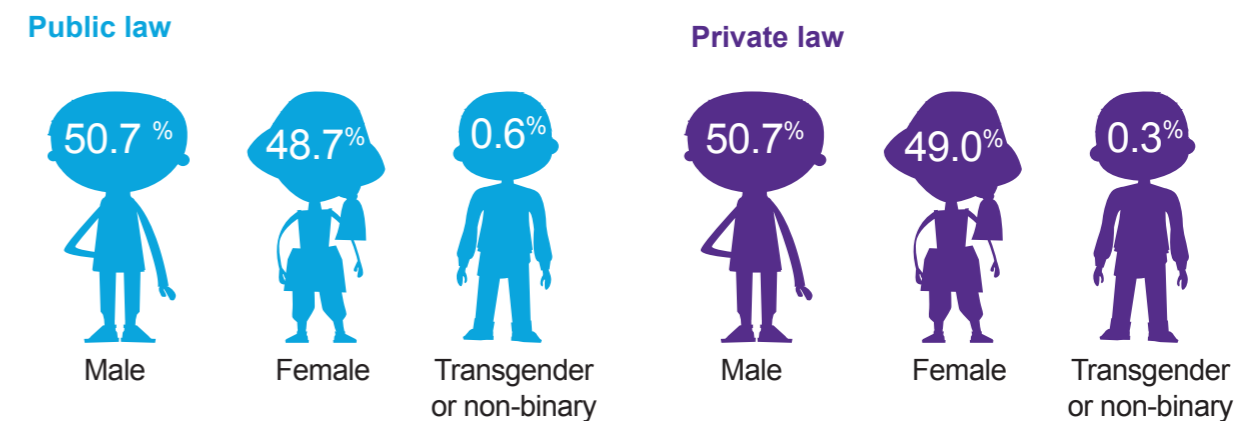
**Figure 4: Age profile (in years) of all children with whom we worked in 2023-24, by type of proceedings**



Children in both public and private law proceedings are slightly more likely to be boys than girls, which is in line with the national population of children where the ratio of boys to girls is greater than 1:1 for ages up to 25.

The children with whom we work have the option to tell us if they prefer to identify as gender neutral, non-binary, or transgender in addition to preferring not to say. 0.6% of children in public law and 0.3% of children in private law preferred to describe themselves as transgender or non-binary. This is the same as last year.

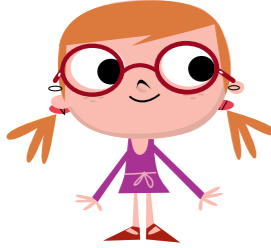
**Figure 5: Gender identity of children with whom we worked in 2023-24, by type of proceedings**



We have continued to improve the way we ask children about their heritage and how this is recorded and assessed to inform our recommendations to the family court. As at 31 March 2024 known ethnicity was recorded for 94.1% of children in public law proceedings (compared to 94.2% in 2022-23), and 84.4% of children in private law proceedings (compared with 83.4% in 2022-23).

<sup>3</sup> Source: Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

**Figure 6:** Heritage of all children with whom we worked in 2023-24, by type of proceedings and compared to the national population of children



	Children in public law proceedings	Children in private law proceedings	All children in proceedings	National population comparison (Census data based on all children)
Total children worked with whom we worked	44,848	92,499	137,347	
<b>Known ethnicity total</b>	<b>42,194 (94.1%)</b>	<b>78,057 (84.4%)</b>	<b>120,251 (87.6%)</b>	
Asian/Asian British	1,753 (3.9%)	6,559 (7.1%)	8,312 (6.1%)	9.1%
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	2,399 (5.3%)	3,888 (4.2%)	6,287 (4.6%)	4.6%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	4,990 (11.1%)	9,485 (10.3%)	14,475 (10.5%)	4.3%
White - All (British + other)	32,533 (72.5%)	56,820 (61.4%)	89,353 (65.1%)	80.9%
White - British	30,186 (67.3%)	52,080 (56.3%)	82,266 (59.9%)	
White - Other (Including Eastern European)	2,347 (5.2%)	4,740 (5.1%)	7,087 (5.2%)	
Arab	208 (0.5%)	467 (0.5%)	675 (0.5%)	
Other ethnic group	311 (0.7%)	838 (0.9%)	1,149 (0.8%)	1.1%
<b>Where ethnicity is not known total</b>	<b>2,654 (5.9%)</b>	<b>14,442 (15.6%)</b>	<b>17,096 (12.4%)</b>	
Prefer not to say	16 (0.04%)	216 (0.2%)	232 (0.2%)	
Not known (including no record and refused)	2,638 (5.9%)	14,226 (15.4%)	16,864 (12.3%)	

Children without a record are likely to be those in newer proceedings with whom we have not yet undertaken direct work, and this is why recording levels tend to be lower for children in private law.

Compared to the national population of children, those in family court proceedings are more likely to be of mixed/multiple ethnic background (10.5% compared with 4.3% nationally).

In public law proceedings, Black, African, Caribbean and Black British children are slightly over-represented compared to the national population of children (5.3% compared to 4.6%),

while children of mixed/multiple heritage are the most over-represented (11.1% compared with 4.3% nationally). Asian children are under-represented in public law proceedings (3.9% compared to 9.1%).

In private law proceedings, children of mixed/multiple heritage are the most over-represented compared to the national population (10.3% compared to 4.3% nationally). As is the case for children in public law proceedings, Asian children are also under-represented in private law proceedings (7.1% compared to 9.1%).

**Of the 137,347 children with whom we worked in 2023-24,<sup>4</sup> we have recorded information in respect of a disability or health condition for 106,150 children (77.3%). This figure includes children recorded as having no disability or health condition. For public law we have recorded information for 34,233 children (76.3%) and for private law 71,917 children (77.7%).**

For those children with whom we worked where we have recorded information, **15,807 children (14.9%) in 2023-24 had at least one disability or health condition recorded; this is below the national average of 17.3%.** We set out the range of disabilities and health conditions reported in the table below: note that the numbers for individual conditions add up to more than the total number of children with a recorded condition, as a child may have multiple recorded disabilities or conditions.



<sup>4</sup> These records are updated as part of on-going case recording; the fields are not mandatory or subject to any medical verification. On this basis, there may be some children's records where this detail is not included as we may not have been made aware.



**Figure 7:** Recording of longstanding health conditions or disability for children with whom we worked in 2023-24 by type of proceedings and compared to national data

	Children in Public Law proceedings	Children in Private Law proceedings	All children in proceedings	National comparison
<b>Total children with whom we worked</b>	<b>44,848</b>	<b>92,499</b>	<b>137,347</b>	
Percentage of children worked with for whom we have recorded information with respect to disability or condition (% of all children)	<b>34,233 (76.3%)</b>	<b>71,917 (77.7%)</b>	<b>106,150 (77.3%)</b>	<b>9,073,832</b>
<b>Recorded condition(s)</b>	<b>5,468 (16%)</b>	<b>10,339 (14.4%)</b>	<b>15,807 (14.9%)</b>	<b>17.3%</b>
Autistic spectrum disorder	1,947 (5.7%)	4,913 (6.8%)	6,860 (6.5%)	13.1%
Hearing impairment	122 (0.4%)	281 (0.4%)	403 (0.4%)	1.5%
Moderate learning difficulty	1,049 (3.1%)	1,440 (2.0%)	2,489 (2.3%)	14.1%
Physical disability	163 (0.5%)	242 (0.3%)	405 (0.4%)	2.3%
Social, emotional and mental health	681 (2.0%)	659 (0.9%)	1,340 (1.3%)	18.1%
Speech, language & communications	309 (0.9%)	452 (0.6%)	761 (0.7%)	21.9%
Visual impairment	85 (0.2%)	144 (0.2%)	229 (0.2%)	0.9%
Global Development Delay	637 (1.9%)	390 (0.5%)	1,027 (1.0%)	
Other difficulty/disability	1,839 (5.4%)	3,877 (5.4%)	5,716 (5.4%)	3.3%
<b>Record shows no longstanding condition or disability</b>	<b>28,765 (84.0%)</b>	<b>61,578 (85.6%)</b>	<b>90,343 (85.1%)</b>	<b>82.7%</b>
<b>Percentage of children worked with for whom we have no recorded information with respect to disability or condition</b>	<b>10,615 (23.7%)</b>	<b>20,582 (22.3%)</b>	<b>31,197 (22.7%)</b>	

## How busy was the year? April 2023 – March 2024

This reporting year, as set out above, **overall demand for new children’s cases was 0.7% lower** compared to 2022-23, with small reductions in both public (-1.2%) and private law demand (-0.4%).

**55,830 children’s cases were new in year featuring 86,419 children.**

In private law proceedings during 2023-24, Cafcass received **20,367 requests for Section 7 reports<sup>5</sup>** (inclusive of 6,148 addendum reports), an increase of 1.3% / 269 reports compared to the last financial year.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, **R16.4<sup>6</sup> appointments decreased by 4.6%** compared to the previous year and were 43.9% lower than 2019-20 (pre-Covid-19) which was a record year for those appointments. R16.4 cases closing in the most recent reportable quarter, (Q4 2023-24) took on average **102 weeks** to complete, which is 10 weeks fewer (112 weeks) compared to the same period in 2022-23 and 29 weeks longer when compared to pre-pandemic durations.<sup>7</sup>

**As at the end of March 2024, Cafcass was working with 30,254 open cases with future known work featuring 48,741 children. The number of open children’s cases reduced by 8.1% (2,650 fewer cases / 4,722 fewer children) when compared with March 2023,** with reductions set out visually in Figure 8. **At the end of March 2024, the volume of open work was generally in line with pre-pandemic levels.** At the most acute point of the pandemic in April 2021, open cases reached 38,178 (c61,200 children) – 26.2% higher than before the pandemic.

As at March 2024, **the volume of public law cases with further work required was 11,875 (21,046 children), which is 9.0% lower** than the same period last year, and **1.7% lower than March 2020 (pre-Covid-19).** Public law cases represent 39.3% of total cases with future known work.

As at March 2024 the **volume of open private law cases with future known work was 18,379 (27,695 children), which is 7.4% lower** than the same period last year and **1.8% higher than March 2020 (pre-Covid-19).** Private law cases represent 60.7% of total cases with future known work.



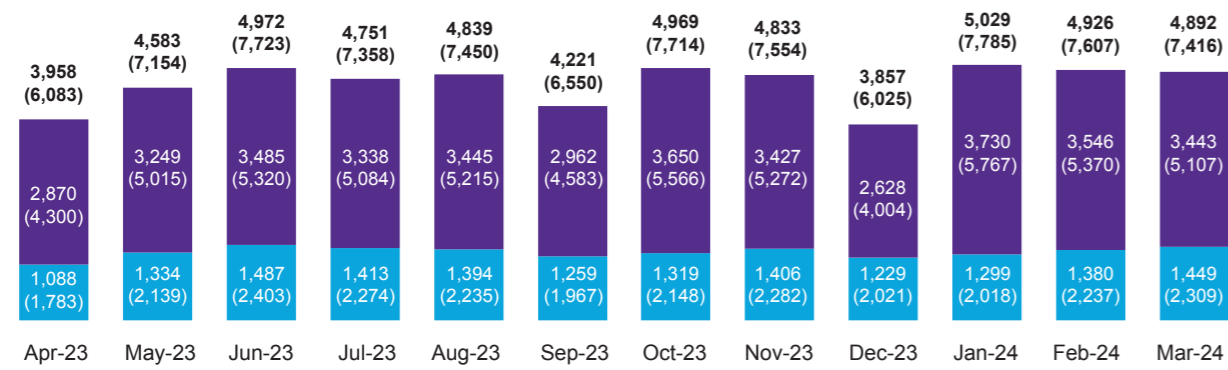
<sup>5</sup> A more detailed assessment of the disputed issues ordered by the court to consider the welfare of the child and advise the court about what is safe and in the child’s best interests.

<sup>6</sup> Appointment of a children’s guardian in private law proceedings to conduct the proceedings on behalf of and in the interests of the child.

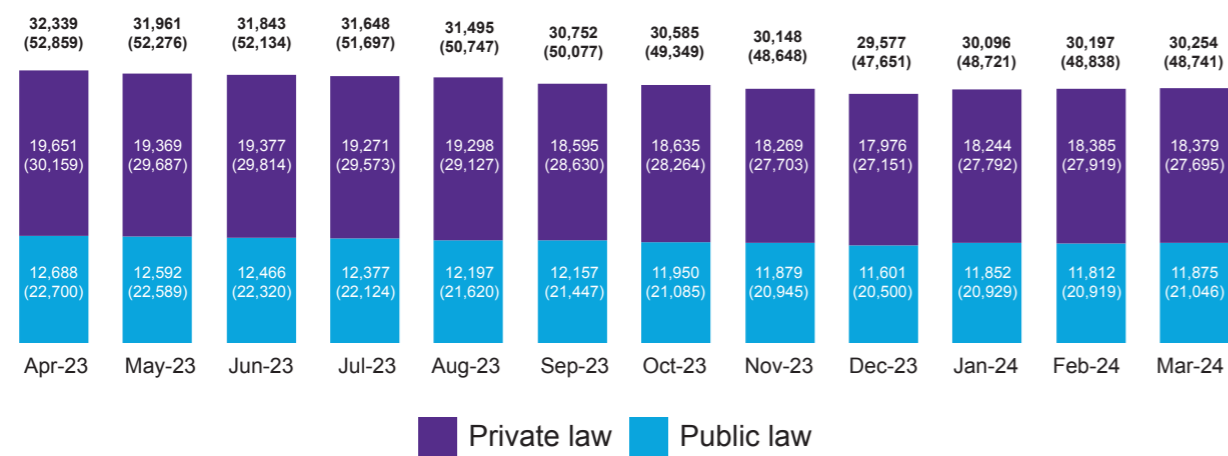
<sup>7</sup> Q4 2023/24 compared to Q4 2019/20 (pre-Covid).

**Figure 8: Demand shown through number of new and open children's cases and the number of children**

**New case demand (number of children) 2023-24**



**Open cases (number of children) 2023-24**



Compared to the period before March 2020, **S31 cases in public law proceedings are now open for approximately an additional seven weeks and for private law cases that go beyond first hearing, an additional 19 weeks.**

**In total 21.3% of work has been open for longer than 52 weeks. In public law this is 15.9% (3,801 children) of children's cases and in private law it is 24.8% (7,109 children) of children's cases.**

**Care & Supervision Applications:<sup>8</sup>** Average durations are **43 weeks** (Q4 2023-24). This is a reduction of four weeks compared to last year (Q4 2022-23) and an increase of **seven weeks** compared to the period prior to Covid-19 (Q4 2019-20). 29.1% of S31 applications are now completed within 26 weeks (Q4 2023-24); compared to 20.6% (Q4 2022-23), still lower than the 34.3% in the period prior to Covid-19 (Q4 2019-20).

**Private law cases – work to first hearing:** Average durations are **11 weeks** (Q4 2023-24) which is a reduction of **two weeks** compared to last year (Q4 2022-23) and an increase of two weeks compared to the period prior to Covid-19 (Q4 2019-20).

<sup>8</sup> Cafcass measures the duration of its involvement with children on a quarterly basis by cases closed in that period. The most recent period is Q4 (1 April – 31 March 2024).

**Private law cases – work after first hearing:** Average durations are **58 weeks** (Q4 2023-24). This is a decrease of two weeks compared to last year (Q4 2022-23) and an increase of **19 weeks** compared to the period prior to Covid-19 (Q4 2019-20).

**Average caseloads for long-term teams** (FCAs and children's guardians) have continued to reduce to below pre-pandemic levels (22.5 in March 2020) to **18.8 national average** (adjusted for FTE) on 31 March 2024 compared to an average of 20.3 in March 2023.

**Average caseloads for FCAs working in work to first hearing teams** in private law averaged **37.0** (adjusted for FTE); compared to the 37.7<sup>9</sup> in March 2023. Compared to March 2020 snapshot (pre-Covid-19), this is a reduction of 3.9 from 40.9 children's cases.

While the average number of cases recorded as allocated to frontline staff has steadily decreased, this belies significant individual and team variation.

**National family justice system success measures**

There are three nationally agreed system wide objectives managed by the ministerially led National Family Justice Board (FJB) ([Family Justice Board](#)) as set out on page 16 of this report. The FJB is led by Ministers and supported by all family justice system partners.

The visuals below describe Cafcass' contribution to those objectives using our own supporting data and they include performance headlines for each objective as well as setting out our improvement and recovery intentions for the year ahead. Data is as at the end of the 2023-24 financial year.



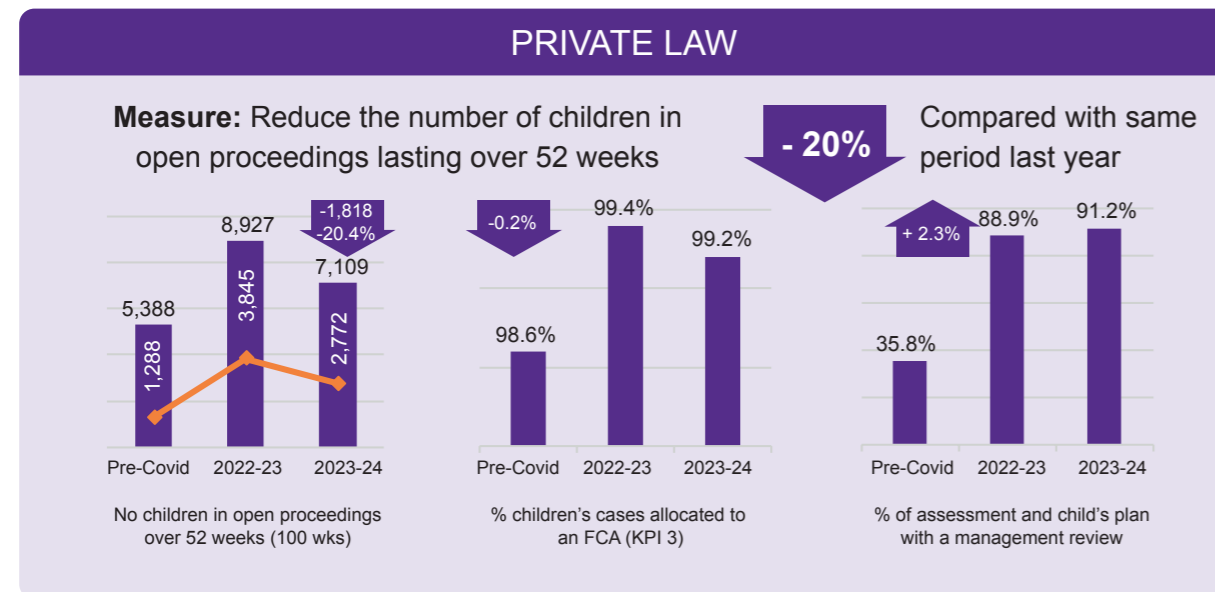
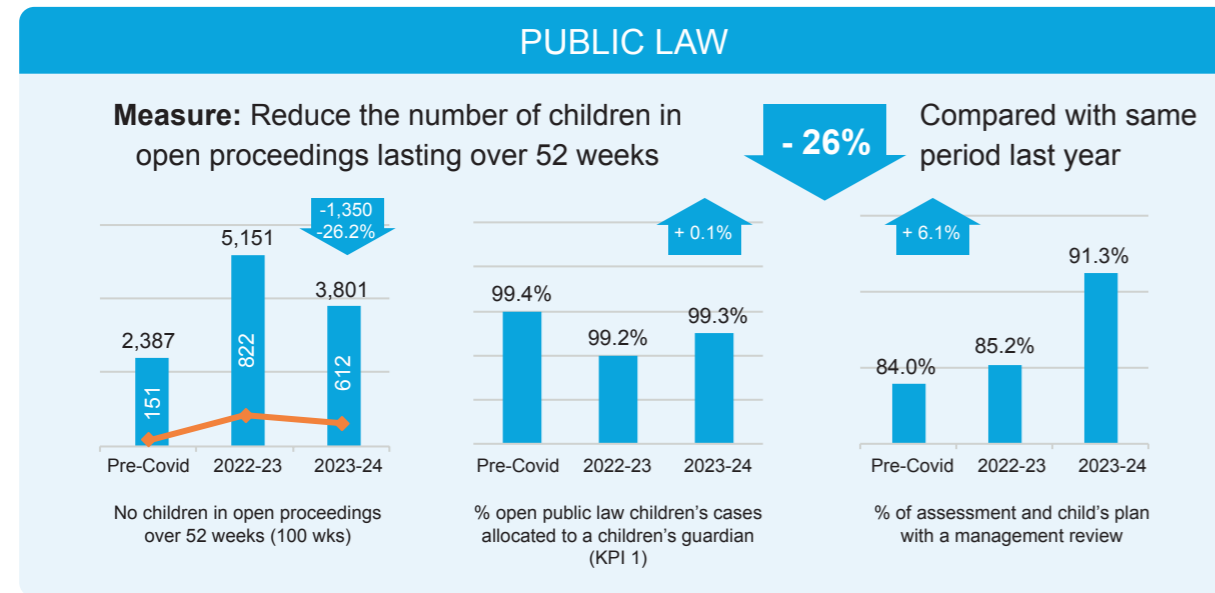
<sup>9</sup> Adjusted to remove outlier Service Areas with inflated workloads due to local working agreements.

**Figure 9: Family Justice System (FJS) objectives mapped against Cafcass success measures**

**FJS Objective: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes**

Cafcass supporting priority 1: reduce number of children in long-running open proceedings

**Lead: National Director of Operations**



**The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:**

- For public law there are 3,801 children in open proceedings 52+ weeks (of which 612 have been open 100+ weeks). This is a -26.2% reduction from 2022-23.
- For private law there are 7,109 children in open proceedings 52+ weeks (of which 2,772 have been open 100+ weeks). This is a -20.4% reduction from 2022-23. 28.7% (2,040 children) of these long-running private law cases are 'court ready' (Cafcass has filed a safeguarding letter or the section 7 report and awaiting instructions from a hearing in the next six weeks or outstanding safeguarding checks).

- Timeliness in public and private law work has been supported by meeting our KPIs for proportion of work that is allocated to the Children's Guardian or FCA to progress our work with children; and increased proportion of children's cases which have had a management review of the child's plan to ensure work is being progressed effectively.

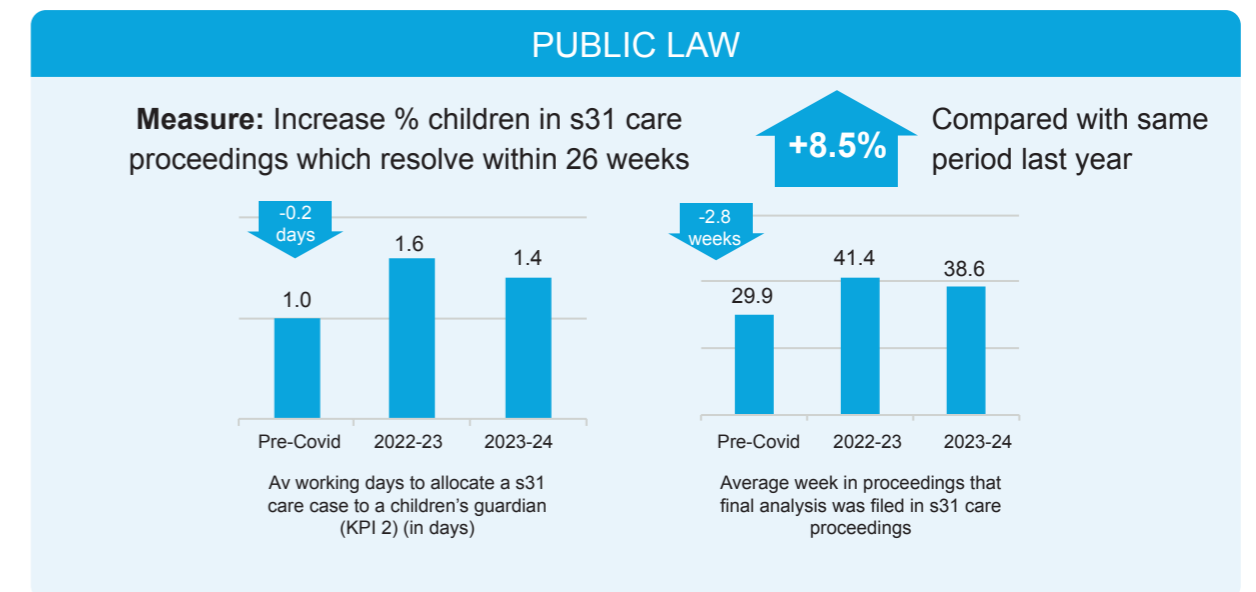
Our improvement and recovery focus is:

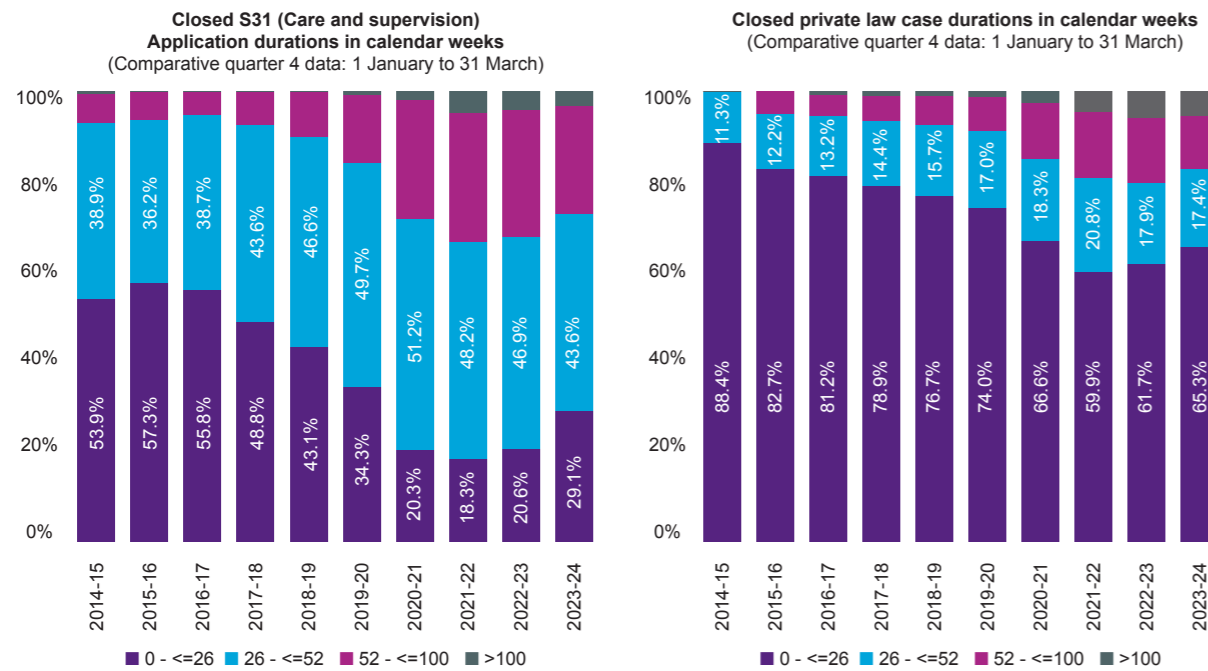
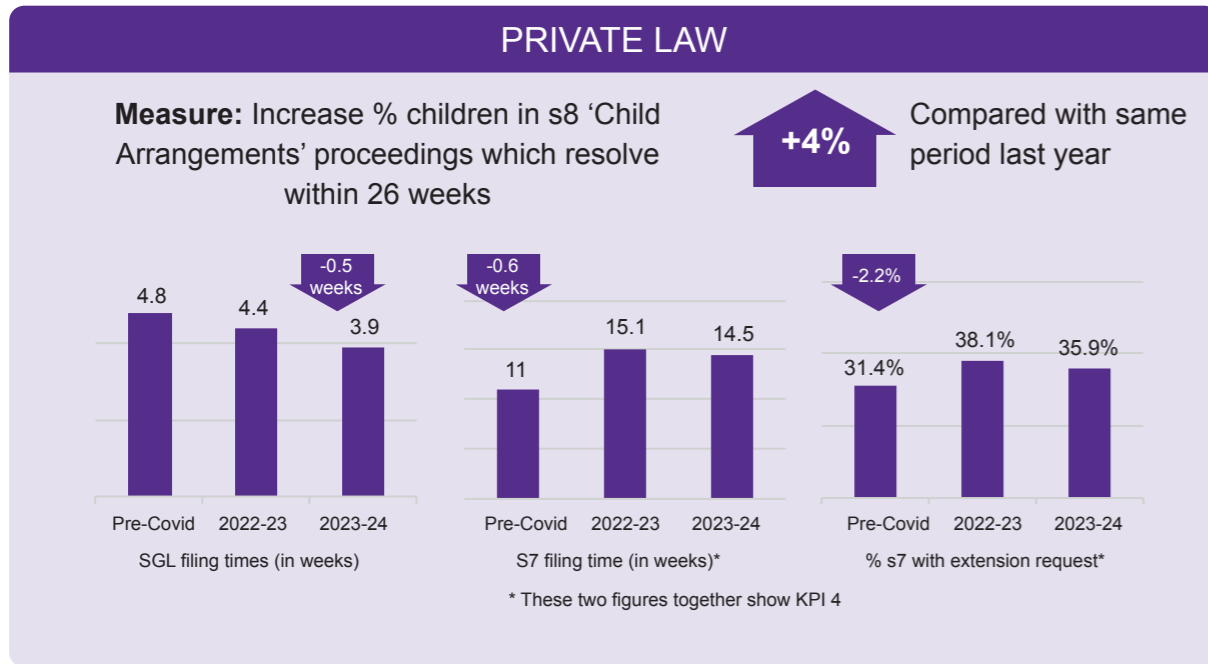
- Maintain reducing delay for children as one of our five practice improvement priorities at a national and local level – monitored through the Spotlight Report, local Practice and Performance Reviews, mid-year reviews of Operational Service Area Improvement Plans, and Regional Performance Boards.
- Work with partners locally (through the LFJB and sub-groups) to understand local and specific challenges and to develop plans to include targeted management oversight, dip sampling, case audit moderations and the annual practice quality audit on proceedings over 52 weeks.
- Implement the Pathfinder private law arrangements in Birmingham and Solihull and monitor timeliness in internal Recovery Board monthly.

**FJS Objective: Ensure children and families have timely outcomes**

Cafcass supporting priority 2: increase % of proceedings which resolve within 26 weeks

**Lead: National Director of Operations**





**The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:**

- During Q4 2023-24 29.1% of S31 (Care and Supervision) applications were closed in 26 weeks. Although this is below the pre-Covid baseline (34.3% in Q4 2019-20), this is a significant upturn compared to the same quarter in 2022-23, where the percentage of applications closing within 26 weeks was 20.6%.
- For the same period (Q4 2023-24) 65.3% of private law cases were concluded within 26 weeks. This is 8.7%pts below the pre-Covid baseline (74.0%) but a 3.6%pt increase compared to the same quarter in 2022-23 where the percentage of cases closing within 26 weeks was 61.7%. For S8 Child Arrangements proceedings, this figure was 62.0%, a 4% increase compared to the same quarter in 2022-23.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

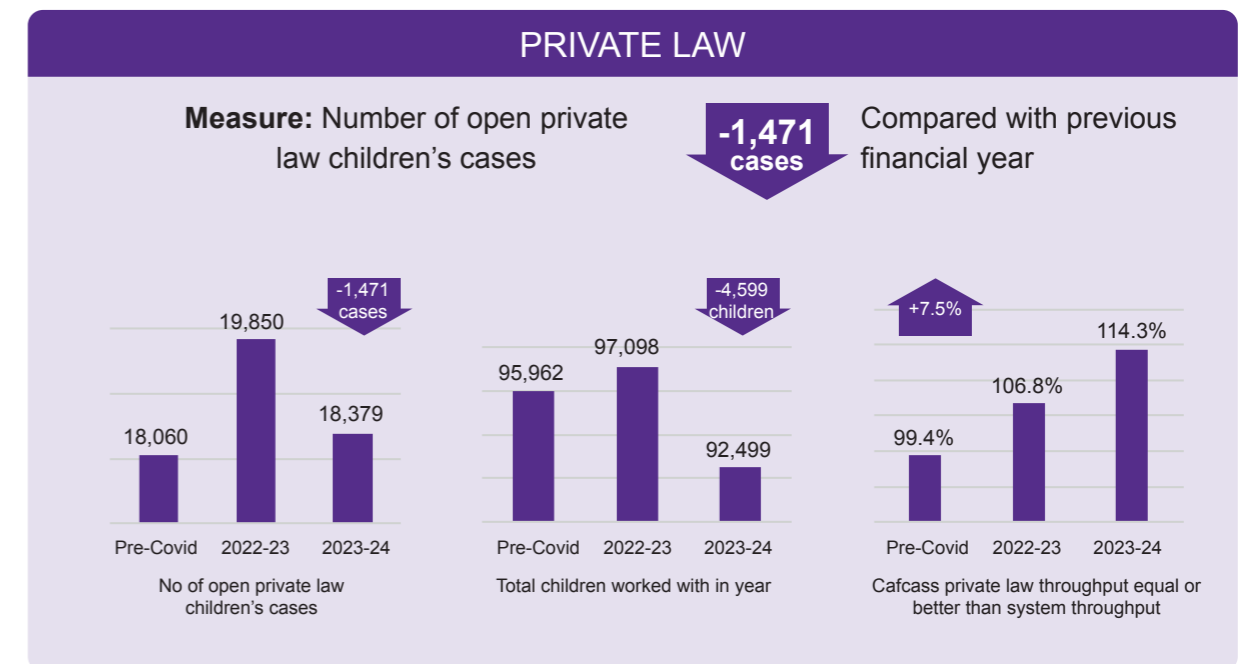
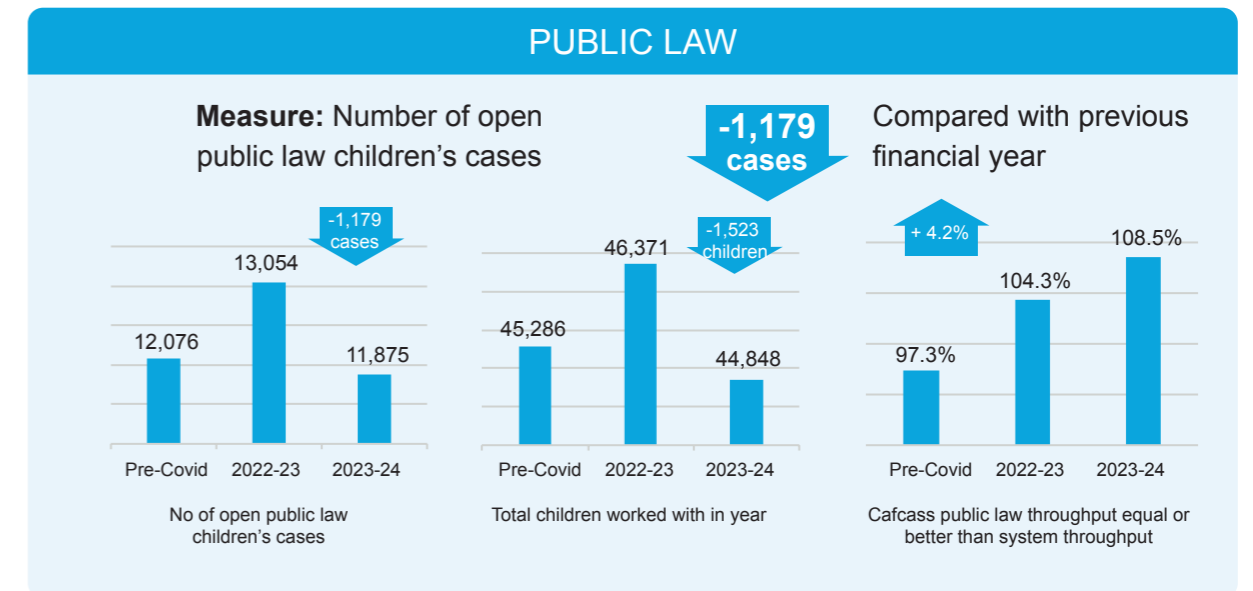
To maintain the spotlight on the practice of Guardians by:

- Putting in place a timetable to conclude proceedings in 26 weeks and having this available at the first Case management hearing.
- Recording the causes of delay for the child.
- Including in their reports to court, their understanding of the impact of delay on the child.
- Advocating and intervening for the child to get a decision within their timescales.

**FJS Objective: Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available**

Cafcass supporting priority 3: reduce the number of open children's cases

**Lead: National Director of Operations**



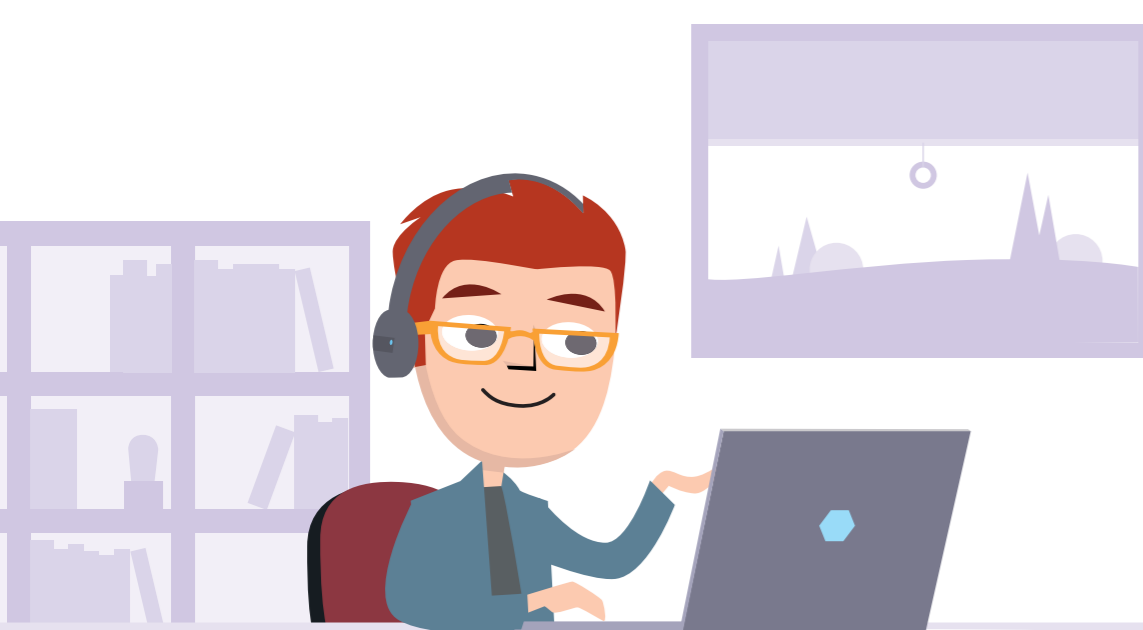
**The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:**

- Over the last 12 months open case levels have reduced, owing to overall lower levels of demand and improved throughput compared to before the pandemic. We are now working with fewer children than in March 2020.
- Open public law case levels have reduced by 9.0% (-1,179 cases) compared to the end of the 2022-23 financial year and have now returned to pre-pandemic levels; -1.7% (-201 cases) compared to March 2020.
- Open private law cases have reduced by -7.4% (-1,471 cases) fewer compared to the end of the 2022-23 financial year but remain slightly above pre-Covid levels (+1.8% /+319 cases).
- Throughput for both public and private law is now higher than pre-pandemic.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

To maintain the administrative team dedicated to reducing the proportion of inactive children's cases:

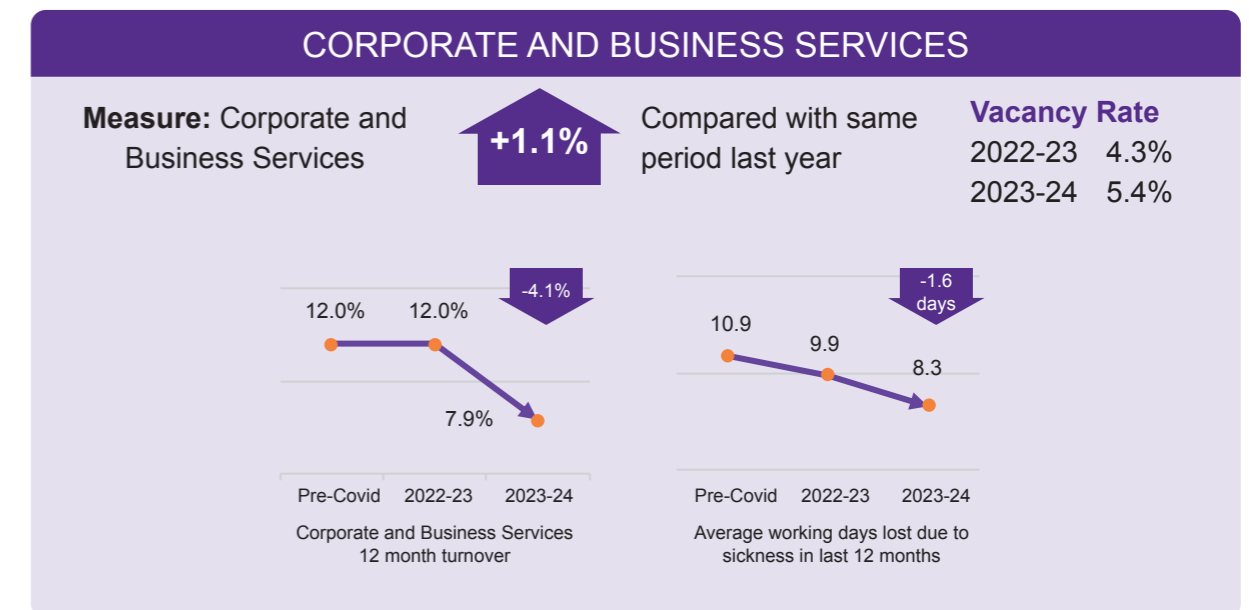
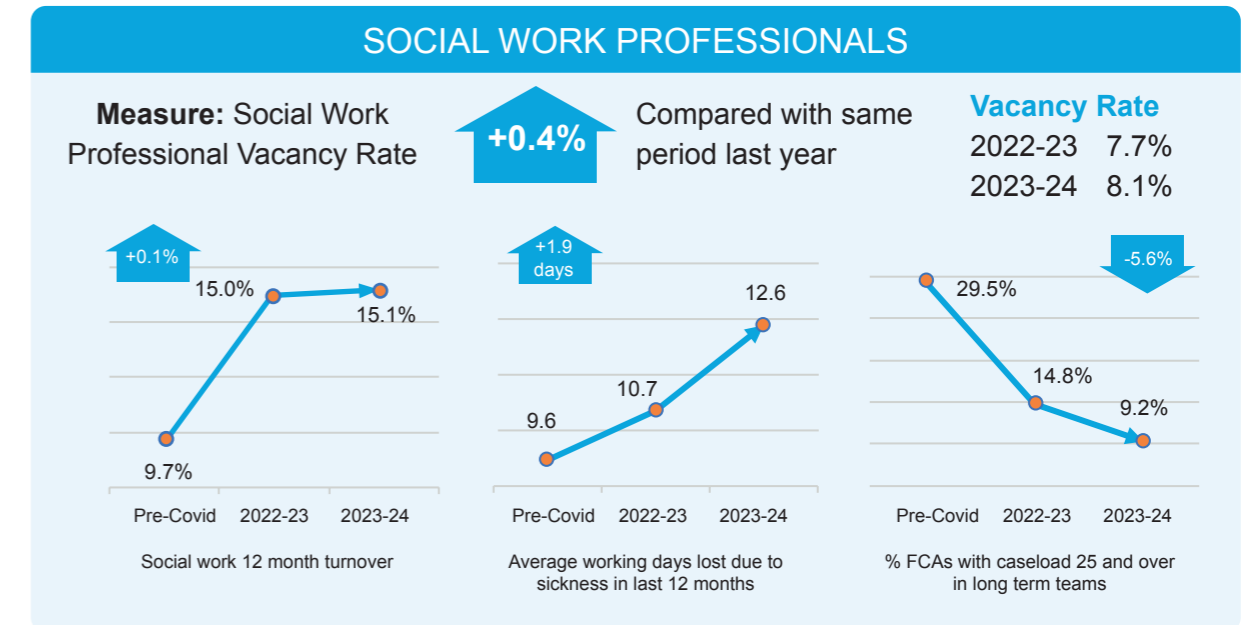
- Work collaboratively with HMCTS to receive orders promptly.
- Monitor the timely closure of children's cases.
- Target support and challenge to OSAs and teams where performance is declining.
- Support operational Business Services to increase the timely closure of children's cases.
- Provide monthly performance reports by team and OSA to the Operational Management Team.



**FJS Objective: Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available**

Cafcass supporting priority 4: increase capacity, especially in social work

**Lead: National Director of Resources**



**The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:**

- Social work turnover remains high compared to historic levels. Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 turnover was 15.1% for social workers, compared to 9.7% pre-pandemic and 15.0% for the 2022-23 financial year. The latest comparable measure for the local authority children's social workforce is 15.9%, -1.2% from previous year (DfE data 1 October 22 to 30 September 23). For corporate and business services staff, turnover has reduced in the latest 12-month period; 7.9% for April 2023- March 2024 compared to 12.0% in 2022-23 and pre-pandemic.

- As of 1 April 2024, the social work professional vacancy rate was 8.1% (approved 'empty seat' FTE vacancies) compared to 7.7% in 2022-23. For corporate and business services the vacancy rate was 5.4%, a slight increase on the previous year's figure (4.3%). Accurate Pre-Covid vacancy data is not available.
- Sickness absence for social work professionals remains at a higher level. The average working days lost (AWDL) for social work staff from 1 April 23 to 31 March 24 is 12.6 days compared to 9.6 days pre-Covid and 10.7 days for the 2022-23 financial year. Where FTE working days lost to sickness in the period 1 April 23 to 31 March 24 are expressed as a percentage of available FTE working days in the period, this equates to a sickness absence rate of 5.8%. The latest comparable measure for the local authority children's social workforce in England is 3.2%, -0.3% from the previous year (DfE data 1 October 22 to 30 September 23). 12-month AWDL for corporate and professional staff (1 April 23 to 31 March 24) is 8.3 days, down from 10.9 days pre pandemic and 9.9 days in 2022-23.

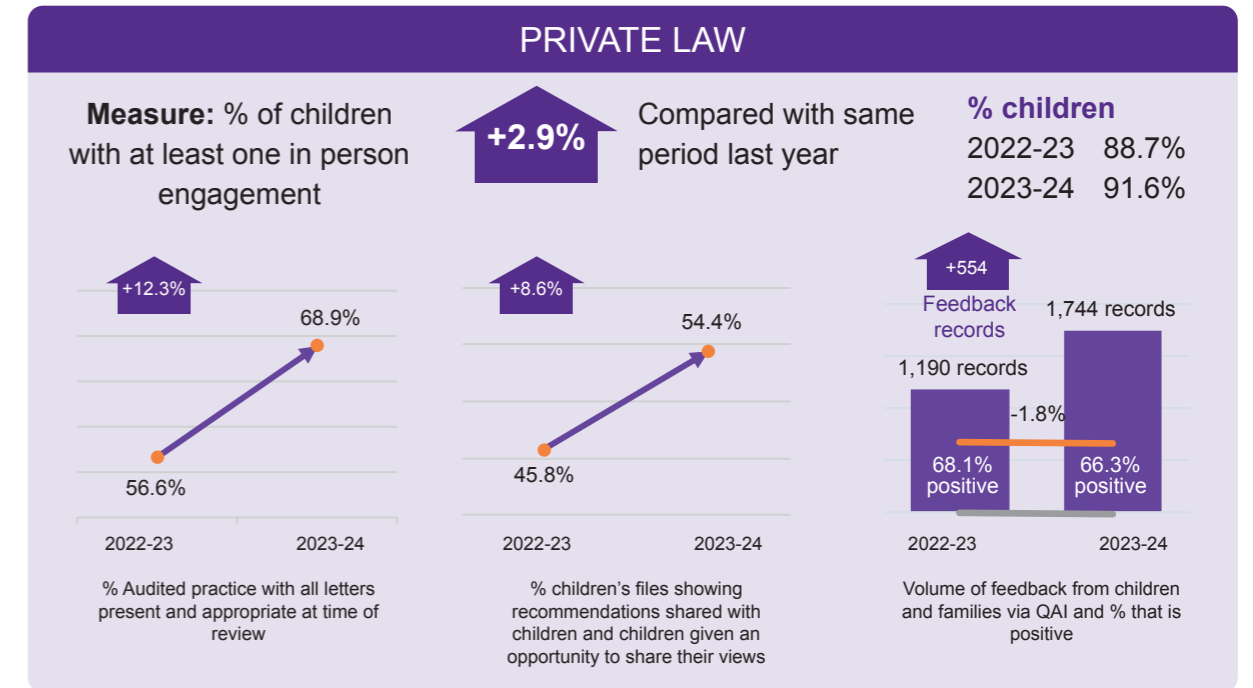
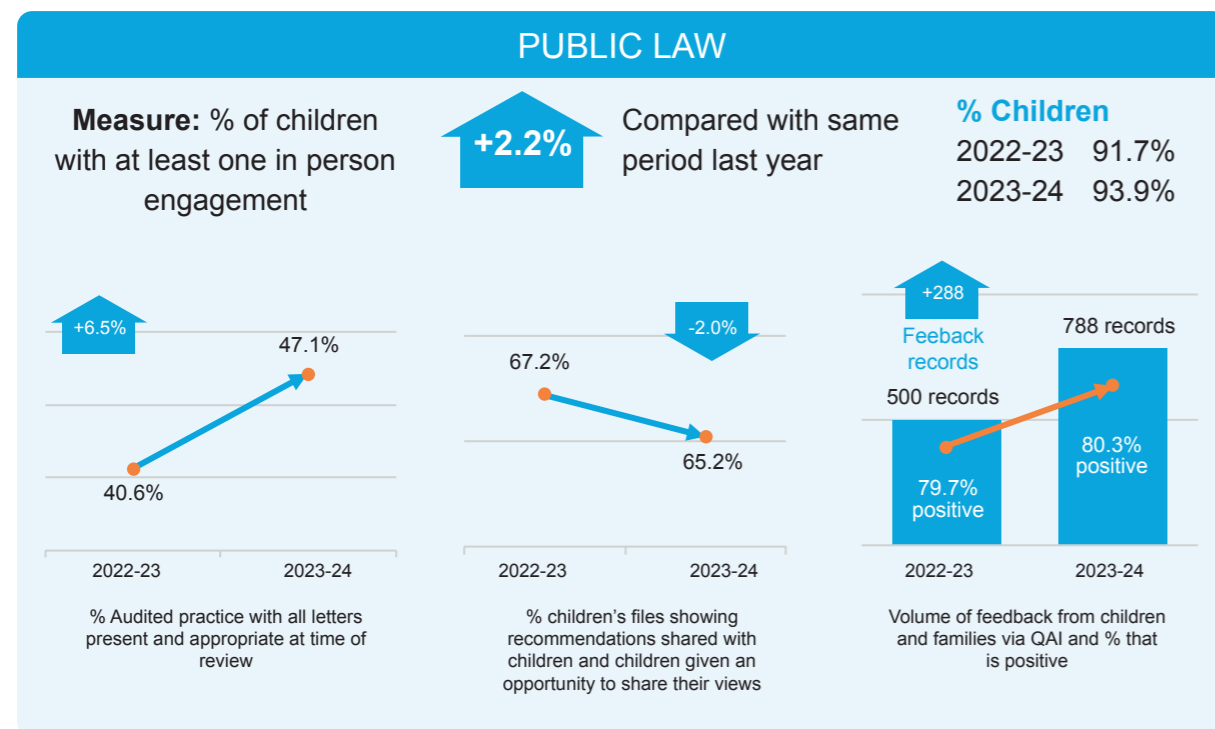
Our improvement and recovery focus is:

- Initiate a learning review to understand the reasons for variation in turnover rates between OSA and teams. Report the findings to CMT.
- Develop an improved strategy to retain our best people using the learning review recommendations as a baseline.
- Target support and challenge to those OSAs and teams with the highest turnover rates with actions relevant to the known causes.

### FJS Objective: Improve experience of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priority 5: improve understanding and ability to engage

Lead: National Director of Operations



### The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- On applicable\* children's open public law cases, 93.9% of children have at least one 'in person' engagement recorded. This is a +2.2%pt increase compared to the end of the 2022-23 financial year. On applicable children's open private law cases, 91.6% of children have at least one 'in person' engagement recorded. This is a +2.9%pt increase compared to the end of the 2022-23 financial year.
- The overall volume of feedback received from children and families via audited children's case files has increased; +57.6% for public law and +46.6% for private law for children's cases subject to a case file audit. For public law, 80.3% of feedback received (where the question was answered) was positive, this is a +0.6% increase from 2022-23 while in private law the proportion that was positive is slightly lower compared to the previous year at 66.3% (-1.8%).
- The proportion of children's case files audited which showed recommendations were shared with children has seen a slight decrease in public law, at 65.2% YTD; -2.0% compared to 2022-23 while there has been a +8.6%pt increase in private law, to 54.4% YTD.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

- Maintain seeing and engaging with children as one of our 5 practice improvement priorities at a national and local level – monitored through the Spotlight Report, local Practice & Performance Reviews, mid-year reviews of OSA Improvement Plans, and Regional Performance Boards.
- Increase the proportion of children - 1. Receiving a personalised introductory letter, 2. Having the recommendation about their life shared with them, 3. Recording their wishes and feelings about the recommendations included in the report to court – in their own words, and 4. Providing feedback about their experience and what would improve their experience.

\* Cafcass expect every child on a public law case to have engagement (remote or in person) within 3 weeks from the initial allocation of the child's guardian.

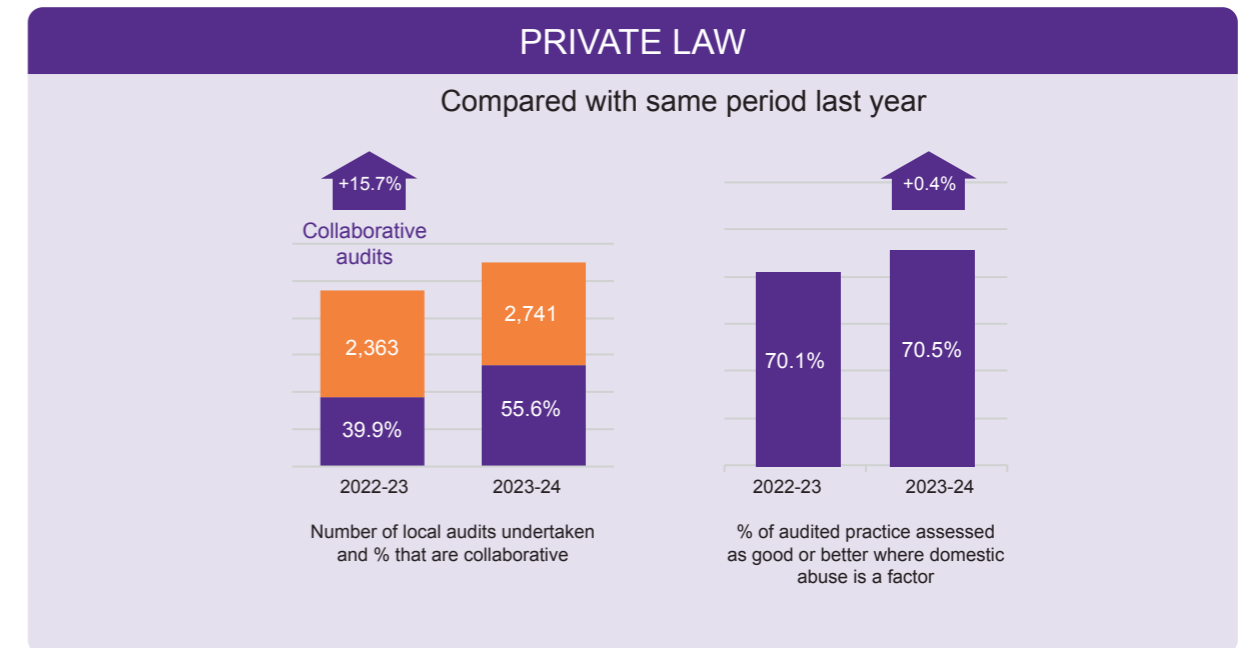
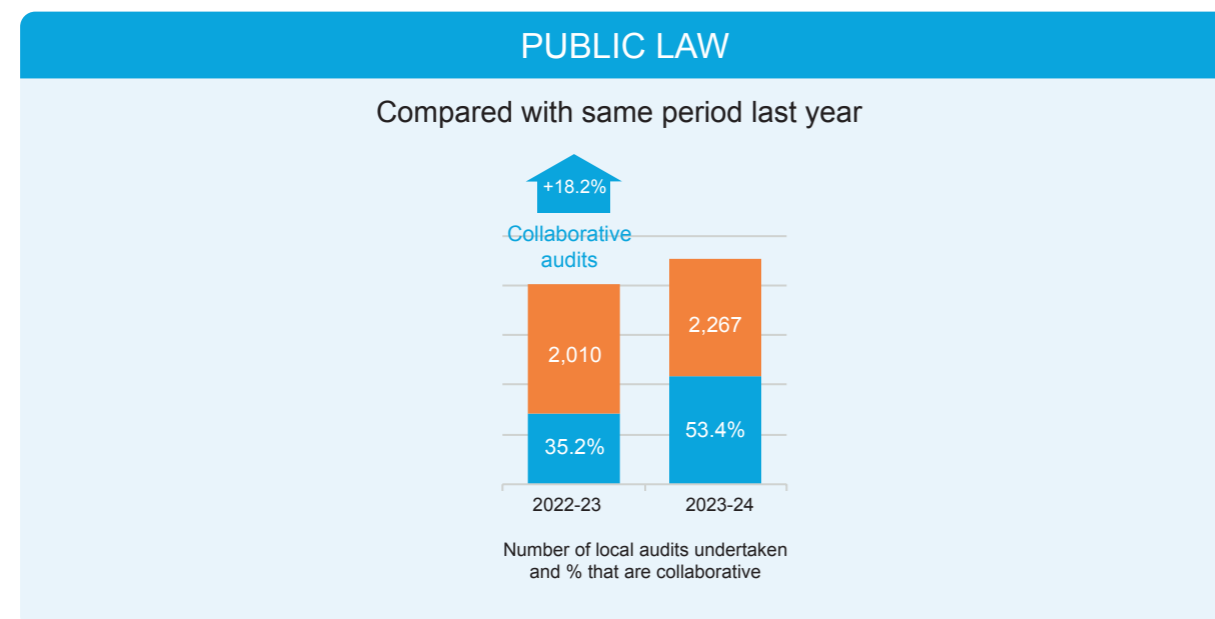
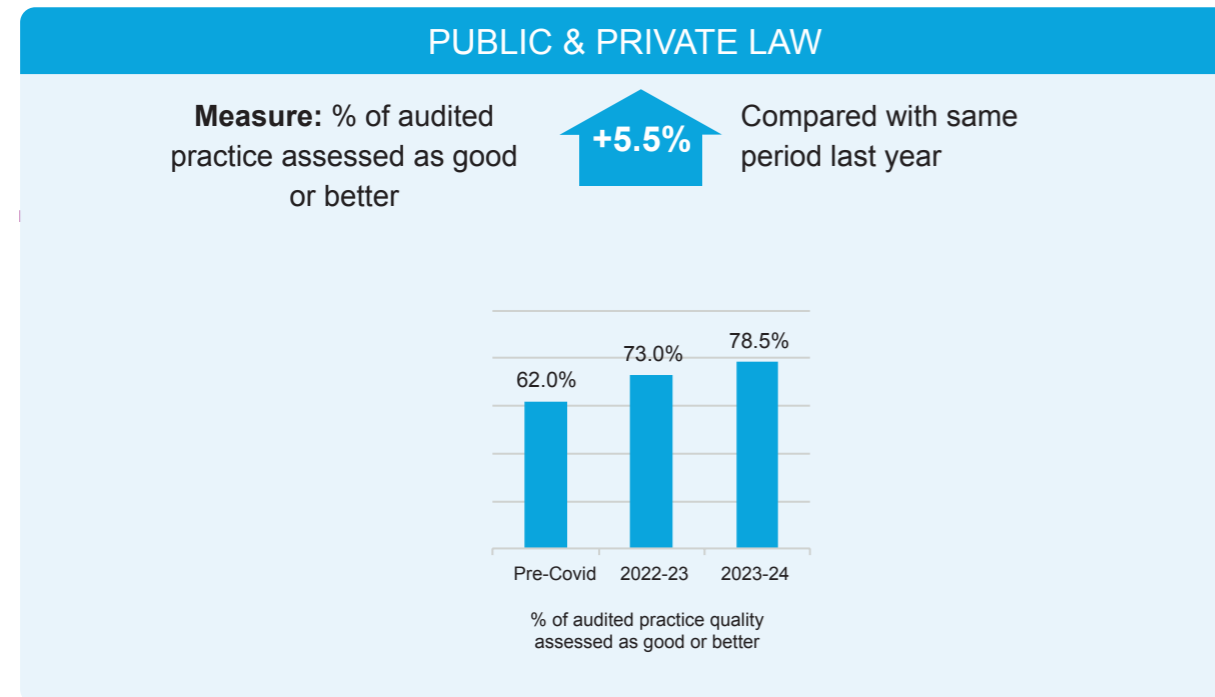
- 1. Review and refresh the policy and standard for seeing and engaging with children in private family law proceedings, 2. Bring a consistent national standard and guidance for Young People Day Appointments, 3. Evaluate the impact of seeing children under the practice direction for pathfinder family courts.

\*Child engagement is required on open public law 15 working days from first lead allocation. Child engagement is required on open private law cases 2 weeks before filing first s7 report.

### FJS Objective: Improve experience of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priority 6: improve quality and consistency of practice

Lead: National Director of Operations



### The continued performance challenge and Cafcass recovery and improvement intentions:

- In the most recent national practice quality audit (Nov 2023) 78.5% of audited practice was assessed as good or better. This is a +5.5%pt increase from the November 2022 audit, and 16.5%pts higher than the pre-Covid baseline (Nov 2020).
- There has been an upturn in the proportion of local audits undertaken that were collaborative; 53.4% of public law local audits completed in 2023-24 were done collaboratively – an increase of +18.2%pts compared to 2022-23, and 55.6% of private law local audits were collaborative – a +15.7%pt increase compared to 2022-23.
- The proportion of public law audited practice during 2023-24 with effective assessment of harm and risk of future harm was 79.6%, this is a small decrease compared to the 2022-23 financial year (-2.0%pts). For private law, this figure was lower at 71.9% but a +3.3%pt improvement compared to 2022-23.

Our improvement and recovery focus is:

Implementing 'Listening to Children – Lighting the Way', our plan to build on the improvements we have made over the last 3 years and maintain the momentum to make further progress by narrowing the gap between the best performers and those falling behind on our 'best for children' measures. We will do this by:

- Leading and overseeing improvement on the specific aspects of practice set out in the national improvement plan 2024-27.
- Targeting support and challenge to those OSAs and teams that are struggling to achieve the priority practice quality standards consistently.
- Introducing a local OSA performance and accountability framework based on quarterly Practice & Performance Reviews.
- Introducing Targeted Team Support Plans to complement Targeted OSA Improvement Plans.

## Commissioned services

Cafcass commissions and co-ordinates the delivery of support services for families in private family law proceedings on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) namely the Planning Together for Children course, the Improving Child and Family Arrangements service (ICFA) and DNA testing.

Before recommending Planning Together for Children and/or ICFA to parents or the courts, a Family Court Adviser (FCA) will undertake an assessment using the Child Impact Assessment Framework (CIAF) to determine whether a referral to the course or service is suitable, and whether there are any risks, particularly in relation to domestic abuse. Planning Together for Children and ICFA aim to help parents and FCAs to make future family time arrangements that are safe and, in their children's, best interests. The DNA testing service is ordered by courts directly and Cafcass administers the collection of DNA samples.

## The services we commission

### Planning Together for Children

This new course replaced the Separated Parents Information Programme in April 2023. It supports parents involved in private law family court proceedings to put the needs of their children first while they are working out how they can parent together when they are in the process of separating and/or living apart. The course was co-designed with children, young people and parents/carers following an extensive consultation over a 15-month period. It combines e-learning, group work and online support and is complemented by a non-mandatory online parenting plan. The course can either be court ordered or referred by an FCA.

Since its launch in April 2023, the parenting plan has been amended in response to feedback received from those using it, and in response to an internal review of how the plan was being used. These adaptations provide clearer initial guidance, better messaging to parents/carers as they use the plan, and more structure to the Planning Together for Children course so that completion of the parenting plan comes more logically towards the end of the learning.

In the first year of delivering the course (3 April 2023 – 31 March 2024), nearly one third of all private law applications (31%) included a recommendation or a court order to complete the Planning Together for Children course (12,293 of 39,661 applications). In this period 24,585 referrals were made, of which 5,538 (22.6%) referrals were by FCAs compared to 6% under the previous provision. 19,740 (80.3%) of parents completed the e-learning (part 1) and 16,119 (65.6%) parents also completed the group work session (part 2). In addition, 2,323 parents received a follow-up call 6-8 weeks after completing the course to see how and whether their plans were being embedded. It took parents on average 39 days from receiving login details to complete the course (2hrs e-learning followed by a 2½ hour group workshop), 54.5% completed the course within four weeks. The non-mandatory, new online parenting plan has been completed 1,489 times since it was launched in April 2023. 651 of these plans were completed by parents referred to Planning Together for Children (2.7% of all referred parents). We are discussing how we can improve completion of a collaborative plan by parents so that the course becomes more useful in the arrangements they are making for their children.

## Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA)

ICFA is a service to help children spend time with a parent when this is safe, beneficial, and sustainable, but the family are finding it difficult to agree and arrange this on their own. The ICFA is a court ordered service. ICFA work, which is tailored to the needs of each family, takes place over a few weeks. Between 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024, the service had 1,859 referrals (4.7% of all private law applications for the period), a 5.5% increase compared to the same period in 2022-23.

## DNA testing

The number of orders made by courts for DNA testing in private law cases for 2023-24 remained at the same level as in 2022-23, with 283 orders made by courts for DNA testing in private law cases each year. DNA Legal, our contracted provider, has processed an average of 24 court orders per month.

Our guidance to courts has been reviewed and updated this year. It remains that orders are only made where this is critical for the progression or conclusion of children's cases and/or where there would be significant risks to safe contact if the test is not made.



## Impact and learning

### Planning Together for Children

Course feedback is very positive. 89% of parents providing feedback after course completion (10,998 out of 12,358) reported having a clearer understanding of the impact of family conflict on children at the end of the group work session. 97.2% (12,012 out of 12,358) of parents said that they will take action to hold their child at the centre of all communications and agreements. When asked at the beginning of the course how confident parents felt they would be able to build an effective co-parenting relationship with the other parent, 27.3% (5,374 out of 19,695) said they were not confident at all and 14.6% (2,872 out of 19,695) said they had little confidence. 23% (4,526) had some confidence this could be achieved and 11.7% (2,309 out of 19,695) felt very confident.

The same question was asked again at the end of the course where 10.5% (1,294 out of 12,358) of all parents that completed the feedback said to have no confidence in building an effective co-parenting relationship (an almost 20% improvement from the beginning of the process).

The number of parents feeling some confidence rose to 37.7% (4,662) and 24.2% (2,996) of all parents feeling very confident that this could be achieved.

As a result of the increase in FCA recommended referrals (from 6% to 22.6% over the past year), more parents now access the course earlier and no longer need to wait for court hearings or court orders to improve their understanding of separation on their children. Our contracted lead provider is following up parents 6-8 weeks after they completed the full course (selected randomly). Out of the 2,323 parents in 2023-24 receiving a follow-up call, 22.4% (521) of parents said that they were able to agree a parenting plan.



We continue to monitor course completions and the time it takes parents to do so. We actively challenge our contracted lead provider to further improve performance. For example, the course completion rate in Q4 (Jan-Mar 2024) was 77.3%, compared to 50.3% in Q1&2 (Apr-Sept 2023). We will continue to work with providers, the judiciary and FCAs to increase referral and completion rates and reduce completion times further. We have used parents' feedback to strengthen FCAs understanding of when best to recommend the course. We also intend to compare court-return application rates for families completing the course with those who do not, to see if we can draw further conclusions about the longer-term impact the course may have in helping parents agree sustainable arrangements for their children.

### Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA)

Between February and October 2023, Cafcass undertook a service review. This included an analysis of the annual contract and performance data for the financial year 2022-23 and engagement sessions with 150 people including FCAs and managers, Family Justice Young People's Board members, the Family Forum, National Association of Child Contract Centres (NACCC) and ICFA providers. Following the service review and stakeholder feedback, key recommendations to improve the service have been shared with the Ministry of Justice and a re-commissioning implementation group has been set up to tender for an improved service. The new child-centred service will focus on safely testing contact arrangements and/or the re-introduction of a parent/carer to a child/ren.

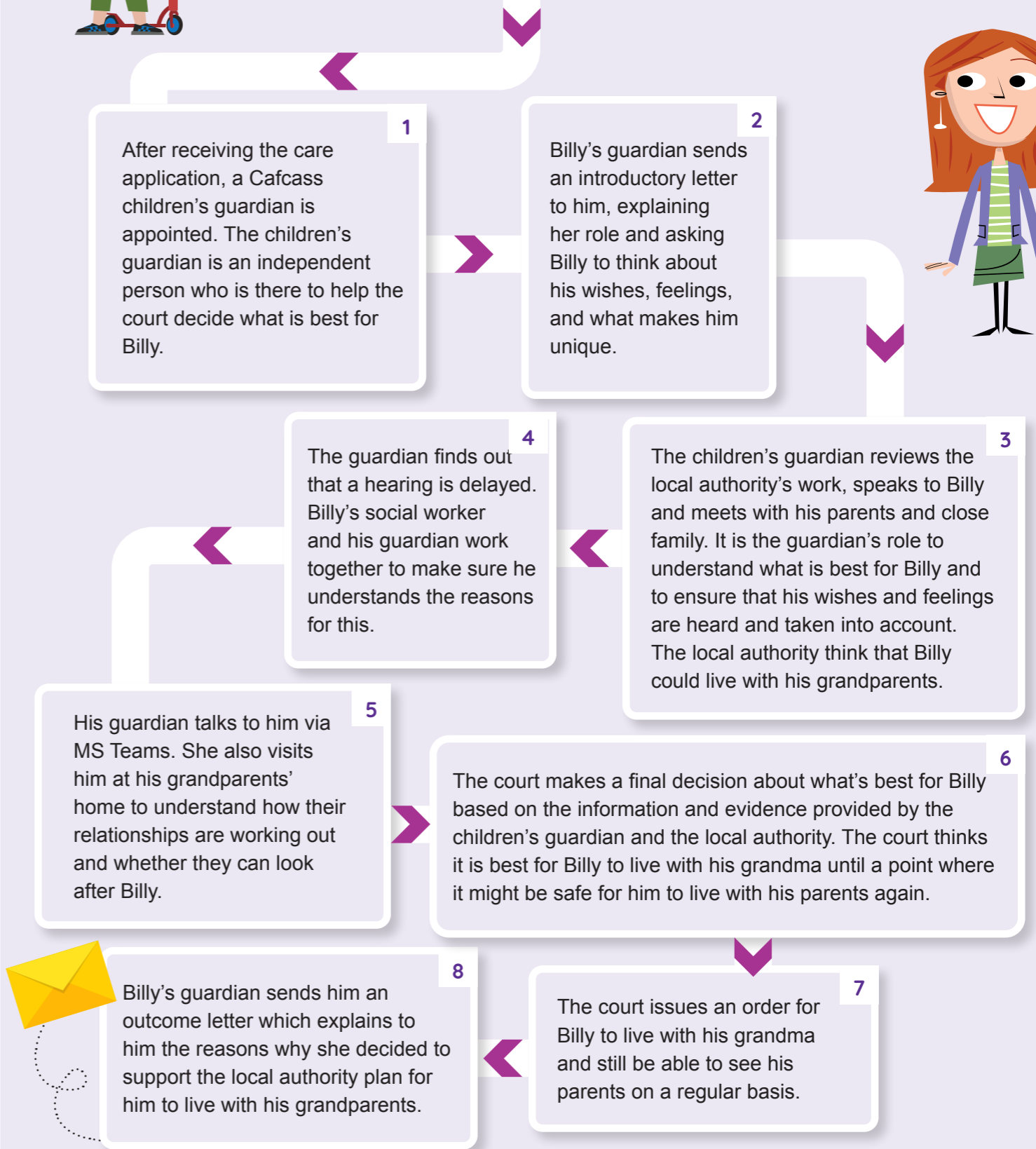
2023-24 outcomes measures, based on FCA Child Case Plan feedback from 706 completed interventions, showed that in 75.1% (530) of the interventions the service was contributing to improved outcomes for the children. 83.0% (586) of FCAs said communication with the service provider was excellent. 55.0% of families (719 out of 1,307) who provided feedback after using the ICFA service reported an improvement in communication once the intervention was completed. 46.0% (601) said the service helped them to agree a parenting plan.

As part of the review, more focused and targeted support, guided and informed by children's wishes and feelings, aims to better support FCAs recommendations to court about family time. FCA guidance for when to recommend the current service has been updated and reporting processes are being updated to better reflect the views of children.



## A child and family journey through public law

\*Billy is 10 and lives with his mum and dad. The local authority has judged that Billy cannot be kept safe with his parents and have made a care application for him to be looked after by the local authority.

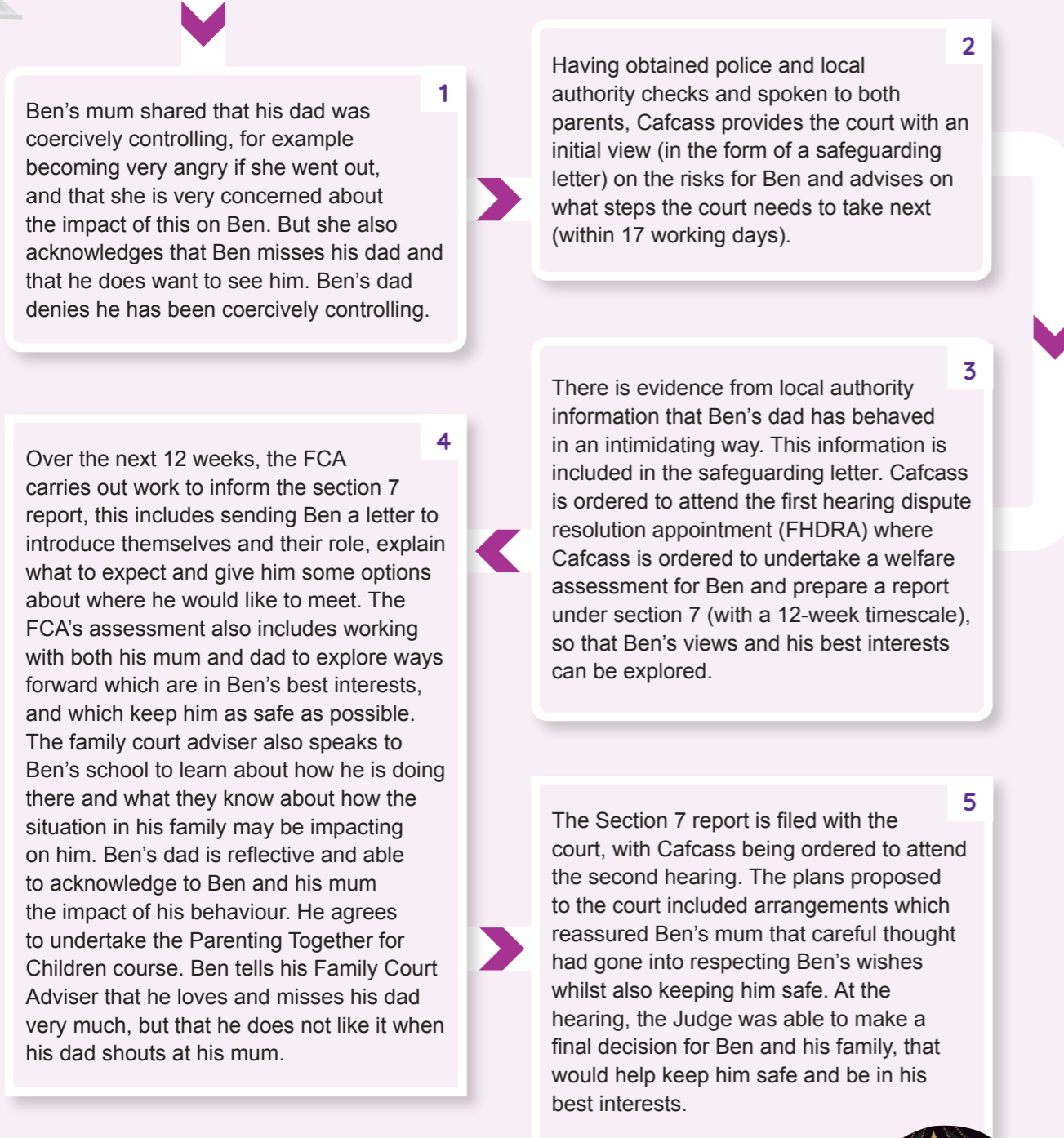


\*The child's journeys contain elements that feature in our public and private law cases but are illustrative only and not based on one particular child or case.



## A child and family journey through private law - working to the Child Arrangements Programme (2014) (current practice in private law)

Ben is 12 years old and lives with his mum. His dad has applied for a child arrangements order because he has not seen Ben since their separation three months ago. He has asked the court to make an order for Ben to spend alternate weekends with him because Ben has said to him that this is what he wants.



### Ben's mum provided some feedback

*"I appreciate your input, and really do hope that this will be the end of the court proceedings for us so that Ben can begin his school year with confidence. You will be glad to know that Ben has now had some input from a children's worker via the domestic abuse service. It was your conversation that enabled him to reconsider counselling from such a service."*



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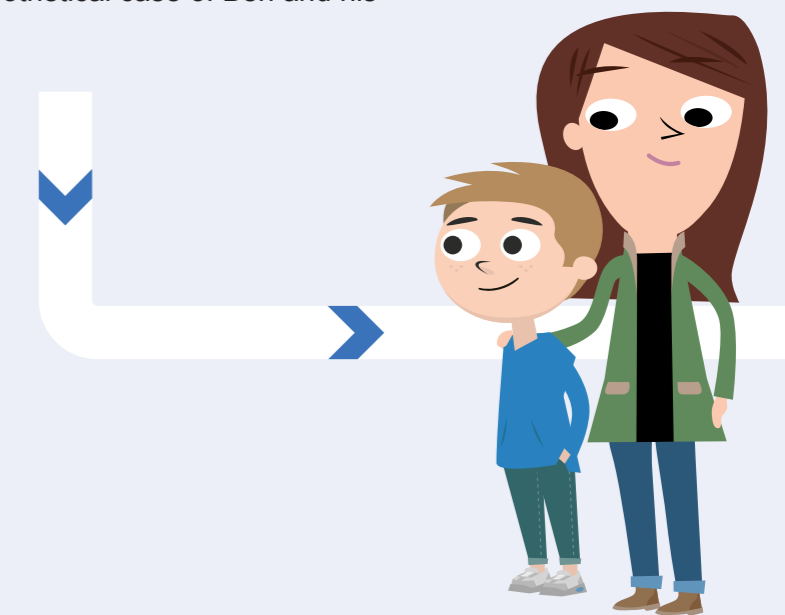
## A child and family journey through the private law Pathfinder pilot (piloted in Dorset since 2022)

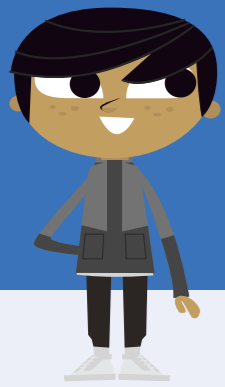
Over the next three pages, we outline the Pathfinder pilot, along with a child and family journey through the private law Pathfinder pilot

### What is the 'Pathfinder' pilot?

The Pathfinder courts were established in response to the Government report, "Assessing the Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children's Cases Report 2020". The report concluded that adversarial court processes in private law proceedings contribute to delay, retraumatise victims of domestic abuse and cause distress to children. The purpose of the pathfinder court is to try to conclude proceedings earlier, with fewer hearings and with less delay through earlier and more in-depth engagement of children with an FCA before the first (and proposed only) decisions hearing. Section 7 reports – currently required where there are welfare issues for the court to consider, are ordered by the court following the first hearing dispute resolutions appointment (FHDRA). Instead, in the pathfinder courts, a child impact report is ordered to Cafcass who make a determination as to whether to undertake an assessment of the child's welfare and safety or to advise the court, that the family can be signposted to support that will enable them to resolve their arrangements away from the court. There is intentional strengthening of the requirement for a Mediation Information Assessment Meeting (MIAM) for families or a clearer account to the court as to why an exemption is to be applied. The pilot courts deploy a multi-agency approach, with the court engaging and developing positive working relationships with key local partners such as mediators, local authorities and domestic abuse support providers. A central objective to these revised arrangements supported by a new practice direction, is improved experiences of adult and child victims of domestic abuse. The full evaluation of the pilot is currently awaited.

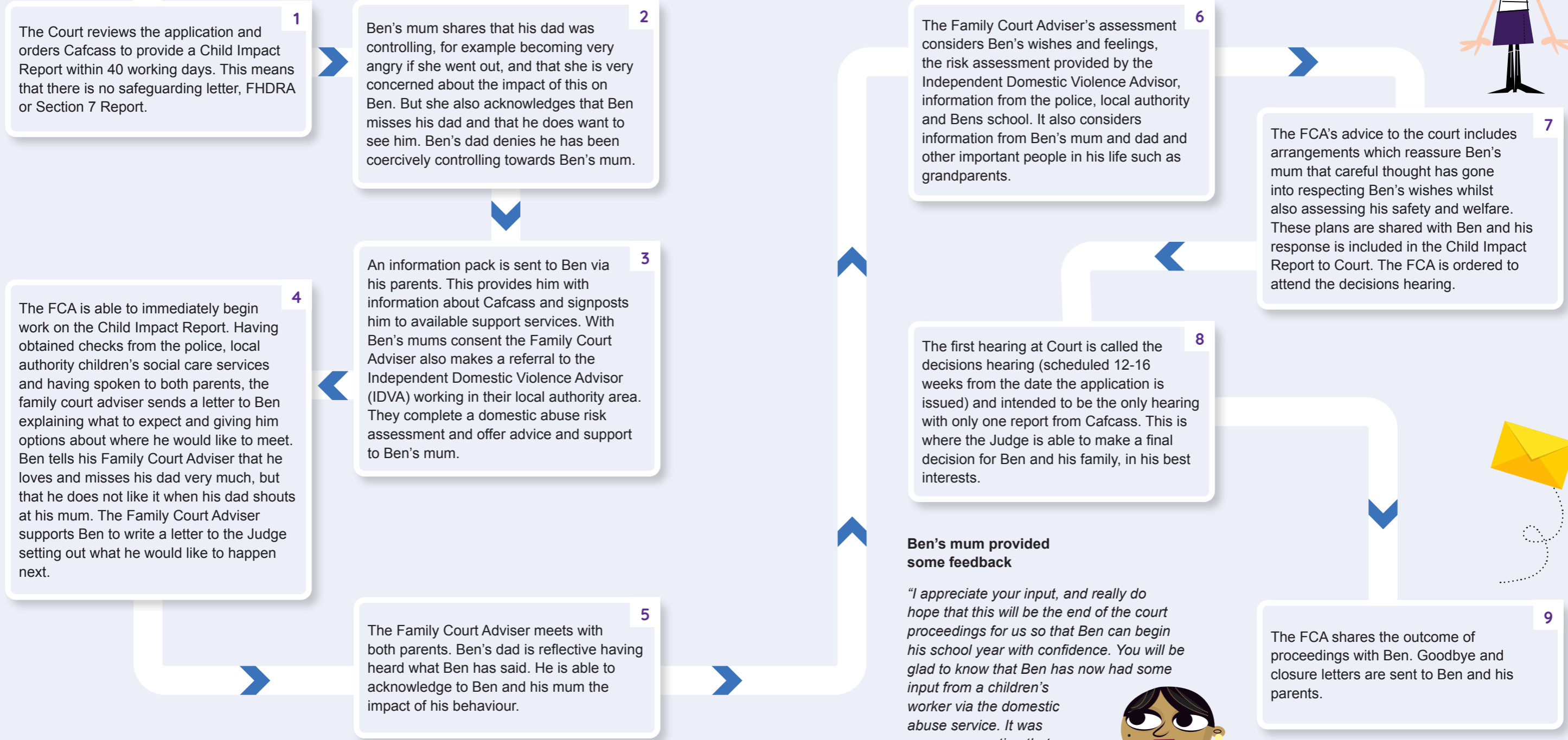
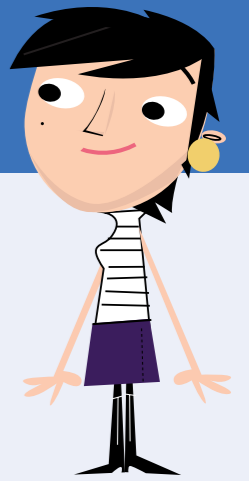
The arrangements described here show how a different approach through the private law pathfinder might impact the hypothetical case of Ben and his family.





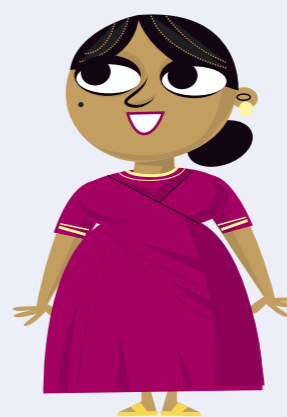
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## 2.3

# Our year in quality: National and local quality audits and operational spotlight reporting

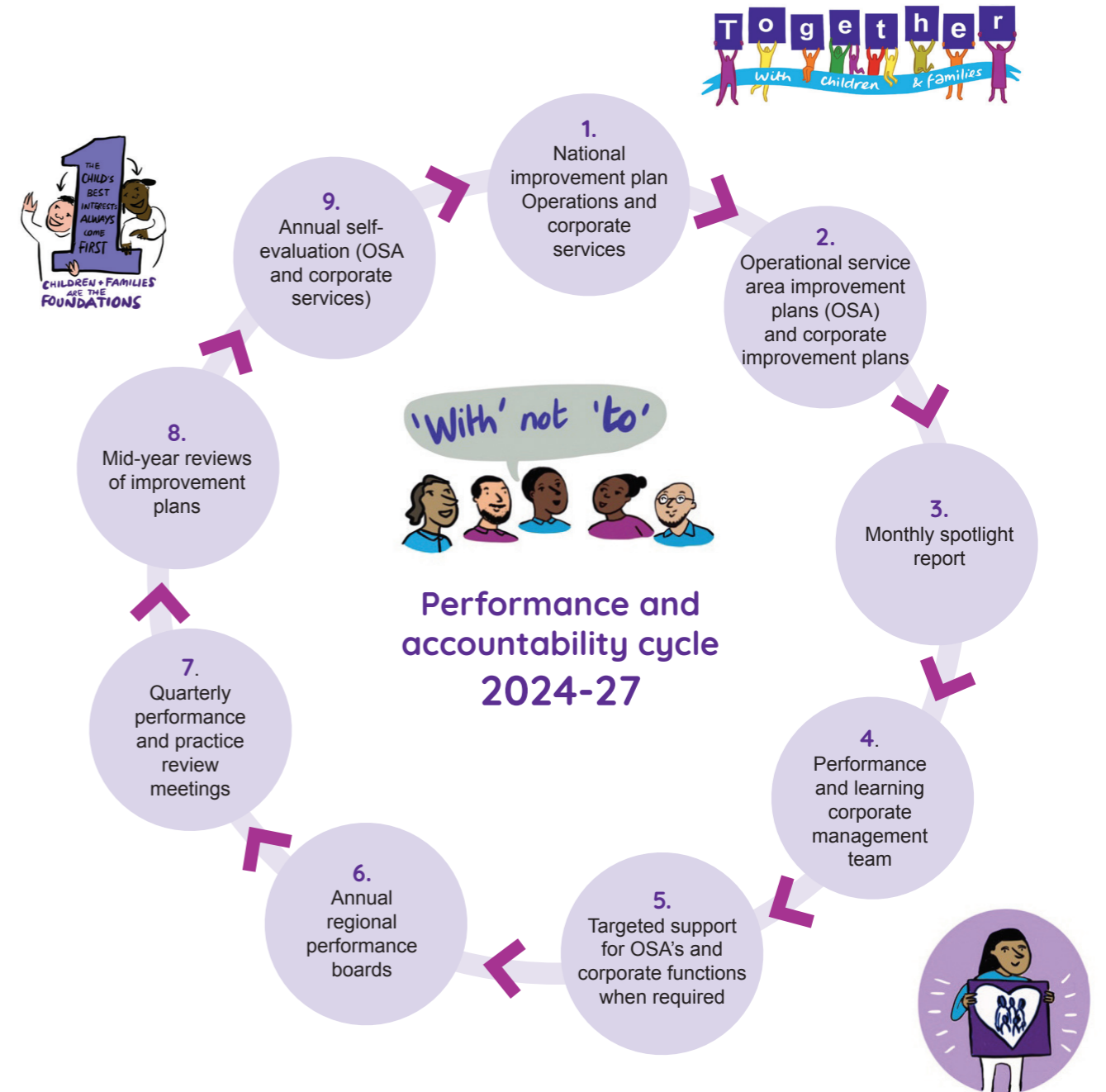
Our Performance and Accountability Framework and the associated quality assurance and management oversight cycles are described in figures 10 – 13 below. They show accountability both nationally and locally and hold all social workers and corporate managers to account for the quality of practice, performance and functions in their operational and business teams, operational service areas (OSAs), and regions. The three elements shown here include:

- The Performance and Accountability Cycle** (the national and local improvement plans, Performance and Learning Corporate Management Team (CMT), monthly spotlight reporting, regional Performance Boards, performance and practice review meetings, mid-year improvement plan reviews, and annual self-evaluations).
- The framework for management support, supervision and oversight**, (Assessment and Child’s Plan reviews, use of management and practice quality standards, supervision, collaborative audit, practice observations, case audit moderations, Practice & Learning Reviews (PLRs) and Leadership and Learning Reviews (LLRs)).
- The Quality Assurance Framework** (local quality and impact audits, practice observations, case audit moderations, national practice quality audits, national improvement service reviews, spotlight reporting, Assistant Director audits, national operational director team audits, local OSA performance accountability and improvement and principal social worker annual report).

These mechanisms for holding ourselves to account enable us to determine the effectiveness of the grip we have and the accuracy of the judgements we make about the quality of practice and performance locally and nationally. More specifically, they establish where we need to take improvement action and where we need to target further support if the pace and impact of improvement is not meeting the standard and objectives set out in the operational service area or corporate team improvement plans. Each of the three frameworks is set out in more detail below.



Figure 10: Cafcass performance and accountability cycle 2024-27



The Performance and Accountability cycle is embedded and increasingly effective. It is forensic and consistently applied. It is flexible to learning from feedback, audit findings, and learning from significant incidents. Policies, practice guidance, auditing, and training are adjusted accordingly. It balances recognition of achievements with accountability for shortfalls. There is clear evidence that the consistent application of the cycle is contributing to further progress and improvement by holding senior leaders accountable for the experience of children and families with whom they engage, and for the positive difference they are making to the lives of children.

For the year ahead, we will strengthen further aspects of our agreed Performance and Accountability cycle by introducing an operational service area (OSA) improvement and accountability framework (see figure 11 below) which is intended to increase momentum and commitment to reducing regional variation and take us closer to our ambitions for children, that all receive an experience that is exceptional. It will support the identification of those teams and individuals struggling to achieve the standards for children consistently, and it will enable proportionate action to support those individuals and teams. Assistant Directors will hold quarterly Performance & Practice Review Meetings with the managers of each OSA (observed by the Deputy Director and the designated Improvement Manager) to review progress and plan for further improvements – narrowing the gap. We are committed to strengthening individuals, teams and collective responsibility for the performance of a team in providing every child with an exceptional experience in their engagement with their FCA or Guardian, everywhere and every time.

**Figure 11: Cafcass Operational Service Areas (OSA) improvement and accountability framework**



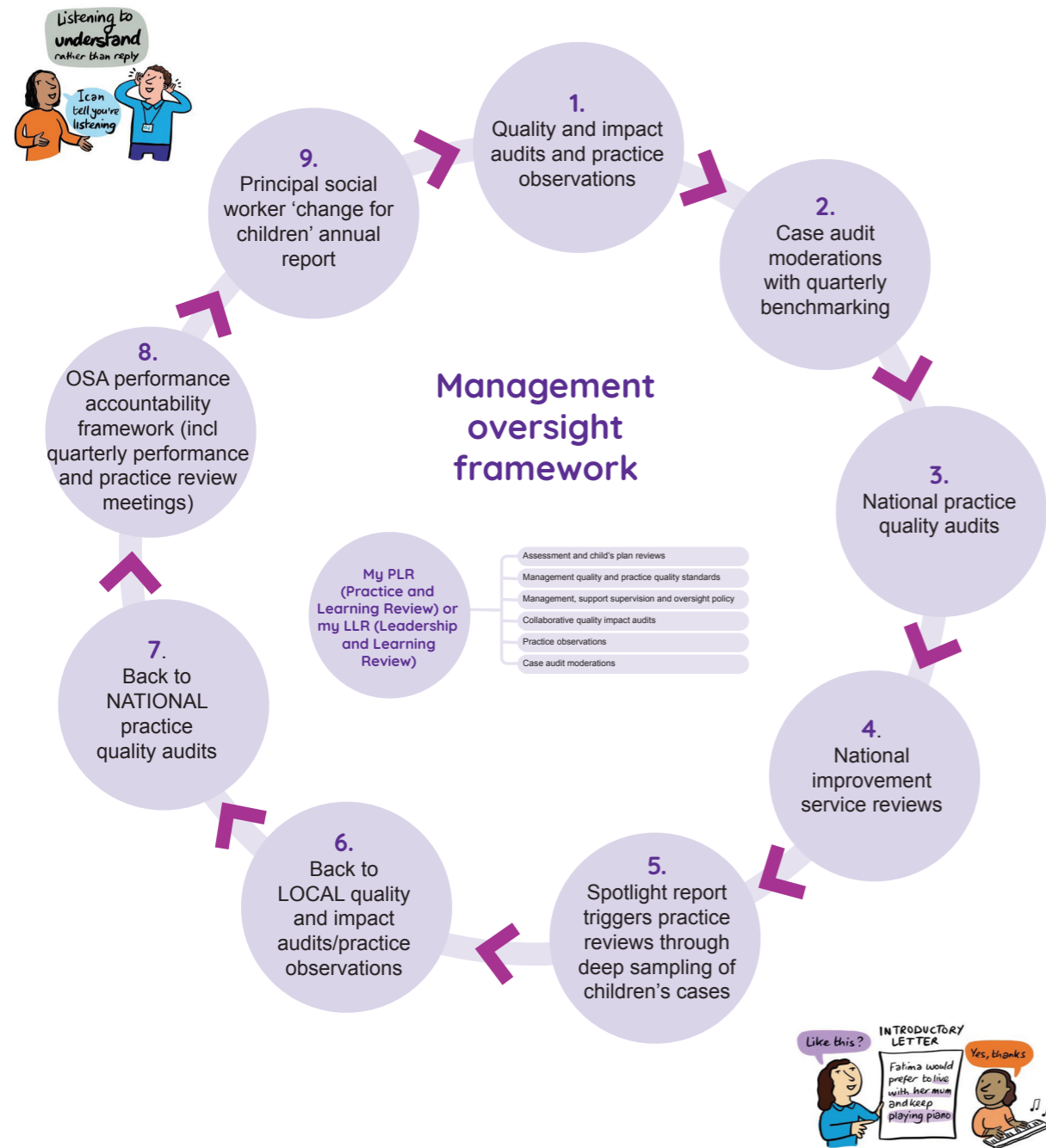
**Figure 12: Cafcass management support, supervision and oversight**



In this reporting year, there has been a significant increase in the recorded presence of management screening and case reviews, supervision, practice observations, and local quality and impact audits – including a significant and intended rise in those which are collaborative with the family court adviser or children’s guardian. We know from the social work health check undertaken in 2023, that there is a high level of confidence and positive feedback about the support provided by line managers. We know from the wide range of quality assurance activity that there is further progress and improvement in the quality and impact of practice in the context of a raised bar that places significant weight on providing evidence of embedding our Together values and practice materials in practice.

In addition, this year, we have focused on strengthening the knowledge and use of our Practice Quality Standards (PQs) as the basis for FCA training, self-evaluation and audit and for discussion in practitioners’ performance and learning reviews. The Practice Quality Standards sit alongside Management Fundamentals and Management Quality Standards in operational services as the basis for manager training, self-evaluation and audit, and managers’ Leadership and Learning Reviews (LLRs). The PLR and LLR methodology and template have been adjusted to clarify and strengthen our staff’s self-evaluation against the respective standards. The now strengthened and embedded operational service area (OSA) improvement plans and the associated reviews show there is clear evidence of further improvement in the quality and effectiveness of practice and leadership and significant further progress and improvement in the wide range of practice and performance measures we have put in place. These include seeing and engaging with children in person, sending welcome and goodbye letters to children, behaviourally detailed Assessment and Child’s Plans, recorded management supervision and oversight and sharing recommendations with children and their families.

**Figure 13: Cafcass operational practice quality assurance framework**



In respect of local quality and impact (QAI) audits, all Family Court Advisers (FCAs) should be supported by four audits in a 12-month period where at least half of these are expected to be undertaken collaboratively. Heads of Practice are required to moderate three of these audits each month.

**In this reporting year, 4,875 QAI audits were completed by managers and 12.0% (585) of these were subject to the required moderation. More than 50% of audits were collaborative in both private and public law work.**

Auditors confirmed the presence of an Assessment and Child's Plan to the required standard in 96% of cases audited. Where direct work with children was recorded, auditors judged 90% showed sensitive use of language to support children to share their wishes and feelings, including children increasingly writing directly to the judge. They also found FCAs using creative relationship-based work such as storyboards to introduce themselves and to help children to understand what to expect. In 95% of audits, the assessment of harm and risk was considered well, and decisions made were well-reasoned and did not require further actions to safeguard the child or 'connected' children. Moderations by Heads of Practice supported these judgements and where action was required to improve the practice and the safety of any child, action was taken quickly and effectively. Understanding the nature and impact of domestic abuse and differentiating between parental conflict and domestic abuse, was judged to be good or better in 94% of cases audited.

In 82% of cases, there was evidence of supervision, where this was required. Auditing managers provide feedback about the added benefit of seeking supervision to support decision making. In the year ahead and following our inspection, we are 'resetting' the requirements for supervision in our policy and implementing more formal action where adherence to requirements fall below the expected standard.

Children's unique circumstances, characteristics, and experiences are the subject of audit and were found to be well considered and influencing advice to the court in 98% of audited cases. Audits show that while there have been incremental increases, consistency in sending letters and sharing recommendations with children requires further effort to embed this important requirement consistently into practice. 74.5% of audits beyond where letters are required showed they

were being used as an introduction and to share with children what will happen in their proceedings or at the end of the work. FCAs were found to have shared recommendations with children in 61% of cases and this remains an area for further improvement as identified in the mid-year reviews of Operational Service Area (OSA) Improvement Plans.

The current quality assurance framework and the associated audit programme were implemented in May 2022, with a commitment to adjust the balance of auditing from compliance to reflection and learning (compliance remains in view but is no longer the operating standard). Accordingly, the requirement to provide a 'judgement and grade' in local teams was removed with the exception of inadequate work where this is recorded and follow up action taken by senior managers who pursue the requirement for improvement in the formality of the practice and learning review (PLR).

Collaborative audits are our preferred mode of audit because they support learning through a practice discussion between the manager and practitioner and include feedback from children and families.

Moderation and observations of Performance and Learning Reviews (PLRs) by Heads of Practice offer assurance on the quality of auditing being undertaken, as well as providing benchmarking with service area management groups. They meet four times a year with the National Improvement Service for benchmarking sessions to support and prioritise consistency.

The quality and compliance of local practice audits are reported monthly to the Operational Management Team, led by the National Director of Operations. Heads of Practice and Assistant Directors have access to live reporting from audit. Heads of practice are required to report to the Deputy Director of Operations bi-monthly on how they are leading improvement on findings

from audit. The triangulation of findings from auditing, performance data, and feedback informs the Performance Boards, mid-year reviews of OSA Improvement Plans, and annual self-evaluation.

## Learning from local quality and impact audits

An **Assessment and Child's Plan** was in place in 96.4% of records, although 22% were not at the standard expected and 3.6% were judged to be below the standard for effectiveness. These plans were either not fully completed and/or did not demonstrate clearly why we were involved and what was happening for children now or in the future.

In cases audited where **direct work** with children was recorded, 90% showed sensitive use of language to support children to share their wishes and feelings, including some children writing directly to the judge and practitioners using creative methods such as storyboards to introduce themselves and help the child to understand what was happening and what to expect. Feedback in a collaborative audit stated, *"B used to come out and explain to us what she was going to say she told us everything - everything B told me was what she said in court"*.

Auditors found that the assessment of **risk for children was considered, and decisions made were well-reasoned** in 98% of audits and in those, no further safeguarding actions were required. Moderations by Heads of Practice supported this finding and if children were in potentially unsafe situations, such as those connected to families involved in proceedings, these were addressed immediately, and actions confirmed as complete.

The quality assurance audits, report a good understanding and accurate assessment of domestic abuse. A specific judgement in the audits is whether **domestic abuse is conflated with conflict and** in 93%

of children's cases, this was judged not to be the case. In audits where there were concerns about the quality of the assessment there was a correlation with incomplete assessments and plans for children.

**Recorded supervision** was found by auditors in 88% of audits where it was judged by the auditor as needed or required and there was correlating evidence to manage shortfalls through service area management meetings, team meetings and group supervisions.

98% of audits demonstrated FCAs and guardians showing understanding of **a child's unique circumstances and experiences**; 73% of audits in work after first hearing cases, showed that personalised **letters were being used** as an introduction and to share with children what would happen in their proceedings and **recommendations were being shared** with children in 59% of the sampled case records. Since the reporting to court templates were adjusted in September 2023, to include recording of sharing recommendations and the child's response in their own words, this aspect of engagement with children has increased by 20% points.

## Moderating audits

Heads of Practice undertake moderations to provide additional assurance to the organisation about the quality of practice and performance in Operational Service Areas. More than 10% of QAI audits were subject to a Head of Practice moderation in the reporting year. Moderations are confirming to us that most children are receiving the expected standard of service and where they are not, our quality assurance is generally identifying shortfalls and targets for improvement.

Managers are not yet consistently and accurately capturing the learning associated

with our five practice improvement priorities. For example, in respect of sharing recommendations with children, reasons for and intervention where there is delay and effective use of analysis and rationales for advice to the court in the assessment and child's plan. All Heads of Practice are taking action to speak with Service Managers and Assistant Service Managers to evidence strengths and learning in practice and lead benchmarking sessions (four every year) to develop consistency in practice and performance challenge. The Performance and Learning Review (PLR) is used to review and follow-up actions when specific and required aspects of auditing are not fully completed or not applied with sufficient rigour. Actions are agreed, including the use of management oversight to resolve proceedings where there is delay for children.

## Spotlight reporting

The Spotlight report focuses the leaders of Operational Service Areas on key areas of practice and performance improvement, requiring them to report monthly (specifically on performance that shows variation against a set of 'best for children' measures) to the operational management team. In this reporting year, the following areas of practice have been in the spotlight:

### 1. Seeing and engaging with children

- Child engagement recording has reached and is being maintained at 98.1%. There is management scrutiny of children not seen. At the end of March 2024, 93.1% of children had been seen in person (at the same point last year, performance was 90.2%).

### 2. Delay for children

- At the end of March 2024, there were 1,893 **public law children's cases** (3,801 children) open in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 288 public law cases (612 children) open in proceedings for 100 weeks or more. This compares with end of March 2023 when there were 2,514 public law cases (5,151 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 375 public law cases (822 children) beyond 100 weeks. The number of children involved in long-running public law cases is slowly reducing.
- At the end of March 2024, there were 4,556 **private law children's cases** (7,109 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 1,770 cases (2,772 children) beyond 100 weeks. This compares to end of March 2023 when there were 5,726 private law children's cases (8,927 children) in proceedings for 52 weeks or more and 2,220 private law cases (3,485 children) beyond 100 weeks. We are continuing to see a slow reduction in the numbers of children in long-running private law cases.

### 3. Use of position statements in public law cases

- In 2022-23, 7.3% of public law cases had no case analysis at the point of case closure. In 2023-24 this figure was 6.4%. We are clear that despite system pressures and delay, all children must benefit from a minimum of one case analysis on every public law case, with best practice being that there is an initial and a final case analysis. We continue to hold this in the spotlight and to work alongside the courts to maintain this standard.

#### 4. Percentage of FCAs holding more than 25 children's cases

- To support allocation and manage workloads during the Covid-19 pandemic we introduced 25 cases as the preferred upper limit to be held by FCAs. From 27.7% of FCAs having workloads of more than 25 cases at the peak in March 2022, this has declined steadily to 9.2% at the time of writing. This remains an area of focus, with a new workload weighting system in development and consideration to a reduced ceiling of 20 being in place.

### Learning from our National Practice Quality Audits

Typically, four themed national Practice Quality Audits (PQA) are undertaken every year (600 children's cases):

- Domestic abuse practice in private law (January 2023).
- Public law in delayed proceedings (July 2023).
- Management supervision and oversight (July 2023).
- Public and private law (December 2023).

This quality assurance work undertaken by our National Improvement Service (NIS) is judged across four standards - Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate. In this reporting year, the quality of practice graded good or better by auditors is 81% (a total of 1,684 of children's cases audited and graded). The quality of practice in 102 children's cases (c5%) was graded inadequate by auditors. The overview learning themes for these audits are set out below:

#### Domestic abuse in private law - Practice Quality Audit 2023 (January)

Improving the quality and impact of practice with children who have experienced domestic abuse remains a practice improvement priority in Cafcass' National and Regional Improvement Plans. This audit was designed to test the impact of improvement activity such as the Domestic Abuse Learning and Development Programme launched in May 2021 and the Domestic Abuse Learning and Improvement plan.

It was the third annual domestic abuse audit, and the overall quality of private law practice where domestic abuse is raised has improved to 65% good or better from 58.5% in 2021.

This audit had the benefit of 65 families providing feedback to help auditors understand the impact of FCA and their work for children. Nearly half of parents were either 'happy' or 'very happy' that the FCA helped their family, said that they felt listened to and thought the recommendations made to the court had been explained to them. Half of families were also 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the introductory letter provided by the FCA. Delay was shared by parents as a concern, such as waiting to spend time with their child/ren. This was also linked to their concerns about the financial costs incurred for parents who fund their own legal representation and concerns that their child/ren were missing out on a vital relationship with them and their extended family.

#### Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- Continued improvement in the quality and **sensitivity of safeguarding screening interviews**, enabling parents to disclose domestic abuse as part of our early intervention work.
- In more than three quarters of the audited work, **FCAs strengthening their assessments** by contacting professionals known to the family and who know the child/ren.
- FCAs understanding the **risk, harm, and impact** on children when they are victims of domestic abuse.
- FCAs **correctly identifying concerns** that required safeguarding referrals to be made to local authority children services because they were concerned about the safety of a child or children.
- **Very few cases showing evidence of practitioners or managers conflating domestic abuse with harmful conflict or minimising domestic abuse as historic.**
- The use of **practice aids to support** the FCA's assessment and analysis of domestic abuse and therefore strengthened advice to the court about safe arrangements for the child or children.



#### What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- In this audit we saw five children's records graded less than good due to the **safeguarding practice** in respect of other children in the family network (connected children).
- **FCAs used practice aids much less to help them make sense of what was happening for children; assessments of domestic abuse were much less clear about the likelihood of future harm or risks were minimised** because conflict and not abuse was being described in the assessments.
- Delays were a factor in some records, including recommendations for a **Fact-Finding Hearing (FFH) without clear enough analysis about whether this was required to conclude proceedings.**
- We need to focus harder on **receiving feedback from children and families.**
- The **Assessment and Child's Plan was not consistently used by FCAs to effectively show their 'workings out'** and their understanding of the child's lived experiences.

#### Public law in delayed proceedings - Practice Quality Audit 2023 (July)

This was a thematic audit focused on children who were subject to delayed proceedings. We know from other audits that the quality of practice in delayed proceedings is less likely to be rated good or better and, in this audit, 61.5% of records were graded 'good' or 'outstanding' which is lower than similar audits of practice where delay is not the chosen audit feature.

The feedback obtained from adult family members was predominantly positive in this audit, with 17 out of 21 parents reporting a positive or very positive experience. Feedback was received from three children, all of which was positive.



35 other significant adults provided feedback (solicitors for the child, Independent Reporting Officers, team managers, carers and social workers) which was overwhelmingly positive, with 33 responses noting the person was 'very happy' or 'happy' with the service provided by the child's Guardian.

It was noted that their Guardians had communicated well, listened, been approachable, professional, friendly, and advocated well on behalf of the child.

#### Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- The introduction of Cafcass guidance in February 2023 relating to introductory and goodbye letters for children having a demonstrable impact upon the numbers of records where letters to children are written - from the feedback, these letters are clearly valued by children.
- Use of the Assessment and Child's Plan makes a significant difference to the quality of case planning, pre-empting difficulties and being proactive to prevent and to address delay - where there was a clear timetable set out in the Assessment and Child's Plan, proceedings last on average five weeks less than those where no such timetable was set.
- Partnership working with other professionals was effective and benefited the child, with a good balance between collaboration and challenge.
- Guardians used sensitive language with auditors seeing evidence of kind and respectful practice with a clear commitment to write records that could be understood by children and families in the future.

- In situations where children remained at home with parents during proceedings or the plan was for them to be reunified; there was clear evidence of the Guardian considering safety arrangements and plans – including through supervision.
- Where supervision was used by Guardians there was a strong correlation with Good or Better grades, supporting the evidence that professional supervision improves the quality of thinking and therefore advice to the court.

#### What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- More effective use of the Assessment and Child's Plan in agreeing a timetable, developing and recording assessment and analysis (showing the 'workings out').
- Individualised letters for each child in a family, including detail about the child's proceedings and the advice to the court.
- Timely closure of the child's record, goodbye and closure letters – within four weeks of the final hearing.
- Improved testing of, and rationales for, the recommendation of the appointment of an additional expert, including consideration of the impact of delay for the child. Relevance, purpose and proportionality should be set out in each case where a recommendation is made.
- Every child's record should benefit from an analytical final report to consider the recommendations being made on their behalf.

#### Management Supervision and Oversight Impact Audit (July 2023)

This audit was undertaken to review the quality and quantum of management oversight, including impact and whether there was follow through of actions. The selection of the records was random across all Cafcass regions.

This review evidenced that there is widespread good practice across all regions. In most of the records reviewed, management oversight was seen to be strengths-based and adding value to the work of the FCAs and children's guardians.

The early screening and case allocation by managers is key, providing support, highlighting risks and identifying actions for FCAs and children's guardians. The review of the oversight within the child's plan, both at the initial and later review however, noted variations in practice, specifically the use of situational supervision.

Taking feedback from family members, children and professionals is a developing part of Cafcass quality assurance. When feedback is obtained but not evaluated in a partnership between manager and practitioner, it closes the opportunity to reinforce good practice and explore where things could be improved.

#### Private and Public Law Practice Quality Audit 2023 (December)

The purpose of this audit was to report on the quality of general practice and to analyse the impact of improvement work undertaken nationally. Overall, 74% of audits were graded as 'good' or 'outstanding' an increase of 1% point from the same snapshot in 2022. Feedback from parents was received relating to 48 child records and was largely positive (83% responded, 'happy or very happy' that their FCA or Guardian had helped them).

#### Strong practice in the audit was characterised by:

- Children being seen according to Cafcass policy and being well engaged during their proceedings;
- an increase in the number of records where domestic abuse is fully acknowledged as a risk to the child and it being well assessed;
- delay being at the forefront when working with families;
- increased levels of effective management oversight and supervision on children's records;
- records evidencing the increasing use of sensitive language, alongside kind and respectful practice;
- the vast majority of 'spending time with' arrangements being safe and appropriate for children;
- improvement in recognising and using information about what is special and unique about children;
- collaborative work with local authority colleagues being consistently strong;
- Guardians offering scrutiny and challenge of the local authority's plans in most instances; and
- guidance regarding introductory and goodbye letters having had a demonstrable impact upon the number of records featuring well written letters to children, especially in private law.



### What needs to strengthen further in practice?

- A minority of records remain where domestic abuse is not assessed sufficiently well and this needs to improve so that practice is consistent, both for children subject to proceedings and for other children in their family and network.
- There needs to be more consistent use of interpreting and translation services where families' first language is not English.
- FCAs need to plan enquiries and interviews to take account of school holiday periods.
- More children in public law proceedings need to receive well-written letters at the start and end of their proceedings, so that they have important information about their Guardian, how to contact them and how to provide feedback. The letters also need to explain how recommendations will be discussed and the child's response incorporated into the report to court.
- Continued action operationally and strategically to prevent and reduce delay.

### Practice alerts

In this reporting year, there are **six major learning themes** which form the basis of our **Practice Alerts** issued with clear expectations for improvement and change in individual and collective professional practice at Cafcass.

**Assessment in work to first hearing stages of private law:** This was a learning theme during 2022 and continued over this last year in response to the death and serious harm of three children in the early stages of private law proceedings. This alert included clear instruction on the use of a 16a risk assessment for the court in the phase of work to first hearing. It references

the need for such a risk assessment when there are concerns about the safety of a child and proceedings are delayed because of a finding of fact hearing that has been advised.

**Unification and reunification of children to parents where there has been previous harm and/or risk of further harm:** This alert notified the requirement for scrutiny and management oversight of plans for the reunification or unification, where children have not lived with the parents before or they are returning to a home having been removed because of the harm or risk of significant harm previously. The alert introduced a requirement to see children in the home where they are going to be living and requesting a formal situational supervision to discuss the assessment and likely recommendations and advice with a manager.

**Reviewing and assessing the importance of previous case and criminal histories:** This alert refers to the screening, analysis and scrutiny of information contained in all previous records (including previous proceedings), relating to police information and local authority checks. There are ten learning points for colleagues to take forward. These have been included in the public law training programme and changes to the case allocation policy.

**The assessment of risk and harm from registered sex offenders:** This alert provides clear instructions for FCAs and children's guardians, including that it must be assumed and factored into assessment that a child living in the same household as a registered sex offender or having contact with them is at risk of significant harm.

**Safeguarding children who are not subject to proceedings:** The safety of any **connected child** within the family must be considered. The revised Child Safeguarding Policy includes specific information about the risk of harm for connected children. The

alert provides information, case examples and notes to managers on how to be thoughtful and curious about connected children and act where required to secure their safety.

**Child and adult victims of domestic abuse:** This alert requires practitioners and managers to use victims' own words to describe their experiences, not minimising abuse as historic or as single incidents. It also requires that recommendations are not made for adult victims to supervise contact where there are concerns about domestic abuse.



## 2.4

# Our year in impact (including ‘Best for children’ measure comparisons for 2022-23 with 2023-24)



As set out in section 2.1, page 25, our Ofsted inspection evidence and the subsequent report confirmed that leaders at Cafcass understand and regularly scrutinise practice quality, performance, evidence and progress on improvement priorities. They confirmed our self-evaluation as accurate and our knowledge of what needs to improve as secure and robust.

Our performance and accountability cycle set out on page 55, describes the processes associated with the Operational Service Area (OSA) improvement plans and the incorporated mid-year reviews that take place in October and November each year.

In this reporting year, we concluded from those reviews, that there is clear evidence of further overall progress and improvement in the quality and effectiveness of practice, with the gaps being narrowed in most areas. As in the previous year, many aspects of practice and performance showed improvement between 10-30% from the baseline in March 2023 and then again from the mid-year reviews in October/ November 2023 to the end of the year in March 2024. In some respects, sustaining the quality of practice already judged to be good and making additional gains of 1-5% is recognised as a notable achievement for those OSAs and teams that continue to improve. The local senior leadership teams show that they have grip and an accurate understanding of the quality of practice and performance, to the level of teams and individuals. They understand their strengths,

impact, and achievements. They know their areas for development and are acting to make further improvements and to rectify any slippage.

Our judgement is that continual improvement has been possible, despite harder tests of what we judge to be ‘good’ because of our commitment to learning from feedback (and the developing systems to support that learning), from practice quality audits, significant incidents, complaints and learning reviews. There is an inevitable lag between the learning, transferring that learning into practice, and then achieving greater consistency in embedding the learning in practice.

In addition to overall further progress and improvement, recognised in the full Ofsted inspection, there is increased consistency in many areas of practice and performance. While varied performance is inevitable as the context and challenges for individuals, teams, and OSAs fluctuate, management grip on the quality of practice and performance is strong. Declining performance is identified quickly, and action is taken locally to rectify shortfalls. This is

raising the national average and ‘Best for children’ measures in most areas of practice and performance. The gap is also being narrowed despite us raising the bar for Good as we continue to adjust and adapt, and to set revised standards.

The Performance and Accountability Cycle is embedded. Where the pace of improvement is not good enough for children, Targeted Support Plans are put in place for OSAs and now teams, alongside Practice Improvement Plans to support individuals to achieve the standards consistently.

The overall trajectory along with the sharpened focus of the national improvement plan ‘Listening to Children - Lighting the Way’ provides a high level of confidence that there will be even further progress and improvement in 2024-25, with more consistent national performance.

The charts below combine an assessment of performance judged by our own best for children measures and the success measures set by the national family justice board and described on pages 35 to 45 of this report.

**Figure 14: Impact and progress comparisons showing Family Justice System (FJS) success measures and year on year comparisons**

### FJS Objective One: Timeliness

Ensure children and families have timely outcomes

Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
TIMELINESS 1: Reduce number of children in long running open proceedings	Number of children on long-running public law proceedings 52 / 100+ weeks	3,801 children (52+ weeks) (31 March 2024) (5,151 - 31 March 2023)	% open public law children’s cases allocated to a children’s guardian	99.3% (99.2% - 2022- 23)
		612 children (100+ weeks) (31 March 2024) (822 - 31 March 2023)	% of public law Assessment & Child’s Plan with a management review	91.3% (85.2% - 2022-23)
	Number of children on long-running private law proceedings 52 / 100+ weeks	7,109 children (52+ weeks) (31 March 2024) (8,927 - 31 March 2023)	% open private law children’s cases allocated to a Family Court Adviser	99.2% (99.4% - 2022-23)
		2,772 children (100+ weeks) (31 March 2024) (3,845 - 31 March 2023)	% of private law Assessment & Child’s Plan with a management review	91.2% (exc. closed at FHDRA) (88.9% - 2022-23)

Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
TIMELINESS 2: Increase % of proceedings resolving within 26 weeks	Increase in percentage of section 31 care proceedings children's cases which resolve in 26 weeks	<b>+8.5% / +335 children</b> (29.1% / 1,571 children) (1 January - 31 March 2024) (20.6% / 1,236 children) (1 January - 31 March 2023)	Average working days to allocate a s31 care case to a children's guardian	<b>1.4 days</b> (1.6 days - 2022-23)
			Average week that final analysis was filed in s31 care proceedings (1 Jan to 31 March 2024)	<b>38.6 weeks</b> (1 Jan to 31 March 2024) (41.4 weeks: 1 Jan - 31 March 2023)
	Increase in percentage of section 8 child arrangements private law proceedings which resolve in 26 weeks	<b>+4.0% / +1,677 children</b> (62.0% / 18,341 children) (1 January - 31 March 2024) (58.0% / 16,664 children) (1 January - 31 March 2023)	Average weeks to file private law safeguarding letter	<b>3.9 working weeks</b> (4.4 working weeks - 2022-23)
			Average working weeks to file section 7 report	<b>14.5 working weeks</b> (15.1 working weeks - 2022-23)
			% private law s7 reports with an extension request	<b>35.9%</b> (38.1% - 2022-23)



## FJS Objective Two: Sufficiency

Ensure the family justice system runs efficiently with the resources available

Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
SUFFICIENCY 1: Reduce number of open children's cases	Number of open public law children's cases	<b>11,875</b> (31 March 2024) (13,054 - 31 March 2023)	Total children worked with in year: <b>public law</b>	<b>44,848 children</b> (25,816 on new cases, 19,032 on existing cases) (46,371 - 2022-23)
			Cafcass <b>public law</b> throughput (compared with system throughput)	<b>108.5%</b> (104.3% - 2022-23)
	Number of open private law children's cases	<b>18,379</b> (31 March 2024) (19,850 - 31 March 2023)	Total children worked with in year: <b>private law</b>	<b>92,499 children</b> (60,603 on new cases, 31,896 on existing cases) (97,098 - 2022-23)
			Cafcass <b>private law</b> throughput (compared with system throughput)	<b>114.3%</b> (106.8% - 2022-23)
			Private law cases held on duty or in allocation hubs	<b>1,474 children's cases</b> (996 duty / 478 allocation hub) (1,486 - 31 March 2023)
			Private law children's cases waiting in post assessment hubs with no hearing in the next 6 weeks	<b>629 cases</b> (525 - 31 March 2023)

Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
SUFFICIENCY 2: Minimise loss of capacity, especially in social work	Social work professional vacancy rate	133 authorised 'empty seat' social work vacancies (31 March 2024) (128.8 vacancies - 31 March 2023)	Social work 12-month turnover	15.1% (15.0% - 31 March 2023)
			Average social work working days lost due to sickness in last 12 months	12.6 average working days lost (10.7 - 31 March 2023)
			% FCAs in long term teams with caseloads 25+	9.2% (14.8% - 31 March 2023)
	Corporate and business services vacancy rate	30 authorised 'empty seat' corporate and business services vacancies (31 March 2024) (23 vacancies - 31 March 2023)	Corporate & business services 12-month turnover	7.9% (12.0% - 31 March 2023)
			Average corporate and business services working days lost due to sickness in last 12 months	8.3 average working days lost (9.9 - 31 March 2023)

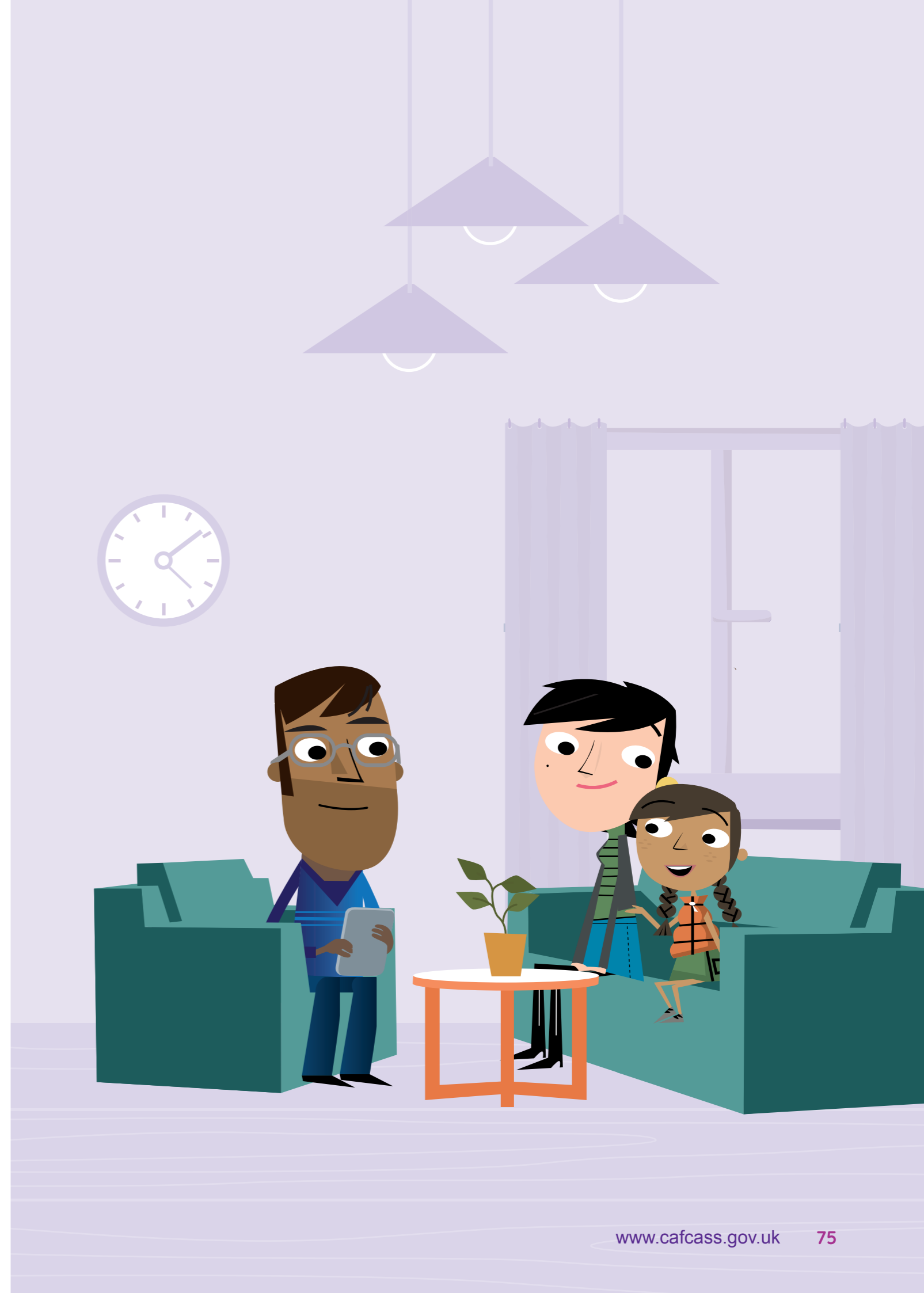
### FJS Objective Three: Experience

Improve the experience of children and families in proceedings

Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
EXPERIENCE 1: Improve children's understanding and ability to engage	% public law children with at least one in person engagement	93.9% (31 March 2024) (91.7% 31 March 2023)	% audited public law practice with all letters present and appropriate at time of review	47.1% (40.6% - 2022-23)
			% public law children's files showing recommendations shared with children	65.2% (67.2% - 2022-23)
			Volume of feedback received from children & families and (and % positive)	1,059 items of feedback via QAI audits and Digital Feedback, 595 (56.2%) of total feedback being positive
	% private law children with at least one in person engagement	91.6% (31 March 2024) (88.7% 31 March 2023)	% audited private law practice with all letters present and appropriate at time of review	68.9% (56.6% - 2022- 23)
			% private law children's files showing recommendations shared with children	54.4% (45.8% - 2022-23)
			Volume of feedback received from children & families (and % positive)	4,273 items of feedback via QAI audits and Digital Feedback, 2,359 (55.2%) of total feedback being positive



Cafcass supporting priority	Headline Measure	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)	Supporting indicators	Data (1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 - unless indicated)
EXPERIENCE 2: Improve the quality & consistency of practice	Percentage of <b>all</b> audited practice assessed as good or better	78.5% rated good or better (National case file quality audit - December 23) (73.0%: National case file quality audit - November 2023)	Number of public law local audits undertaken and % collaborative	2,267 undertaken / 53.4% collaborative (limited to non-NIS audits only) (2,010 undertaken / 35.2% collaborative – 2022-2023)
			Number of private law local audits undertaken and % collaborative	2,741 undertaken / 55.6% collaborative (limited to non-NIS audits only) (2,363 undertaken / 39.9% collaborative – 2022-2023)
			Percentage audited private law practice assessed as good or better where domestic abuse is identified	70.5% (Case file audits completed by NIS only) (70.8% 2022-23)
			Increase in volume of private law families worked with in Pathfinder Model/ equivalent	Measure to be developed 2024-25



## 2.5

# The quality and impact of business and corporate services

**Our Cafcass business services function consists of 21 teams with circa 400 colleagues supporting an efficient and welcoming service to children and families. The work after first hearing and public law business service teams are responsible for developing and using quality processes and systems in support of social work practice. This includes the processing of all child and family data and providing an in-person service to children and families in all local Cafcass offices. The business services productivity and training team work to provide and sustain efficient systems and technology.**

The National Business Centre provides a critical and single front door for families and children at the start of their proceedings and **in the reporting year, managed on average 224 applications every working day**, initiating essential checks to safeguard children. Supporting the circa 65,000 applications and circa 137,500 children every year, involves corporate and business services teams handling large numbers of documents and speaking with many families and children. See figure 15 opposite.

Case progression through work to first hearing and work after first hearing (private law) and public law teams are supported by a business team to keep throughput effective. Other corporate functions serviced in business teams include:

- the Police National Computer team, providing police intelligence from the Police National Computer (PNC) system for private law applications;
- a digitised postal service and exceptions team, supporting the electronic receipt and immediate digital distribution of post across the country;

- a national Call Centre providing a single point of access for all families and professionals to contact Cafcass as well as a bespoke feedback service (Hear to listen) for children to provide their feedback in their own words;
- IT trainers to support skills family court advisers and business services colleagues;
- a dedicated business services team supporting our self-employed social workers known as Cafcass Associates; and
- a dedicated team supporting our National Commissioning Team in the progression of court ordered and other associated work such as Planning Together for Children courses and DNA testing.

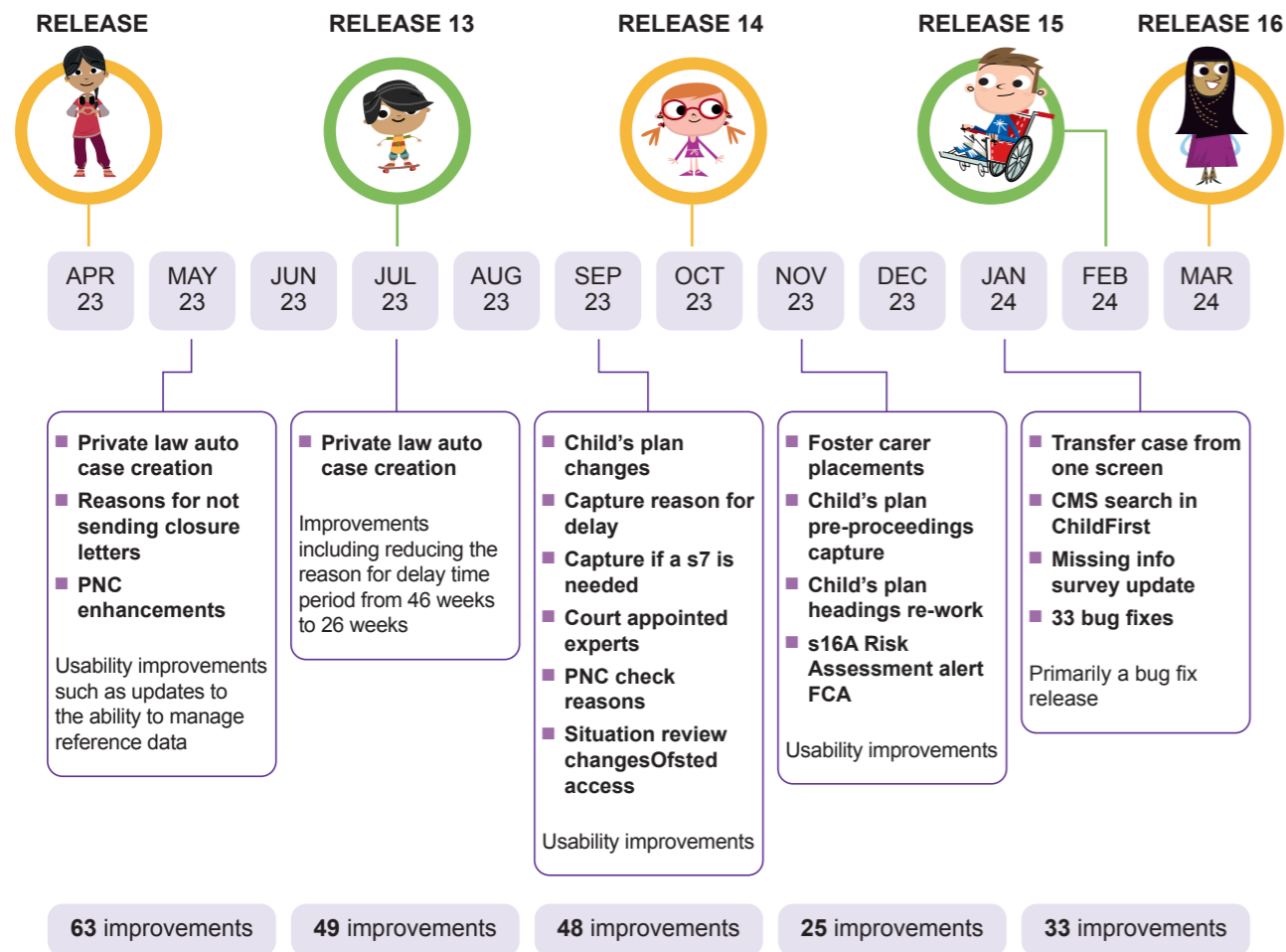
All teams work to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are monitored through formal performance systems and supported by standard operating procedures to provide for maximum national consistency. Business services take an active role in practice meetings, performance boards and mid-year reviews to support frontline colleagues and managers.

**Figure 15: Cafcass corporate and business services functions**

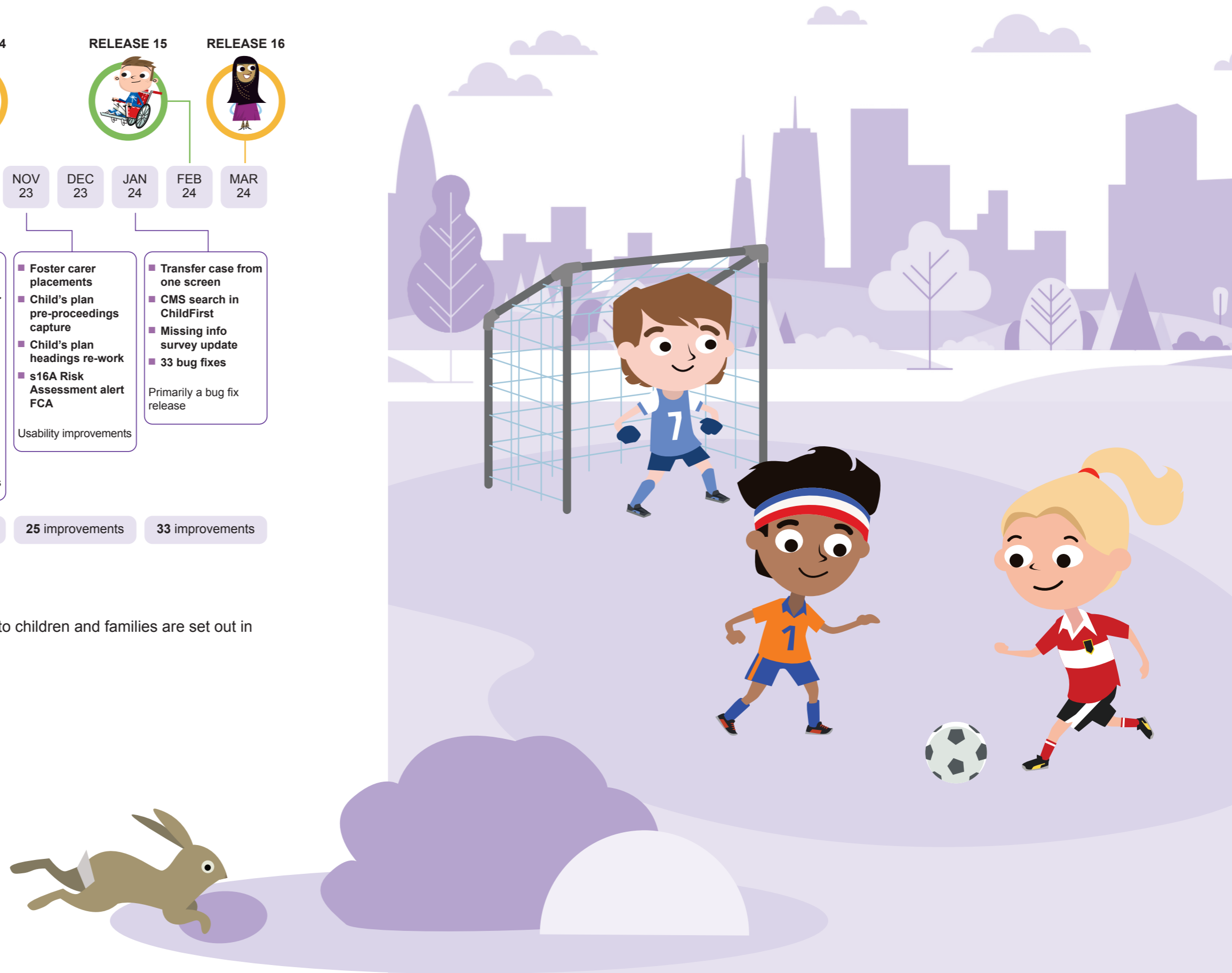
Business functions	
Cafcass intake team - manage receipt of private law applications into Cafcass	<b>49,226</b> applications processed
Public law intake team - manage receipt of public law applications into Cafcass	<b>16,213</b> applications processed
Early intervention team - prepares the first safeguarding letter to court for the first hearing in a private law case	Children's cases allocated = <b>42,113</b> Children's cases closed = <b>41,582</b>
Police national team - the team manage the police safeguarding checks at level 1 and level 2	Level 1 checks processed <b>96,014</b> (plus <b>1,475</b> Level 1 check for Cafcass Cymru) Level 2 checks requested = <b>5,224</b>
Commissioning services support unit – referring for Planning Together for Children and child contact centres	DNA tests requested = <b>281</b> Planning Together referrals = <b>24,583</b>
Post exceptions team - receipt of court orders, Level 2 Police checks and local authority checks received by post and by email in Slough (Quadient)	<b>359,796</b> documents processed including court orders, safeguarding checks and general correspondence
Call centre - linking all Cafcass local offices via smart phones to the call centre. One Cafcass number for all first contact users	<b>221,764</b> calls taken

The Cafcass National Estates and Health & Safety team are responsible for the maintenance, design, leases and associated budgets for all our properties where we meet with children and families. Their main objective is to make sure that our offices provide a welcoming child-focused, safe, and functional space to support the work we do. Our IT team supports and leads the development of our ChildFirst core case management system. They, too, have been at the forefront of leading developments in practice associated with our culture change and the implementation of the practice framework. There are quarterly systems updates and releases, all of which reflect our improvement priorities, the major impacts in this reporting year are set out in figure 16 below. Our IT team supports and leads the provision of all our technology. This year we surveyed internally and achieved a 95% satisfaction rate with the tools and services provided. As in previous years, changes to the case management system have had to be scheduled and aligned with developing practice improvements.

Figure 16: Updates to the Child First system



Improvements in all corporate functions as they relate to children and families are set out in table D on page 113.





## 2.6

# The influence of the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) work programme on Cafcass’ effectiveness

Written by a FJYPB member

Our 2023-24 work programme focused on our work with partners and delivering Cafcass’ strategic priorities, supporting Cafcass in its ambition for children. The priorities we set included:

- **Improving children and young people’s participation in their proceedings.**

We have continued to focus on how children and young people are best engaged and communicated with during their proceedings. We have supported Cafcass to develop its resources, including the first of the [Taking Me Seriously animated videos](#) – Letting You Know How We Help. Six videos are planned, and we are currently developing the second video, which will support sharing recommendations. We have been involved in the review of feedback and learning from children’s complaints, and contributed to the review of Planning Together for Children. Looking to the year ahead we are contributing to the Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA) and to make sure children feel safe during time with families. For 2024-25 we will also be promoting the uniqueness of neurodivergent children and young

people and those with disabilities and creating resources to support professionals in their work with them.

- **Continuing to raise awareness of the impact of delay in the family courts on children and young people.**

We have supported Cafcass to maintain its strong focus on reducing delay and on our challenge that we initially set to professionals around this in 2022. We revisited this in our 2023 Voice of The Child conference when we highlighted the importance of building trust with children and young people in the context of delay. Members met with Jacky Tiotto, Cafcass, and Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division, in June 2023 and April 2024 to discuss delay and we have recently had a follow up meeting with them both to hear about the changes and improvements made since then. We have also worked with the LFJB network to ensure our challenge is shared across all local areas.

- **We have continued to develop a resource for schools to support children and young people involved in family court proceedings.**

We have been supporting the Department of Education to create a PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, Economic) resource. This is a school lesson plan with the aim of increasing awareness of and supporting conversations about children and young people who experience family law proceedings.

- **Raising awareness of the impact of the different types of abuse on children and young people.**

We continue to support Cafcass in further strengthening the quality and impact of its work with children and families where domestic abuse is known or reported and we are represented on the Cafcass Domestic Abuse Practice Reference Group. We also worked with the Durham Police Policy and Commissioning Team to support the

script development of a training resource for the judiciary. We were looking forward to our 2024 Voice of the Child conference, which this year was focused on the voices of children and young people who have experience of domestic abuse and harmful parenting.

During 2023-24, the FJYPB worked hard to further raise our profile and reputation across family justice and, with the support of Cafcass, showed how our contribution is having a greater impact to make a positive difference for children and young people. The FJYPB completed over 500 commissions, 50% of these for Cafcass. We were delighted in October 2023 to receive the National Children and Young People’s Award for Partnership Working, which recognised our work to promote accessible use of language across Cafcass and the wider family justice system.



### FJYPB CHALLENGE 2023

1

How will you tell children and young people about the information you have shared about them with others?

2

How will you keep children and young people updated and informed especially around delay?

3

What will you do to promote and encourage children and young people to stay in contact with the people that matter to them?

4

Make sure that all children and young people you work with know their rights.

5

How will you show children and young people that TRUST started with them, stayed with them and ended with them?

6

What will you do differently in your practice now that you have heard our messages?

Our **Voice of The Child Conference** was held in July 2023 – ‘Building Trust – To enable children and young people to participate in their family court proceedings in the context of delay’. 434 professionals attended from across the family justice sector. This is the challenge that we set; Cafcass updates us on actions it is taking in response to the questions and impact of this.

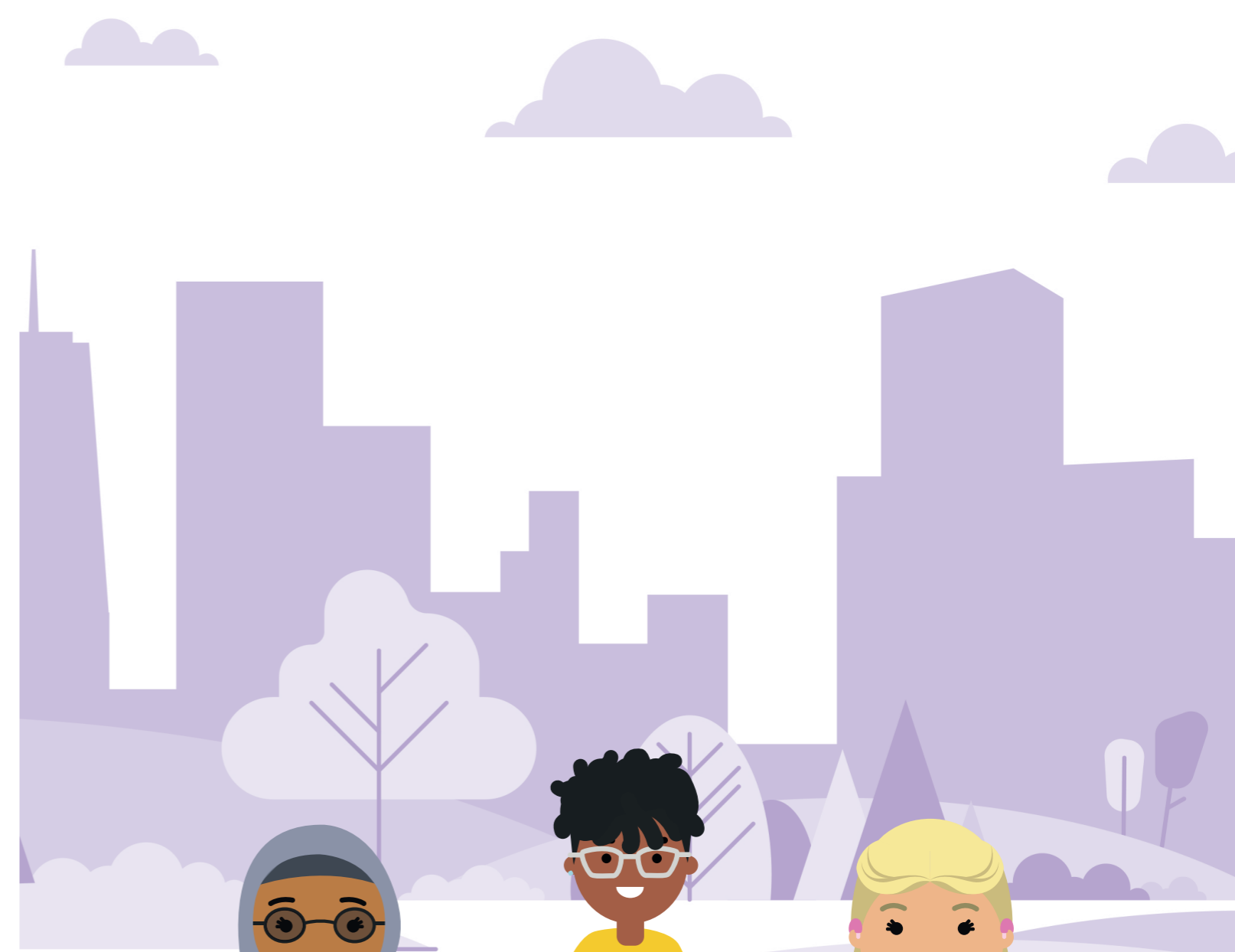
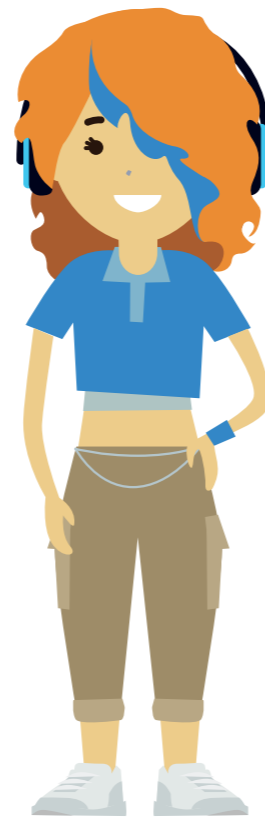
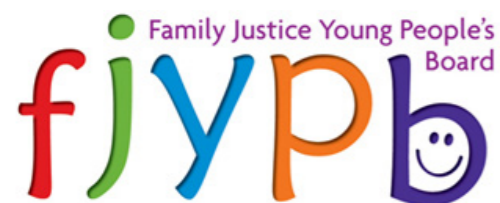
## Denmark

The FJYPB raised its profile internationally through attendance at a judicial conference held in Svendborg, Denmark, in March 2024. We shared lived experiences to judges and other professionals and showed how our work with Cafcass in strengthening the voices of children and gaining feedback from them about their proceedings supports service development. Attendees were inspired by our work and impact of this, and we have agreed to support the development of a young people’s board across Denmark.

## Ofsted

We were proud to meet with Ofsted during the inspection of Cafcass in February 2024 and to have our work with Cafcass and impact of this highlighted within its report:

*“A genuine desire to continually learn from feedback from children and families is a real strength... this as well as the phenomenal impact of the Cafcass sponsored FJYPB demonstrates how leaders continually learn from feedback. The FJYPB told leaders that delay should not be normalised for children. This is now a national and regional improvement priority. The board has also rightly challenged senior leaders about the prioritisation protocol, and they have been instrumental in designing the extremely child-centred family rooms in the new central London office. Members of the board who spoke to inspectors were unanimous in saying that being part of the board had helped them and helped others. Members feel listened to and valued. Their impact on service development has been exceptional”.*



# Sustainability report

## Cafcass Disclosures under Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures

Cafcass has reported on climate-related financial disclosures consistent with HM Treasury’s TCFD-aligned disclosure application guidance, which interprets and adapts the framework for the UK public sector. Cafcass considers climate to be a principal risk, and has therefore complied with the TCFD recommendations and recommendations disclosures around [sic]:

- **Governance** - recommended disclosures (a) and (b) (below)
- **Risk Management** - recommended disclosures (a) to (c) (below)
- **Metrics and Targets** - recommended disclosures (a) to (c) (covered separately in this section)

This is in line with the central government’s TCFD-aligned disclosure implementation timetable for Phase 2. Cafcass plans to provide recommended disclosures for Strategy in future reporting periods in line with the central government implementation timetable.

### Board oversight of climate related issues

The Board receives an annual report containing information related to climate related issues, principally those relating to progress with the Greening Government Commitments. Through it’s Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), the Board also received a report from the Government Internal Audit Agency on Cafcass’ progress with Net Zero Reporting in June 2024.

The Board received a copy of the Cafcass Sustainability Strategy updated in April 2024. The Board also receives through its ARAC an annual assessment of arrangements to ensure business continuity where service delivery is at risk through a broad range of physical and digital disruptions.

### Management’s role in assessing and managing climate-related issues

Cafcass management understand its obligations to support the Government’s strategic objectives and legal requirements including to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the 25 Year Environmental Plan (2018). Broader than this, Cafcass management know sustainability is important to its staff, the children and families they work with and the many partners and vendors with whom they collaborate in service design and delivery. Cafcass has established a Sustainability Steering Group which is chaired by the Director of Resources. This steering group oversees the delivery of the Sustainability Strategy. Cafcass has a long established Business Continuity Steering Group. This group is chaired by the Director of Resources and has responsibility for assessing all risks to the delivery of all of its activities. This steering group receives and responds to commissions through the Ministry of Justice on all matters related to delivery risks including those relating to climate.

## Scope of report

The data shows our position for 2023-24 using non-financial data available for the calendar year of 2023 up to and including December 2023 in line with the Ministry of Justice approach to annual reporting. Please note our data recorded for 2022-23 in this report now shows non-financial data from the financial year 2022-23.

Financial data is reported from the financial year 2023-24. This is tracked against a 2017-18 baseline in line with the Greening Government Commitments for the period 2021-25.

Cafcass is unable to report data from locations where property owners are not obliged to provide it. Some data is estimated due to the nature of our estate.

### Key










Target met



Target not yet met



## Overall GGC Performance 2023-24 against a 2017-18 baseline


Overall GGC performance 2022-23 against 2017-18 baseline


Requirement by 2025	2023-24 performance	RAG status	Explanation where not on track
 Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 41%	-40%		
Reduce direct greenhouse gas emissions by 23%	-55%		
Reduce emissions from domestic business flights by 30%	-30%		
Reduce overall waste by 15%	-22%		Cafcass holds poor data records for waste due to the nature of the estate, which means the baseline year 2017-18 data is unlikely to be accurate. Due to the nature of the estate with a large number of sites within shared buildings where waste forms part of the buildings charges, we have difficulties obtaining data in relation to waste. Improvement of data is something being worked towards as a future target.
Landfill waste to be less than 5%	BNA*		
Increase recycling to at least 70%	BNA*		

Continued on next page

Requirement by 2025	2023-24 performance	RAG status	Explanation where not on track
Reduce paper use by 50%	-75%	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	
Reduce water consumption	+427%	<span style="color: red;">●</span>	Poor water data records in the baseline year 2017-18 make this difficult to track. We also have a number of sites where we have historically had estimated readings for water consumption which makes this challenging to provide a year on year comparison. It is estimated that due to us now recording water consumption at additional sites that our additional consumption from the baseline year is 20%.

Indicator	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
<b>Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings and travel</b>					
Total gross scope 1 (direct) GHG emissions (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e)	56	100	72	80	175
<b>Non-financial indicators</b>					
Total gross scope 2 (energy indirect) GHG emissions (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e)	74	113	125	127	211
 Total gross scope 3 (official business travel emissions) (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> E)	380	957	589	380	2,210
<b>Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings and travel</b>					
Total emissions (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e)	510	1,171	785	587	2,595
<b>Non-financial indicators</b>					
Electricity (MWh)	525	535	589	548	745
 Gas (MWh)	520	468	393	418	681
<b>Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings and travel</b>					
Other energy sources	0	0	0	0	0

Indicator	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
<b>Non-financial indicators</b>					
 Total energy (MWh)	1,045	1,003	982	966	1,426
<b>Notes:</b> We currently report Gas MWh figures at 9 offices - Bristol, Coventry, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, Stafford and Swindon.					
We currently report Electricity MWh figures at 14 offices – Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, Lincoln, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, Stafford, Swindon.					



Financial indicators	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
<b>Energy and travel costs</b>					
 Total energy (£000s)	361	316	206	157	176
Official business travel (£000s)	453	287	131	20	788
Air travel (£000s)	6	5	2	0	7
<b>Total travel (£000s)</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>795</b>

**Notes in relation to financial indicators for energy.**

The figures have been re-calculated for 2017-18 baseline year in comparison to previous annual report figures. This is based on the fact a credit note had been processed for £28,000 which related to previous usage. If credit note added total figure for energy usage for that year would be £125,000 for the sites we directly pay utilities for. In addition, we received financial data from several sites where energy is paid via service charge which had not been previously included.

The figure for 2019-20 total energy has been recalculated based on the inclusion of financial data from several sites where energy is paid via the service charge.

In 2022-23 – the electricity cost for this financial year is higher reflecting the increase in energy prices and also because this has included a payment relating to a previous year received from the energy provider.

		2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings and travel	Number of domestic flights	32	30	6	1	103
	Air travel 	Domestic flights (KM)	28,452	26,580	4,128	1,020
Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from buildings and travel	Number of international flights	5	8	0	0	22
	Air travel 	International flights (KM)	6,910	11,676	0	0

### Target Area 1

#### Mitigating climate change: working towards Net Zero by 2050

We continue to achieve lower greenhouse gas emissions and are on track to meet our 2025 targets.




We continue to reduce travel-related emissions where possible, through our flexible working policy, our laptops with Microsoft Teams, video conferencing facilities in offices and our encouragement of staff to travel 'sustainably smart'. New conferencing technology was recently deployed across the Cafcass office estate to support people in attending meetings at their local offices, reducing the amount of travel required.

There has been an increase in business critical travel in Cafcass following travel restrictions easing following the Covid 19 pandemic however this is still below the 2017-18 baseline. Business travel is essential in Cafcass in order to meet with Children and families and to attend court when ordered to do so.

Whilst has been an increase in flights during 2023, travel has been for business critical reasons.

In our offices where we are directly responsible for our electricity and gas, smart meters are used to ensure accurate billing for utilities and our expenditure on energy has reduced in recent years, the increases over the past 2 years reflects staff returning to the offices following the Covid 19 pandemic and is in line with pre-pandemic levels. Cafcass has made a commitment to a Green Tariff – 100% clean /renewable for our electricity for sites where we are directly responsible for utilities.

Flexible working continues to be fully embedded by the whole organisation, and this has resulted in lower emissions within the working environment.

Target Area 2		2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
	Non-hazardous waste: landfill (tonnes)	0	0	0	0	0
Non-financial indicators (Tonnes)	Non-hazardous waste: reused/ recycled (tonnes)	3.95	5.66	6.07	11.11	5.10
Reduced overall waste 	Incinerated with energy from waste	0	0	1.11	0	0
	Incinerated without energy recovery	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total waste (tonnes)</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>5.66</b>	<b>7.28</b>	<b>32.10</b>	<b>5.10</b>
Financial indicators		2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
Waste management costs 	Non-hazardous waste: landfill (£000s)	12.4	9.1	8.1	11	11
	Non-hazardous waste: reused/ recycled (£000s)	1.6	2.5	1.2	1.5	4
	<b>Total disposal (£000s)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>15</b>



## Target Area 2

### Minimising waste and promoting resource efficiency

#### Waste

Our waste management data is currently limited due to diverse lease arrangements across our 32 offices. We are aware that the sub-targets within the latest version of the Greening Government Commitments (GGC) 2021-2025 require reporting to be undertaken in a more granular detail in relation to waste and as a result of this Cafcass will be reviewing our recycling and waste arrangements throughout the whole estate. This will be reviewed over time as contracts are re-tendered. For some sites in shared buildings we receive a breakdown of cost for waste but do not receive figures in relation to volume of waste disposal.

Recycling is encouraged in all offices and all confidential paper waste continues to be recycled under a national scheme.

Via our IT contract 1 desktop, 7 laptops and 40 phones were disposed of during this financial year. 43 of these were reused, and 5 recycled.

#### Single use plastics

The [MoJ's single-use plastics policy](#), published in January 2019, continues to drive our work to remove single-use plastics, ensuring single-use plastics are only used in the Cafcass estate where no other viable alternatives are available.

#### Food waste

Cafcass does not procure food and therefore does not have a corresponding food waste disposal contract.

Indicator		2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
Non-financial indicators	<b>Water consumption</b> Total water consumption (m3)	1,018	1,297	128	906	193
	<b>Financial indicators</b>					
Water costs	<b>Water supply and sewage</b> (£000s)	7.86	11.2	29.3	22	7
	<b>Financial indicators</b>					

## Target Area 3

### Procuring sustainable products and services

Our use of water has remained steady over the last three years. The figures do show a slight increase in 2022, this is related to us now being in a better position to report and reporting on additional sites. Following the deregulation of water companies, we have a plan to tap into the de-regulated suppliers to see if any savings can be further achieved. This would allow more in-depth reporting across the estate improving our water metrics.

Target by 2025	Indicator	2023-24	2022-23	2021-21	2020-21	Baseline 2017-18
Reduce paper usage by at least 50%	Paper consumption (reams)	644	553	951	425	2,618
<b>Financial indicators</b>		<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>Baseline 2017-18</b>
Paper costs	Paper (£000s)	2.7	4	5	0.7	7

#### Reduction of paper

We are on track to meet our target for paper reduction. Our use of paper remains constant which we will keep under review. As Cafcass has now digitised the majority of its processes this makes it difficult to achieve further reductions.



## Target Area 4

### Procuring sustainable products and services

Cafcass is committed to meeting the Government Buying Standards (GBS) best practice specifications wherever possible which help deliver sustainable procurement to meet GGC targets.

Wherever possible we work collaboratively with other public bodies, particularly with our sponsor the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and with the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), part of the Cabinet Office. The majority of our procurement requirements are channelled through pre-existing public sector framework agreements set up by the CCS. Any requirements which are not covered by existing agreements will go through a competitive process with tenders in excess of £25,000 and will be open to the SME market.

Emphasis has increased within the Procurement Cycle to consider Modern Slavery and Social Values with every procurement undertaken using the social value model with at least 10% of the evaluation criteria dedicated to social value.

Sustainable procurement: we are on track to meet the government target of 33% of procurement spending to reach small and medium- sized enterprises (SMEs); spend with SMEs for 2023-24 stands at 41.37% of our spend with suppliers. Please note that our system records SMEs when they are entered into the finance system, if their status subsequently changes this would not be recorded.

## Target Area 5

### Nature recovery and biodiversity action plannings

Nature recovery and biodiversity action planning is not currently relevant to the Cafcass estate as we do not own any open spaces; we consider climate change within the Sustainability Steering Group.

## Target Area 6

### Adapting to climate change

In response to the updated Greening Government Commitments, Cafcass will be considering the development of a climate change action plan. In 2023-24 Cafcass undertook an audit of its sustainability activity and Cafcass was formulating a sustainability strategy for Cafcass for 2024-26 which was published in April 2024. This outlines our future plan of work.

## Our work plan for 2024-26

Our plan of work will be monitored through our Sustainability Steering Group. We will share the strategy and work of the steering group through various channels including live events around key topics.

Goal	Description	Date
1	We finalised and published our Sustainability Strategy 2024-26	May 2024
2	We will review and finalise the terms of reference for the Sustainability Steering Group	Jan 2025
3	We will complete our annual self assessment against the Greening Finance expectations	Mar 2025
4	We will recruit Sustainability Champions across the main areas of business	Jan 2025
5	We will ask children and their families how well they think we are doing and in what ways we can improve our sustainable working practices	Dec 2024
6	We will carbon baseline and cap our Estates portfolio	Mar 2025
7	We will carbon baseline and cap Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, including the impact of our pension scheme portfolio	Sep 2025
8	We will evaluate, baseline and set goals for progress against the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development	Dec 2025
9	We will refresh our Sustainability Strategy for 2026/2029	Mar 2026

We have a Sustainability Steering group chaired by the Director of Resources, which monitors our progress and promotes sustainability values within Cafcass. The group is made up of a cross section of colleagues from all parts of the organisation. In the past year the group has continued to expand its members to include a wider spectrum of operational staff. The aim of the group is to promote values of environmentally sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility in order to inform, inspire and find solutions to the challenges we all face in relation to climate change. The group is currently focused on a plan around embedding sustainability across the organisation.

Cafcass continues to be committed to sustainable practices which consider our environmental, economic and social output.

## Target Area 7

### Reducing environmental impacts from ICT and digital

A number of IT activities were undertaken in the year to support sustainability.

- Optimisation activity took place on the cloud environment, reducing the footprint and ensuring services were only used when required.
- New conferencing technology was deployed across the Cafcass office estate to support people in attending meetings at their local offices, reducing the amount of travel required.
- New multifunctional device printers and scanners were rolled out to all offices. These devices have a lower carbon footprint than the devices they replaced.

## Financial commentary

**In 2023-24 Cafcass received grant funding of £152.540m (2022-23: 143.535m) from the Ministry of Justice. Further to this, Cafcass also received additional non-cash budget to cover its £2.790m (2022-23: £1.930m) depreciation and amortisation cost.**

We also drew down from the sponsor separate additional funding of £1.996m (2022-23: £1.823m) for child contact intervention services, which are commissioned and managed by Cafcass.

A summary of how we spent our budget is shown below and further details are provided within our 2023-24 Annual Accounts in section 5.

Total spend reported in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure (£000)		
Staff costs	123,850	79.5%
Self-employed contractors	3,268	2.1%
Agency staff	3,555	2.3%
Depreciation and amortisation	2,790	1.8%
Partnership costs	1,994	1.3%
Other charges	20,269	13.0%
<b>Total spend reported</b>	<b>155,726</b>	

The Cafcass Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024 shows a net asset position of £0.362m (2022-23: £12.606m net liability position), including a net pension asset position of £2.045m (2022-23: £12.083m net pension liability position). The Statement of Financial Position net asset position includes liabilities falling due in future years which, to the extent that they are not to be met from Cafcass' other sources of income, may only be met by future grants or grants-in-aid from Cafcass'

sponsorship department. This is because, under the normal conventions applying to Parliamentary control over income and expenditure, such grants may not be issued in advance of need.

The net pension asset position as at 31 March 2024 is primarily due to the fair value of pension plan assets exceeding the present value of funded obligations, after adjustments for restrictions on surplus and minimum funding requirements. Further details explaining the movement in pensions are provided in Note 22 of the Annual Accounts.

The total of trade payables as at 31 March 2024 is £0.294m (2022-23: £0.903m).

Interest and late payment charges of £nil have been paid or claimed by creditors under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 (2022-23: £0.002m).

Parliament has voted Grant-in-Aid to Cafcass for the 12 months following the Statement of Financial Position date. Therefore, Cafcass operates as a going concern.

It is expected that Cafcass will continue to be fully funded and operate as a going concern for the 12 months following the publication date of this Annual Report and Accounts.



**Jacky Tiotto**

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Date: 10 December 2024





# Feedback, learning and change



## 3.1

### What are children and families telling us?

Our 'Ambitious for children' strategy confirms our active priority and intention to ask for and to learn from feedback from children, their families and carers. We consider feedback and the associated learning as a major driver of improvement and change, and it remains one of our five leadership improvement priorities in our national and operational service area improvement plans. Our feedback strategy sets out a range of mechanisms now in place where feedback is actively sought:

- **Complaints and compliments** from children and families;
- Feedback sought through conversations with families when we undertake **collaborative audits**;
- Feedback through our **new digital feedback** system;
- **Listen and learn conversations** focusing on learning through a restorative conversation when an individual has had a less than good experience of our services and support; and
- Seeking **feedback from partners as part of our annual regional performance boards**.

In addition, the Family Justice Young People's Board provides us with the child's experience and perspective. We have also established a Family Forum. Twenty-one parents with experience of the family court whose experience has not been good enough, share with us with feedback on what worked and what did not. We ask them to help us implement change aimed at improving the experience of families in the future.

#### What we know and how we know it?

- 2,799 digital feedback surveys have been submitted this year. 2,533 in private law and 266 in public law.
- 2,468 (88.2%) derive from adults and 331 (11.8%) from children.
- Average ratings via digital feedback are 4.2 out of 5 for children and 3.5 out of 5 for adults.
- For feedback through collaborative audits, we have had responses from 143 children, 1,453 adults, and 381 other professionals.
- The percentage of feedback from collaborative audit is 56% in private law and 44% in public law proceedings.
- Average ratings via collaborative audit are higher than through the digital feedback, with 4.1-4.5 out of 5 (where 5 is the best) across all questions for children and 3.97-4.22 out of 5 for adults across all survey questions. For other people who were significant to the child (solicitors, social workers, Independent Reporting Officers and foster carers) the average score was 4.7 out of 5.
- Approximately 75% of children and adults report positive experiences with us.
- Twenty-three listen and learn conversations were held in this reporting year, with the learning shared at local and national events.

We have identified clear learning themes that we are taking forward. A quarterly national report brings those themes together for senior leaders and members of the Cafcass board. Operational Service Area (OSA) reports, which include complaints and compliments provide local managers with information to consider in their learning and change priorities. These include:

### Our key messages from children's complaints:

We have heard children talk about how they trusted and liked their social worker, how they liked their honesty, explanations and listening. There are four things that we hear very clearly from children:

- Receiving letters helps children feel connected to their FCA and lessens their anxiety. Children say that letters are something to keep and refer to in the future;
- Understanding what is happening, what will happen next and how they will be informed is important to children and they tell us this regularly. Children want their FCA to speak to other people who know them and who are important to them;
- Sharing recommendations, even when they are not what children have said they think is best for them, is very important to them. When children provide negative feedback, it is often when they say that we didn't act in accordance with their wishes; and
- The opportunity to write to the judge is something most children want so that they can tell them in their own words what they want to happen.

### Our key messages from adults in feedback:

- Adults find it stressful when FCA appointments are rescheduled at short notice. They seek clearer understanding of early-stage processes, such as initial telephone interviews and the focus of these meetings.
- Adults appreciate clear and timely communication to avoid surprises in court reports.
- Feedback highlights the importance of FCAs recognising domestic abuse, coercive control, and emotional abuse accurately. Ensuring language and reports align with lived experiences is crucial.
- Improving the consideration of a child's unique needs and practical living arrangements in recommendations is important to parents.
- Consistent and clear descriptions of alienating behaviours and their impact in reports are valued by families.
- Families appreciate FCAs showing kindness, accuracy in details, and building respectful relationships throughout the process.



## 3.2

# What are we learning from complaints and serious incidents?

The Customer Service team and Complaints and Correspondence team, work together to provide children, their families, and those who are supporting them, with responses to their complaints when they are not happy with their experience of Cafcass.

The receipt, assessment and initial recording of complaints happens within our customer service team, based at the National Business Centre. The team assesses which complaints need allocating to a caseworker or a complaints manager, based on the complexity and severity of issues.

Our complaints policy encourages families to raise any concerns as soon as they arise and the policy is clear that we expect all staff to try to resolve issues through everyday conversations wherever possible.

Where an issue raised by a child and/or family member requires consideration independently of the local team, we have two routes for the complaint: early resolution or investigation. We aim to complete early resolutions within one working week and investigations of complaints within 20 working days. Our policy expectation is to complete investigations of complaints from children within 10 working days, acknowledging them on the same working day that they are received.

Complaints are progressed within the early resolution route where they are assessed as being possible to resolve more quickly through engagement with the complainant and the team working with the family. Investigations are undertaken in cases where the complaint requires a closer look, and a longer period of time to complete the work.

At the end of our complaints work, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, we refer them to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

### What we know about complaints in the 2023-24 reporting year

We investigated 819 complaints from adults, this is 404 fewer complaints (-33.0%) than in 2022-23. In addition to this, from 4 August last year, our published complaints policy recognised 'early resolution' as a route for complaint and in the eight months from August we recorded 405 early resolution complaints. We do not have comparable data for early resolution complaints as these only formally became part of our complaints policy from August 2023. Prior to this, early resolution was offered to people as a step before potential investigation but without the consistent, structured process which is now reflected in our management information.

In the same period, we investigated 24 complaints from children, twelve more than in the previous year and follows the move to centralise children's complaints within the Complaints and Correspondence function from April 2023, with a dedicated Children's Complaints Manager. A key success measure in our Strategic Framework was to record more feedback from children, including complaints. We view this as a positive development given that children do not typically complain or give feedback unless they feel it will be considered. We have been actively encouraging this feedback and appointed a dedicated children's complaints officer for this purpose.

In this reporting year, we did not have any complaints investigated by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) and we responded to 27 enquiries.

Our data is reported quarterly to the Corporate Management Team and our thematic data, which includes learning from complaints, reports quarterly to our Performance and Quality Committee. The new complaints policy published in April 2023, was positively received by partners and our wider community. Family members welcomed the two recognised routes for complaints and partners say it is more transparent. They have welcomed changes regarding the timescales for complaining and the emphasis on early conversations and resolving things as 'business as usual' where appropriate.

We are in the process of implementing a quality assurance framework to monitor performance against our required standards and the new complaints policies.

### Significant incident reports

Cafcass operates a significant incident process which is triggered when a child has been seriously harmed or has died in live family court proceedings or they are known to us, having been the subjects of previous proceedings. The intention for the organisation when this happens, is to coordinate internal responses to enquiries and investigations that are established, to support local authorities to protect any other children, to make sure that the welfare of our people involved is prioritised and to enable prompt and clear communication to sponsor government departments, the Cafcass board and Ofsted where required.

In accordance with our process, this requires immediate engagement with and oversight by the National or Deputy Director of Operations. They consider the information in all notifications and will direct actions, including child record or learning reviews where these are required. The national director determines which incidents are escalated to the Chief Executive. Where such escalations are made, consideration is given as to preparation for press contact, notification to the Cafcass board, government departments, the association of directors of children's services and the judiciary where this is necessary.

In this reporting year, there were 327 significant incident reports made. Three were the subject of internal learning reviews and there was one serious complaints review. All four of these reviews gave rise to a practice alert, our internal mechanism, led by the Cafcass principal social worker and issued to staff via personally addressed letters which set out the learning and clear instructions on what is to change.

**Learning from these incidents includes:**

- The quality of assessment in the work before first hearings in private law proceedings, including the use of 16A risk reports to the family court where there are concerns about the safety of a child and the increased risk to children from delayed proceedings, where a finding of fact hearing is recommended.
- The management oversight and challenge of advice to the court for children to be unified or reunified to parents where there has been previous harm or risk of harm.
- The assessment and analysis of information in previous records, including the importance of understanding the nature and implications for contact with children where a party in proceedings has previous convictions, engagement with local authority children's social care services and previous proceedings.

- The assessment of risk and harm of registered sex offenders applying for contact with children.
- Safeguarding children who are not subject to proceedings.
- Listening to adult and child victims of domestic abuse, using their own words in reports, not minimising the risk and violence by referring to it as historic and explaining rationales to the court where contact is recommended against the wishes of a child.



## 3.3

# The actions we have taken in response to feedback, complaints and serious incidents

In March 2023, we implemented a **system linking feedback surveys into all welcome and introduction letters and closure and goodbye letters**. Everyone can send us feedback should they wish to do so. From July 2024, we propose to extend this capability to other people who are significant to the child and with whom we engaged in our work.

We have **reviewed our initial letters in private law** so that the work to first hearing stage is clearer for families. We explain what will and will not happen and our telephone interviews now also do the same.

In response to the feedback about understanding children's additional needs in connection with child arrangement orders, we have developed in this reporting year, **a practice aid called, *A day in my life***. This is designed to help build a shared understanding for both parents and the FCA about what will work in the advice given to court when additional needs are taken into account.

**Extending learning into the model of practice to be tested in our private law reform area** (also known as the pathfinder court in Birmingham and Solihull) and

into the Cafcass private law improvement programme. We have plans to compare feedback about our proposed new way of working with what we already know and to enhance our understanding of family's experiences as we attempt to improve them.

**Feedback from parents living with domestic abuse is informing our improvement programme** led collaboratively with our SafeLives<sup>11</sup> secondees.

We have been **working alongside 'Dads Unlimited'**<sup>12</sup> to think about data on adult suicides (specifically fathers) in private law proceedings. Charity representatives from the organization are now formally members of our practice reference group – people with lived experience and with whom we report on and consider practice improvement.

Our **Child Impact Assessment Framework has been reviewed to provide clarity on our advised position on alienating behaviours**. We have developed practice scenarios to support practitioners and will follow this theme into practice week in 2024.

Centralising how we respond to children's complaints has given them greater visibility within the organisation, with more complaints from children recorded in the first six months of 2023-24 than in the previous year as a whole. **This is a key element of Cafcass' Strategic Plan 2023-26 which recognises that "success" will mean the volume of feedback increasing, especially from children.**

Having one manager with oversight of all children's complaints has also enabled more thematic analysis, helping us to identify the things children need from us more quickly.

The complaints team is now more closely connected to operational practice to enable learning and change, specifically through memberships of the **'next steps in national learning panel'**. **The panel is led by the national improvement service, and meets six weekly to review learning from complaints, feedback and serious incidents.**

### The Cafcass Family Forum

There are now 21 established members of the Family Forum. The main objective is for us to be able to learn from the experiences of adults in proceedings where the quality of our work has been less than good. Forum members are involved in working out with us how we can improve and change in response to their feedback. Forum members meet quarterly as a whole group and monthly to progress specific priority workstreams.

The Forum Manager chairs the meetings, which are attended by the Principal Social Worker and our Chief Executive.

During this reporting year, the Forum has been working on:

- **Contributing to the design of the new Cafcass website:** Family Forum members contributed their views and content and evaluated the information for families;

- **Producing better information for families:** The forum developed two explainer videos available to parents on our website – private law and public law - and our welcome letters were reviewed to be simpler for parents to understand;
- **Producing Family Forum Top Tips and improve information for families about the role of Cafcass:** There are now three Family Forum top tips for parents in their welcome pack and available on our website. The advice is to help parents think about how they can minimise the damaging impact of separation and court proceedings on their children. Another includes advice to parents on how to work positively with children's guardians and other professionals;
- **Contributing to the design of Planning Together for Children:** This support programme for parents who are separating has been influenced by members of the forum;
- **Helping produce guidance on sharing recommendations with families:** Cafcass' sharing recommendations guidance was produced with the Family Forum and videos were provided by members at internal training events;
- **Engaging with grandparents, wider family and other professionals' policy:** Improving the policy so that the experiences of grandparents were more closely considered; and
- **Engaging with children with disabilities and additional needs:** In response to feedback from families and from the experience of Family Forum members a practice aid was developed called ***A Day in My Life***. This helps FCA's engage in what everyday life looks and feels like for the child and helps build a picture of what needs to happen when considering recommendations on where they live and with whom and how they spend time.

<sup>11</sup> SafeLives is a UK-based charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. It works with organisations to transform the response to domestic abuse through provision of training, and multi-agency support. More information can be found at [safelives.org.uk](https://safelives.org.uk).

<sup>12</sup> Dads Unlimited is a charity that supports the emotional safety of men and those they care about, through supporting male victims of domestic abuse, supporting men with family separation, and supporting men's mental health. More information can be found at: [dadsunltd.org.uk](https://dadsunltd.org.uk).

Forum members continue to be involved in the domestic abuse practice reference group contributing their lived experience to our thinking and planning on practice improvement. They are involved in wider repositioning of the service to facilitate family time and also with the internal private law reform work.

*“The FCA made a huge difference to mine and my children’s life’s. My children opened up to her which they wouldn’t of done to just anyone. My youngest son was worried about meeting her so she arranged a telephone call to speak with him over the phone a week before which helped. Due to the length of the court process, the FCA made sure she saw my youngest son again to check his feelings were still the same.... even my solicitor commented on how thorough she was. She recognised what was happening to the children and wrote a really good report (as said by the court).She has done what was needed to keep my children safe and made what is an awful, difficult process a little bit easier for us all. Her goodbye letters to the children included the information they needed to know and has helped give some closure. Thank goodness she works for CAF/CASS and I am sure she will help many other children.”*

*“The Cafcass team member I spoke to was excellent, but before they were assigned to my call, I had two phone appointments missed by Cafcass without notification or communication. I absolutely understand that the unexpected can happen, but I just wanted to highlight the stress caused by the missed appointments. With the interview set to be focussed on my child and their protection, the calls were the highest priority for me. I’m sure you can imagine the anxiety in wanting to ensure I get all the important messages across, lots of stress and worry. To then have the call not happen twice left me worried this would somehow reflect badly on me. I was reassured by your team this would not be the case which helped. I’m very appreciative of Cafcass and your involvement in my case, I just thought I would share this to help you be informed.”*

*“Unfortunately, I was not given clear instructions about the role of Cafcass and what their involvement was regarding procedures and this caused a lot of confusion for me and impacted heavily on my mental health , I felt not treated with empathy as a victim of continual domestic abuse. What you could do better? Communicate clearly, query conflict of interests or confusion, Have more compassion and empathy.”*

*“As an immigrant, domestic abuse survivor and a ‘litigant in person’ I am literally invisible in the courtroom. I am sat at the back so I can’t hear anything and I am usually not allowed to say anything. I am extremely thankful to Cafcass not only for giving me a voice but also for presenting my situation to the court better than I would do it myself.”*



## Improving our engagement with children and families.

An important offer for children who have an experience of Cafcass is that we enable them to access information that we know about them and that we record on our case management system. Children can request this information through the Subject Access Request (SAR) process set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

**Figure 17: Number of Subject Access Request (SAR) applications in 2023-24**

SAR Summary 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024	#
Total number of SARs received	656
Total number of SARs requested by adults	608
Total number of SARs requested by adults in current proceedings	354
Total number of SARs requested by adults in closed proceedings	254
Total number of SARs requested by adults who were children in closed proceedings	41
Total number of SARs requested by children	7
Total number of SARs requested by children in current proceedings	2
Total number of SARs requested by children in closed proceedings	5

Feedback to us from children was that the process may be confusing and/or be very difficult for them if they are seeing information they were not aware of or they do not understand. They told us that we needed to improve how we provided them with access to information.

In April 2023, we launched ‘My Cafcass journey’ – our new name for subject access requests. This is a service now offered to all children who ask and it is tailored to their needs and circumstances. 36 children and young people have experienced this new service since the launch.

To pursue our commitment to improve our engagement with children all of the time, during 2023-24, **we introduced a dedicated freephone service called ‘Hear to Listen’, for children to tell us in their own words how they experienced our services.**

At the time of writing, 24 calls have been received directly from children. 2,746 calls received from parents and carers wanting to understand more about how the child in proceedings can contact us or to support them in helping the child to speak and to let us know about their experiences.

We have also **developed a range of top tips guides to support children and families in the Family Justice System.** These have been designed by the FJYPB and Cafcass Family Forum using ideas about how to communicate the role of Cafcass and provide signposting advice and guidance. They are available in ten different languages.

## 3.4

# Leadership, culture, accountability and improvement priorities



Our practice framework 'Together with children and families' was developed internally and introduced fully in 2021. Our intended aim was to create and implement a relationship-based approach for all operational and corporate functions so that this informed every process, contact and experience for children and their families. At the start of 2023, the Together Practice Expectations were published. These expectations set out what was required over the year, as we moved into the second full year of implementation. They included:

1. Children receiving introductory and good-bye letters more consistently.
2. Strengthened use of the Assessment and Child's Plan.
3. Using family storyboards to explain to children what is happening in their proceedings.
4. Use of appreciative inquiry with children and families and with one another.
5. Increasing the use of group supervision to have reflective practice discussions.

Some key expectations relating to practice became formal requirements of policy, for example, the requirement to send letters to all children and to share the recommendations being reported to the court with children and their families.

Our explicit intentions with regard to respectful work with children and families, informed by effective social work analysis and trusting relationships, are becoming our operating norm. There is more to do, as this report describes, to achieve all that we plan for children consistently. In addition to the formal processes of performance, accountability and improvement, we have also been trying to be creative and innovative, particularly in engaging the FJYPB in our progress. This year, two very practical innovations were realised:

- 'The Taking Me Seriously' film which explains to children what they can expect from Cafcass and was developed collaboratively with Together Champions and the Family Justice Young People's Board.
- 'Getting to Know Me' uniqueness spinner which is a physical child engagement aid to support conversations about what is special about them such that it informs the submissions that FCAs make to the court.



These next sections of the report, describe what we plan to do to secure the operating environment we need to enable our ambitions for children who find themselves in need of our support and help. Our ambitions are clearly described in section 1.4 and derive from the entitlements and expectations that we believe children have when we are in contact and working with them (figure 18).

Figure 18: Our ambition to children

### Why will we continue to get better at what we do for children at Cafcass

Every child is **entitled** to an exceptional experience, every time and everywhere from everyone who works at Cafcass, every family court adviser and every children's guardian

It is not acceptable for any child to have a lesser experience, to be left at risk, or to be harmed by the uncertainty of unresolved family conflict and delay

Children have **a right** to expect their FCA and guardian to listen, to act (do something) and make a difference to their lives

Children also have **a right** to expect us collectively to listen, to act and to change in response to their feedback

Children are **entitled** to have access to their records which are written respectfully and kept up to date

Our strategic priorities are supplemented by a national improvement plan with operational and corporate priorities. **Listening to children – Lighting the way, is our identifying description for all improvement** work in the year ahead. Progress is managed and overseen through the range of established performance management processes set out in section 2.3 on page 54.

Going forwards there are three underpinning areas of focus for our five practice and five leadership operational improvement priorities, which have already been set out above in detail:

1. **Further improving and increasing consistency in the quality and effectiveness of practice** (Table A).
2. **Building on our most effective management practice** (Table B).
3. **Making the culture of learning not blaming a reality for everyone in operational services** (Table C).

Our corporate resources are fundamental enablers to effective social work practice and many of the associated functions relate to and involve direct engagement with children and families. To that end, the corporate improvement priorities set out in table D on page 113 are those that we consider require focus, attention and faster progress.

Figure 19: Table A

Our practice culture and mission	What children and families will experience (exemptions to policy must be agreed by a manager and the rationale recorded)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We are committed to <b>the rights of children to be active participants in decisions about their lives</b>, and for their voices to be heard in their words.</li> <li>2. <b>Our policies and practice quality standards reflect those rights, are defined by their feedback, and are based on learning that safeguards their welfare.</b></li> <li>3. All our work at Cafcass is undertaken through developing <b>constructive and respectful relationships based on personalised communications.</b></li> <li>4. FCAs and guardians are curious and able to talk about <b>what is special and unique about children</b> so that their life, wishes, and feelings are understood. This understanding is reflected in the advice to the court.</li> <li>5. <b>The perspectives and contributions of others who know the children and the family are valued, sought, and used</b> by FCAs and guardians to understand what life is like for the child.</li> <li>6. FCAs and guardians <b>accurately assess harm, impact of harm, and the risk of further harm</b> for children based on detailed analysis – especially where there is raised domestic abuse.</li> <li>7. FCAs and guardians understand the cause and impact of delay for every child. They are mindful of how they can contribute to delay. They <b>set out a timetable to conclude proceedings within the child’s timescales in the Child’s Plan</b> for every child and take action if that timetable is breached.</li> <li>8. <b>The child’s voice is amplified</b> in reports to court so that they are heard as loudly as the adults.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>All children will benefit from personalised letters to introduce and end their relationship with their FCA or guardian.</b></li> <li>2. <b>All children are seen in person by their FCA or guardian</b> in accordance with the policy and guidance, including the use of practice aids.</li> <li>3. When children are <b>seen in school, care is taken</b> that they do not experience stigma or miss out on learning or breaks.</li> <li>4. FCAs and guardians <b>keep in touch with children throughout their proceedings</b> to know what life is like for them/ what is happening.</li> <li>5. <b>Supervision is requested by practitioners and managers and recorded in line with policy</b> - especially when there is a proposal for an additional expert.</li> <li>6. <b>The Assessment and Child’s Plan</b> is used effectively to support thinking, analysis and to set out rationales for their assessment, analysis, and advice to court – <b>a transparent record of how professional judgement was achieved.</b></li> <li>7. <b>The thinking and recommendations of practitioners are always shared with children and families</b> and their responses are recorded and conveyed to the court – in their own words.</li> <li>8. Children and families can expect <b>an initial and final analysis</b> in public law proceedings.</li> <li>9. <b>Letters are written to Independent Reviewing Officers</b> at the end of all public law proceedings. Copies are provided to children and to their parents and carers where this is appropriate.</li> </ol>

Table B

Our management culture and mission	What we will see in organisational change and practice (exemptions to policy must be agreed by a manager and the rationale recorded)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Managers are actively concerned about your wellbeing, professional development, and career aspirations – <b>supporting you to be well at work and successful in your role.</b></li> <li>2. Managers understand their role in mediating the relationship between you and the organisation, <b>supporting and sustaining your morale</b>, and enabling your engagement in learning, change, and improvement.</li> <li>3. Managers understand and are able to <b>balance your professional independence with your professional accountability</b> in adhering to policy requirements and consistently achieving quality standards. This includes registration with Social Work England.</li> <li>4. Managers understand <b>the positive impact of supervision and management oversight on the quality and effectiveness of practice</b> – and adhere to policy.</li> <li>5. Managers are able to <b>balance compliance with policy and standards with reflection and learning</b> in supervision, audit, and observations. They are clear about your achievements and areas for development</li> <li>6. Managers understand what constitutes a ‘balanced workload’ and <b>what is reasonable to expect of you as an experienced, competent, and confident FCA or guardian.</b></li> <li>7. Managers are committed to making diversity, equality, and inclusion a reality for you. They seek to understand the impacts of <b>bias, prejudice, and discrimination</b> on you and work with you to mitigate those experiences.</li> <li>8. Managers understand the impact of social work with children and families on you. <b>They will help you to access support.</b> They will set clear boundaries and protective actions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Initiation of Phase 1 of our career and learning pathway</b> for Family Court Advisers, Children’s Guardians, and Service Managers.</li> <li>2. <b>Reduced variability (narrowing the gap) in rates of team sickness absence, retention, and vacancy.</b> More speedy resolution of HR processes, including the use of performance improvement plans.</li> <li>3. Clarity in expectations and an <b>increased participation in team meetings, group supervisions and Practice Week (narrowing the gap).</b></li> <li>4. <b>A balance of remote and in-person team meetings, group supervisions and team meetings.</b></li> <li>5. Further increase in <b>the effective use of supervision and management oversight</b> in raising the quality and effectiveness of practice – including follow up (<i>narrowing the gap</i>).</li> <li>6. The revised <b>Practice &amp; Learning Review</b> policy and guidance will be initiated, to include follow up from supervision, audit and significant incidents. Data will be reviewed at the Recovery Board.</li> <li>7. The introduction of a <b>‘Framework for a Balanced Workload’</b> setting out what is reasonable to expect of a competent and confident FCA or guardian. – arrangements for allocations, transfers, and closures (<i>narrowing the gap</i>).</li> <li>8. The <b>talent programmes are reviewed and made clearer</b>, including expectations of time allowance and manager support (<i>narrowing the gap</i>).</li> <li>9. The policy and criteria for the <b>use of performance improvement plans</b> will be reviewed and re-set (<i>narrowing the gap</i>).</li> </ol>



Table C

Our leadership culture and mission	What we will strengthen further
1. Leaders at all levels are <b>focused on achieving what is best for children, and their families</b> , taking account of and responding to the uniqueness of children and families, initiating change and improvement from their feedback.	1. The <b>arrangements for obtaining feedback from children and families</b> in audits will be made clearer with the support of business services colleagues.
2. Leaders understand and recognise <b>the complexity of social work with children and families</b> , providing practitioners and managers with the support, supervision, training, and oversight they need to reduce risk.	2. A work programme will be established with HMCTS to change the <b>C100 to include ethnicity and an 'in whose best interest' statement</b> .
3. Leaders create a working environment and conditions that encourage <b>self-improvement, self-awareness and self-evaluation</b> – recognising and rewarding achievements and success.	3. The arrangements for requesting <b>level 2 police checks</b> will be reviewed and relaunched with revised guidance.
4. Leaders <b>involve colleagues at all levels in developing initiatives and proposing changes</b> to improve the quality and effectiveness of practice.	4. The <b>learning from child safeguarding practice reviews with similar recommendations</b> for Cafcass will be the subject of a bi-annual review of progress at the performance and learning CMT meeting.
5. Leaders model respectful relationships and are committed to learning and improving their own practice in ensuring <b>diversity, equality and inclusion</b> .	5. The <b>ChildFirst case management system</b> will have a priority development to record and report recommendations together with the outcome of those recommendations. Case closure will address the reasons for any difference in recommendation and outcome.
6. Leaders create <b>a culture of learning not blaming</b> , creating the trust needed to support honest and <b>constructive professional discussion</b> , even when things go wrong.	6. Managers and practitioners will be required to undertake <b>a self-assessment of their respective quality standards</b> in PLRs.
7. Leaders at Cafcass set policy and practice quality standards and hold practitioners <b>accountable for those standards without compromising their professional independence</b> . They apply the same principles to themselves.	7. Local leaders will be required to obtain <b>authority for local initiatives that potentially create variation in practice and performance</b> .
8. Our <b>performance and accountability processes are reasonable and applied fairly</b> , including the application of the criteria for career progression, confirmation, and recruitment.	8. The <b>social work registration database will be improved</b> to record the date of qualification, start with Cafcass, and registration number. The annual snapshot of the workforce will be reinstated to align with DfE.
	9. The Recovery and Improvement Board will consider the <b>detail of missed QAI audits and shortfalls in undertaking collaborative audits</b> .

Table D

Our corporate culture and mission	What we will strengthen further
1. All Heads of Corporate and Business services professions will <b>set out how their service can make the most difference to children and families; assess how well they are doing; and have a plan for making improvements</b> .	1. Corporate and Business Services Leaders will develop and set out clear priorities for the <b>Together promise</b> (the way in which corporate functions use the practice framework), reporting on progress as required.
2. Leaders and managers in Corporate and Business services will <b>demonstrate they are meeting the expectations for visible and accessible leaders, as set out in the management quality standards</b> .	2. All leaders and managers will <b>self-assess against the management standards, select an annual development objective and evaluate in the new PLR system</b> .
3. Our <b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy will be actively led across the organisation with performance evidence, oversight and formal reporting</b> .	3. We will publish our <b>updated equality, diversity and inclusion priorities</b> , including an annual update on progress, making sure the policy conversations are led across all teams with progress reported as required.
4. We will <b>prioritise the sourcing and collation of feedback</b> and corresponding change and improvement.	4. We will <b>host an annual staff survey</b> and ensure national leadership and local actions for 2024-25 are progressed in full.
5. We will <b>prioritise connection to and visible leadership in teams with a balance of in person and virtual working</b> .	5. We will set out basic and consistent <b>expectations for in person and virtual engagement, supported by our estates strategic priorities</b> , and an <b>annual programme of regional in-person and virtual leadership live events</b> .
6. New colleagues will receive an <b>effective induction</b> to Cafcass and to their team that quickly enables them to belong, perform and progress in their role.	6. Our new <b>virtual and in-person induction programme</b> will be launched and evaluated, complemented by mandatory guidance and training for managers.
7. We will <b>encourage innovation and professional excellence</b> in all business and corporate services functions.	7. We will <b>identify priorities for innovation, digitisation and efficiency</b> and seek corporate management team and board sign off for the annual programme.
8. All <b>communications and resources for children and families</b> will be clear and accessible and support their effective participation with us.	8. We will develop and test a <b>new suite of resources to support new practice arrangements in the Private Law Pathfinder</b> in Birmingham and Dorset, and identify which can be implemented in our standard private law operational arrangements.
9. We will prioritise the <b>health and safety</b> of all colleagues and the policies and arrangements to keep them safe and well at work.	9. We will <b>develop and implement a new strategic priority and associated work programme for health and safety</b> , including a new managing unacceptable behaviour policy with regular testing, performance oversight and senior leadership reports to the Cafcass board.
10. We will <b>develop and improve our policies and leadership in respect of sickness absence</b> to support all managers to give a priority to employee wellbeing.	10. We will <b>revise and implement new arrangements for managing attendance and develop enhanced training</b> for managers in its implementation.

# Accountability report



## 4.1

### Corporate governance

#### Directors' report

The Chair of the Cafcass Board is Sally Cheshire CBE and the Deputy Chair of the Cafcass Board is Professor Eileen Munro CBE.

The Board comprises non-executive members, listed below, who have been appointed in accordance with the Membership, Committee and Procedure Regulations 2005.

#### Cafcass Board membership:

- **Sally Cheshire** CBE Chair
- **Professor Eileen Munro** CBE Deputy Chair
- **Catherine Doran** Chair of the People Committee
- **Helen Jones** Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
- **Paul Grant** Chair of the Performance and Quality Committee (left in September 2023)
- **Catharine Seddon**
- **Dalwardin Babu** (joined in September 2023)
- **Joanna Nicolas** Co-opted Board member
- **Mandy Jones**
- **Peter Fish**
- **Rohan Sivanandan**
- **Steven Cox** (joined in September 2023)

#### Register of interests

Board members have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest; a register of interests can be found on our [website](#).

#### Information assurance

Cafcass agrees that no unauthorised disclosure of personal data is acceptable but acknowledges that the risk cannot be entirely eliminated. There is a commitment from Cafcass, the Board and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to continue the work to focus on mitigation and there are improvements in place to seek to lower the number of data breaches, mitigate the impact when they do occur.

In 2023-24, Cafcass recorded 463 data incidents of which 365 were classified as personal data breaches, 262 of which were avoidable. Of the 365 data breaches 32 were logged as breaches caused by third parties, resulting in 333 breaches by Cafcass and of the 333, 79% (262) were 'avoidable'.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total number of data incidents investigated	454	523	463
Confirmed breaches	321	404	365
Significant breaches reported to the ICO	8	2	8

Eight of these avoidable personal data breaches fell within the legal requirement for reporting to the Information Commissioner's Office. Cafcass worked with a total of 89,787 new and existing children's cases in 2023-24, with a data breach occurring in 0.41% of children's cases. This remains an extremely low number when considering the volume of information processed by Cafcass in its open work and the number of staff handling that information through Cafcass systems. Monthly information governance communications continue to be shared about data protection to ensure improved awareness and reporting of incidents.

## Statement of accounting officer's responsibilities

**Under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the Secretary of State has directed Cafcass to prepare for each financial year a Statement of Accounts in the form and on the basis set out in the Accounts Direction. The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of Cafcass and of its net resource outturn, application of resources, changes in taxpayers' equity and cash flows for the financial year.**

In preparing the accounts, the Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the Government Financial Reporting Manual and in particular to:

- Observe the Accounts Direction issued by the secretary of State, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis.
- Make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis.
- State whether applicable accounting standards as set out in the Government Financial Reporting Manual have been followed and disclose and explain any material departures in the financial statements.
- Prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

The Principal Accounting Officer of the Ministry of Justice has appointed the Chief

Executive as Accounting Officer of Cafcass. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding Cafcass' assets, are set out in 'Managing Public Money' published by HM Treasury.

As far as the Accounting Officer is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which Cafcass' auditors are unaware. She has taken all steps possible to make herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that Cafcass' auditors are aware of that information.

The Accounting Officer confirms that the annual report and accounts as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable. She takes personal responsibility for the annual report and accounts and the judgements required for determining that it is fair, balanced and understandable.

## Governance statement

**Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body for which I, Jacky Tiotto, am the Chief Executive and the Accounting Officer. I am personally responsible and accountable to Parliament for the organisation and quality of the work carried out by Cafcass, including its use of public money and the stewardship of its assets.**

There have been no material changes in our governance framework during the financial year. Our governance arrangements satisfy the requirements of the main principles of the code 'Corporate governance in central government departments: Code of Good Practice' that are relevant to Cafcass. I consider our Governance Framework to be effective.

### The Ministry of Justice

As a non-departmental public body Cafcass is accountable to our sponsor department, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). We work within the strategic objectives agreed with the MoJ. We agree an annual delivery plan with the MoJ which reflects our statutory duties, our contribution to the MoJ targets, and our plans to deliver efficiency targets.

Regular meetings have been held with the MoJ to allow scrutiny of arrangements. We work closely with the MoJ on policy development, and we contribute in agreed, defined ways to the MoJ policy objectives for the family justice system.



### The Cafcass Board

The Board use their expertise and experience to establish the organisation's strategic aims and objectives. Their work is supported by four committees:

1. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: provides assurance to the Board and Accounting Officer on audit, risk and control issues.
2. Performance and Quality Committee: supports the Board in overseeing the performance of services, the quality of casework and the impact of that work on children and families, Cafcass and the courts.
3. People Committee: provides assurance to the Board over the policy and strategy frameworks for the recruitment, retention, reward and development of people.
4. Remuneration Committee: which considers proposals on the remuneration of executive directors and other organisational pay issues of a significant and strategic dimension.

The Board has also established time-limited Committees to scrutinise the delivery of the public and private Law Improvement Programmes and the impact of that work on children, young people and their families. The Public Law Improvement Programme Committee was established in September 2022. The Private Law Improvement Programme Committee commenced in 2024-25.

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) works across the family justice system to promote the voice of the child in family court proceedings and is integral to the family justice reform process. A representative of the FJYPB attends each Cafcass Board meeting, providing an update about its work and scrutinising and challenging the work of the Board in the best interests of the children and families we serve.

Meetings attended per member of those eligible to attend:

Board member	Board meeting	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Performance and Quality Committee	People Committee
Sally Cheshire	4 of 4	1 of 1*	1 of 1	n/a
Eileen Munro	3 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Catherine Doran	4 of 4	2 of 4	n/a	2 of 2
Catharine Seddon	4 of 4	3 of 4	n/a	n/a
Helen Jones	4 of 4	4 of 4	n/a	n/a
Joanna Nicolas	4 of 4	n/a	2 of 3	n/a
Mandy Jones	4 of 4	3 of 4	n/a	2 of 2
Paul Grant	1 of 2*	n/a	2 of 2*	1 of 1*
Peter Fish	4 of 4	n/a	4 of 4	n/a
Rohan Sivanandan	4 of 4	n/a	n/a	2 of 2
Dalwardin Babu	2 of 2*	1 of 1	n/a	n/a
Steven Cox	2 of 2*	2 of 2	1 of 1	1 of 1

\*Dalwardin Babu and Steven Cox were appointed as Board members in September 2023 and attended and observed Committee meetings as part of the induction process. Paul Grant stepped down from the Board in September 2023 at the end of his maximum term in office. Sally Cheshire attended and observed one of each committee meetings through the year in her role as Chair of the Cafcass Board.

The Board meet on a quarterly basis and meetings are attended by all Board members including co-opted Board members and the Chief Executive and Executive Directors. Representatives of the Ministry of Justice sponsor department and the FJYPB are invited to attend and take part in discussions. Stakeholders and members of the public are invited to observe Board meetings on at least two occasions every calendar year and where possible, all meetings. Stakeholders and members of the public are invited to submit questions before and after Board meetings, to which they receive a written response.

The Performance and Quality Committee and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee are mandated to meet on a quarterly basis during the year. The People Committee is mandated to meet twice annually. The Remuneration Committee meets annually, more often if needed to manage particular remunerations or terms of service issues.

Standing reports provided to the Board at their quarterly meetings cover reports from the following:

- The Chief Executive who, together with directors, provides updates on current performance, delivery of strategy, risk, issues, and successes.
- The FJYPB reports on its work programme and seeks input from the Board on key issues.
- Committee chairs provide key updates from recent committee meetings.
- Governance reports on finance, risk, people and performance were introduced as a standing item in July 2023. The finance and risk reports are delivered at every Board meeting, the people and performance reports are delivered at alternate Board meetings.

Additional reports during the period have covered:

- Development and delivery of the Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22 (April 23).
- Development and delivery of the Strategic Plan 2023-26 (July 23).
- Strategic Plan Launch 2023-26 (November 23).
- Development and delivery of the Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 (February 23).

## Internal management structure

The Chief Executive was supported during the year by three Directors, a Chief People Officer, and two Deputy Directors. Together they make up the Corporate Management Team (CMT): the Chief People Officer, the Director of Strategy, the Director of Resources, the National Director of Operations, the Deputy Director of Operations and the Deputy Director for Improvement and Principal Social Worker.

CMT meet weekly and follow a governance and decision-making cycle which allows discussion in themed meetings and includes a range of senior managers across the organisation in attendance. The recovery board established during the pandemic remains in place and meets fortnightly, being chaired by the Chief Executive. Its functions now focused on recovery and improvement.

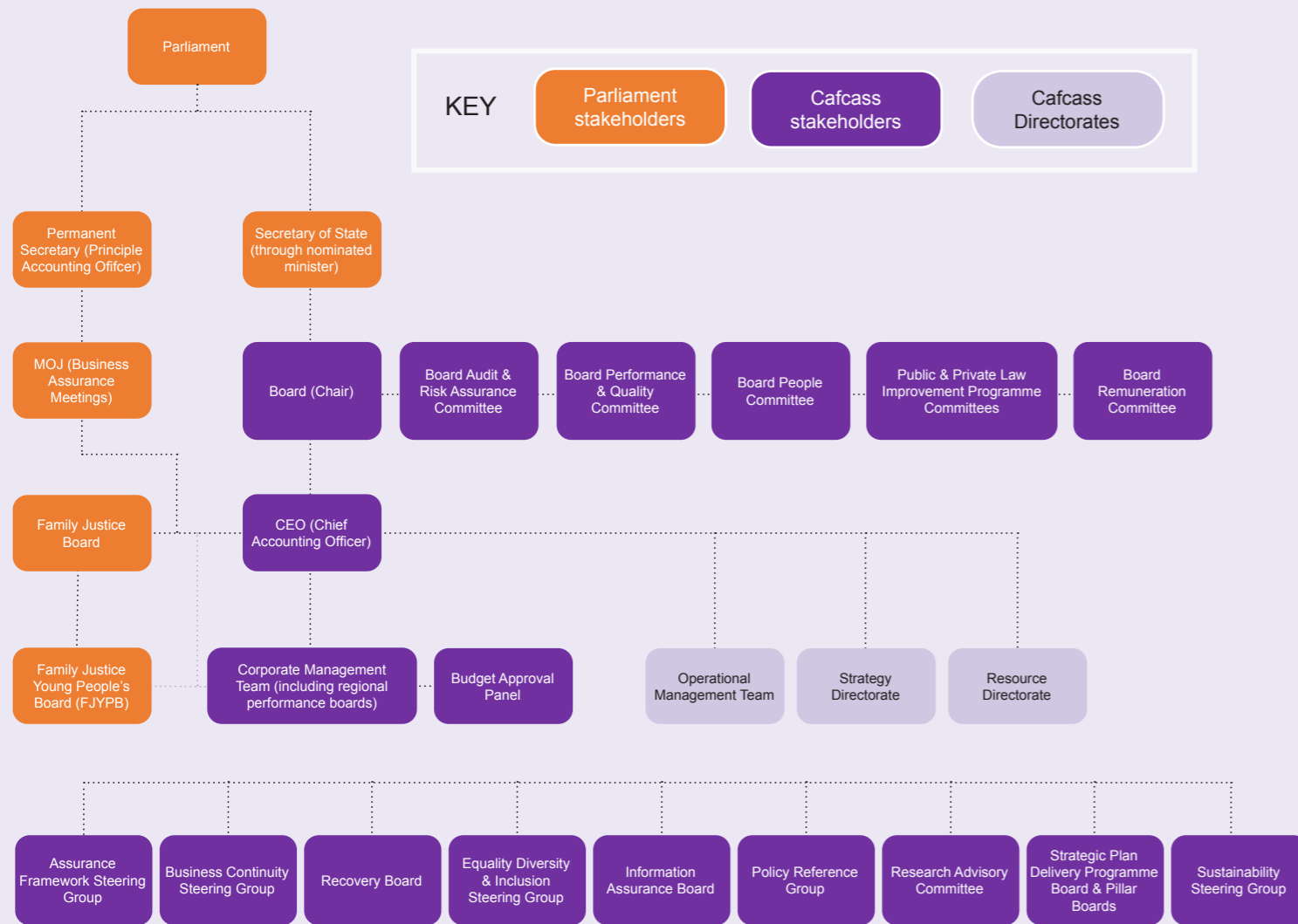
The Operational Management Team (OMT) is led by the National Director of Operations. Its membership is made up of the Assistant Directors, operational heads of practice, and representatives from teams that directly support operational services including Finance, Human Resources and Business Analysis. The OMT meets monthly to manage performance across the country.

Service area meetings take place locally every month in each service area to lead and implement corporate and operational decisions into local actions. Local team meetings complete this cascade structure and process, which includes the learning both from things we could have done better and from best practice.

The Directors of Strategy and Resources meet regularly with their managers to review performance across their respective directorates.



## CAFCASS GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



Internal boards and groups are managed by members of the CMT to ensure that we remain up to date with regulations and requirements in line with good governance principles. These include the Assurance Framework Steering Group, Business Continuity Steering Group, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group, Information Assurance Board, Policy Reference Group, Research Advisory Group, Strategic Plan Delivery Programme Board & Pillar Boards, and the Sustainability Steering Group.

The Chair of the Cafcass Board is Sally Cheshire CBE.

During 2023-24, the Board continued to govern and perform its role effectively and Board members worked closely with members of the CMT to provide strong leadership to achieve our priorities.

The Chair is confident that the quality of the data used by the Board is robust. All reports prior to submission to the Board are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes by senior managers. The effectiveness of the systems that generate the financial and performance data contained within the reports is evidenced through positive internal audit and inspection results.

We aim to keep reports clear, concise and focused on the purpose of the Board's review. An example of this is our performance report, which provides an overall high-level position and assessment of our performance against our strategic objectives and risks and is aligned with the corporate work programme, which drives the actions needed to meet our objectives.

## Assurance arrangements

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has oversight of the organisation's governance, risk and internal control frameworks. It receives reports on matters of assurance and oversees the preparation and publication of the financial statements.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee oversees the internal audit programme work and delivery arrangements. The Head of Internal Audit role and internal audit programme are provided through the Government Internal Audit Agency.

In line with our Assurance Framework, we report annually on assurance to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. The annual assurance report identifies the internal controls mapped against the three lines of defence (i.e. frontline and management controls, management monitoring and independent/external assurance) and how they are performing. This process is supported by an internal steering group which is chaired by the Director of Resources.

The 2023-24 Assurance Report confirmed that the control environment was adequate and supported the Governance Framework and the services to children and families. The report also provides a mechanism for identifying areas to be included in the Government Internal Audit Agency audit programme for further scrutiny of the performance of controls. Review of the compliance against Functional Standards showed good progress being made on compliance against the mandatory elements with actions plans in place to address improvements.

## Internal audit

Our appointed internal auditors are the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). There is a strong annual programme

negotiated with directors and the Chief Executive. The planned programme of audit work was completed during the year and was awarded an overall assurance of Substantial. The programme included four audits covering:

- **Business Continuity** - Rating - Substantial.
- **Risk Management & Corporate Governance** - Rating - Substantial.
- **Management of attendance** - Rating - Moderate.
- **Net zero** - Due to the narrow focus of this review and the relatively small scale of relevant activity within Cafcass' remit, this report is not accompanied by an assurance opinion.

All actions arising from recommendations made by the Internal Auditor are allocated to named officers who are charged with implementation. Medium and high-risk recommendations are also maintained in a central log held within the Members Office. While the named officers are responsible for completion of the recommendation and updating of the central log, the Members Office also seek assurance on completion of the actions. The updated log of recommendations is presented to each meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

## Business continuity planning

Business continuity planning provides assurance of resilience within our processes (such as IT systems) so that we can continue to deliver our services effectively during unexpected disruptive events. Business continuity planning and incident response is overseen by our Business Continuity Steering Group and Incident Management Team, and both are chaired by the Director of Resources.

## How we manage risk

Our risk management policy sets out our approach to risk management and outlines our responsibilities in the management of risk throughout the organisational structure, including how risk is escalated.

This includes the responsibility of CMT members (Executive Directors) who are senior risk owners of strategic risks and responsible for reporting and ensuring changes to strategic risks are reported to CMT, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Board.

The risk management function is managed and delivered within the Resources Directorate and the risk management policy is reviewed every three years.

Risk is formally reported to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Board on a quarterly basis and details strategic risks and above tolerance organisational risks and mitigation actions being taken. Organisational level risks are recorded and maintained within the Organisational Risk Register, whereby risk owners are responsible for recording and updating on the status of risks as part of the quarterly risk reporting process. Internal controls that help manage and reduce risk are monitored through our Assurance Framework and categorised using a three-line of defence model: frontline and management controls, management monitoring and independent/ external assurance). The strategic risk report and the Organisational Risk Register is reviewed quarterly by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Board.

The risk profile during financial year 2023-24 focused on eight Strategic Risk Themes mapped against our strategic plan. The risk environment has remained generally static in the reported period and no new strategic risks were reported. Despite a strong focus on mitigation the risk profile remained high, predominantly due to persistent pressures in the family justice system and our overall risk appetite where we take an averse approach to practice related risks and a cautious approach to people and partner risks. There is also a strong dependency with partners in the delivery of our work, which impacts our control over the likelihood of the risk occurring.

Our strategic risk profile at year end was:

**Risk to children:** The risk to the welfare of children arising from delay in the capacity of many courts to make timely decisions about their arrangements and futures, continued to be assessed as 'significant' throughout 2023-24. Mitigations to control the risk and its impact have included FCA workloads being reduced and the introduction of Operational Service Area (OSA) plans which include the suite of best for children measures. Practice Quality Standards were introduced in public and private law which included understanding the impact of and taking action on delay. Changes were implemented to the reconfiguration of operational management arrangements and the final version of the Management Quality Standards together with ten Management Fundamentals were formally launched at the Leadership Conference in May 2023. HR undertook regular face-face exit interviews to identify the main reasons why people are leaving Cafcass and the induction programme and training development programme were revised and refreshed to reflect learning from feedback and significant incident response. It is anticipated that this thematic risk is expected to remain significant due to the nature of social work in safeguarding children and the interdependence with partners.

**Demand, delay and capacity:** Demand, delay and capacity was consistently assessed as a fundamental risk and treated as an issue during Q1 to Q3 because of the additional work arising from delayed proceedings causing additional pressures on FCAs and managers. During Q4, based on the evidence that the controls and mitigating actions are working, the risk reduced to significant.

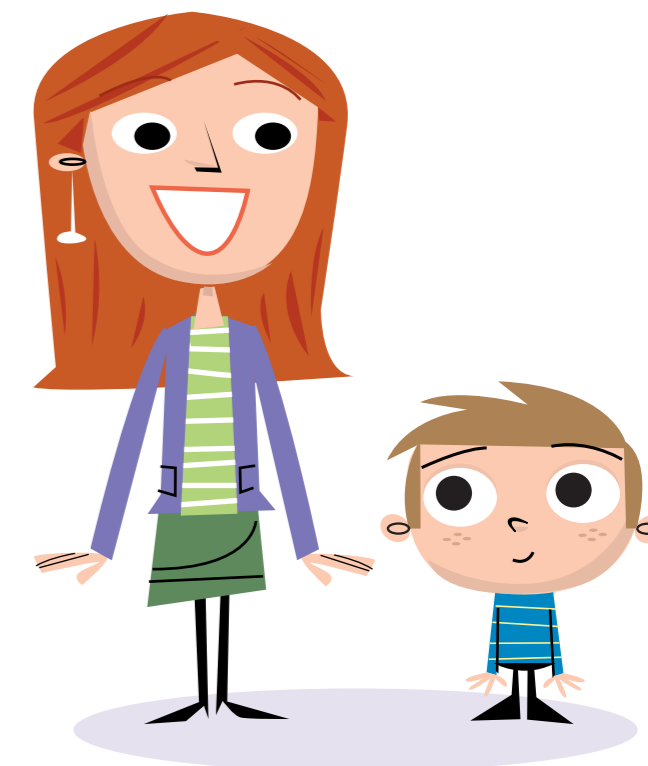
The introduction of Operational Service Areas (OSA) improvement plans and specialist training for social work managers positively has helped to identify areas in need of targeted support. In addition, the outcome of Ofsted's inspection and the staff survey had a positive impact. During the year, prioritisation remained the main alternative to preventing frontline and managers becoming overwhelmed. Post assessment hubs remain the key mechanism to case progression and throughput of work on children's cases. Our case progression programme continues.

Figure 20: Quarterly assessment and trend of strategic risks for 2023-24

Strategic risk	Quarter			
	Q1/23	Q2/23	Q3/23	Q4/24
Risk to children	↔	↔	↔	↔
Demand, delay and capacity	↔	↔	↔	↓
Staff retention and attraction	↔	↔	↔	↔
Manageable budget	↔	↔	↔	↓
Digital and technology	↔	↔	↔	↔
Information and knowledge management	↔	↔	↔	↔
Change infrastructure	↔	↔	↔	↔
Reputation - partners and stakeholders	↔	↔	↔	↑

Key: ↔ No change in risk ↓ Decrease in risk ↑ Increase in risk

1-5	(Minor) Acceptable level of risk. Risk is managed within the local business area.
6-11	(Moderate) Risk acceptable but may require monitoring. Consider if additional controls to reduce risk are available (where cost effective and proportional). May require escalation to next management level for information if deemed to be increasing or guidance on acceptable response/action.
12-15	(Significant) Risk exceeds desirable level. Identify additional controls. Requires escalation to next management level for information and guidance on acceptable response/action.
16-25	(Critical) Risk exceeds acceptable levels. Identify additional controls to reduce and manage risk and ensure contingency plans are in place. Immediately report to the next management level.



**Staff retention:** The risk has been consistently assessed as significant during the year. Vacancy levels for operational staff remained high and recruitment continued to be challenging in some parts of the country. Despite this, we continued to be able to recruit. Career and Learning pathways continued to be developed to enable staff to progress within Cafcass. Mitigation continues to be focused on succession planning and development of career and learning progression pathways for staff.

**Manageable budget:** The risk has been consistently assessed as significant during the year. Mitigation continues to be focused on maintaining strong communication routes with the Ministry of Justice to keep it appraised of forecast through strong financial oversight and to ensure there is timely discussion and negotiation. Various arrangements were put in place to assist staff from the impact of rising inflation, such as a temporary increase to fuel reimbursement and to allow claims for low emission zone charges incurred during claimable business journeys.

**Digital and technology:** The risk has been consistently assessed as minor during the year. Investment in system development and equipment continued to be delivered against plans. Related supplier Key Performance Indicators continued to be met and customer satisfaction has been maintained at a very high level.

**Information and knowledge management:** The risk has been consistently assessed as moderate during the year. The identification and reporting of data breaches has increased in the last few years but the benefits of a digital-first approach to information sharing means performance remains significantly better than pre-pandemic levels.

The number of high-risk incidents reportable to the ICO has increased on the last reporting year 2022-23 but remains the same as 2021-22. Mitigation is focused on investment in improved learning and action to develop competency to all staff, including through sharing learning from serious data breaches and revitalise our mandatory Information Assurance e-learning and alongside this to embed data protection, information rights and records management principles in all training. An ongoing priority was to work with HMCTS and the police to formalise updated Data Sharing Agreements for current information processing and in anticipation of future automated information sharing with the courts.

**Change Infrastructure:** The risk has been assessed as significant during the year. The development of effective accountability and governance across all contributing family justice partners remains a chronic systemic challenge. Cafcass' new Strategic Plan for 2023-26 and associated success framework were published, providing clarity of resources and requirements, including how Cafcass contributes to wider family system objectives. However, a significant amount of work must necessarily be delivered in partnership, and there is insufficient focus placed on robust evaluation of pilots to support an appropriately paced approach to roll-out. Cafcass has also been influential in initiating action where greater urgency or agility is needed in the family justice system response on behalf of children, for example to address delay.

**Reputation - partners and stakeholders:** The risk has been consistently assessed as moderate during the year, rising to significant in the last quarter, reflecting an increased spotlight on Cafcass as a result of its full Ofsted Inspection, reforms to private family law arrangements and the extension of the transparency court pilots. The new complaints framework improved the quality

of our complaint responses based on a restorative approach and including the key elements of the practice framework and the redesign of the Cafcass website included improved information and resources about what to expect in family proceedings and Cafcass' role.

### Overall conclusions from the accounting officer

I consider that our governance framework has continued to operate effectively with the additional measures outlined in this report. We confirm that the internal control systems have been in place for the year under review and up to the date of approval of the annual reports and accounts. We have continued to prioritise our efforts and directed resources into providing effective services to children and their families. The complexity of the work and the record levels of work staying open longer, creates significant challenges. These challenges are not only in how to maintain the quality of our work with children but also, equally importantly, how we can

continue to sustain and ensure the resilience and wellbeing of our staff. In this context, while the governance framework in place is working for now, we will continue to keep this under review.

In addition, the capacity of the organisation to continue to operate effectively whilst investing in and supporting proposed government changes to the arrangements in private law proceedings is challenging. We continue to make this known to officials. As a minimum we expect any national roll out of new arrangements should only be determined on the basis of the findings of a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness for children and families alongside the operational costs and pressures for Cafcass. We remain in close planning mode with the Ministry of Justice and are discussing the risks and opportunities of any new arrangements.



## 4.2

# Our people: remuneration and staff report

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of our workforce and to set out the pay and benefits received by Cafcass Board members and directors, our pay and pensions' policies, details of staff numbers and costs, and our policies to support staff including equality and diversity commitments.

### Our people

Cafcass is the largest employer of children's social workers in England. As of 31 March 2024, we had 2,258 employees (2,043 FTE). In addition to the Chief Executive and three directors in post on that date, there were 1,692 social workers and 562 corporate and other professionals. There were 160 contingent workers, including 43 locum (agency) social workers, 109 Cafcass Associates who undertake discrete social work assessments and eight locum workers in corporate and professional roles.

### Social work roles

There were 1,692 social workers in post on 31 March 2024 (1,515.4 FTE), a decrease in headcount of 1.7% from the same point in the previous year. All social work staff are required to be registered with the regulator for social work, Social Work England, and renewal of registration for all eligible staff was completed to the required deadline of 30 November 2023. There were 43 locum staff in social work roles.

Employed social work FTE				
2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
1,407.5	1,485.1	1,549.4	1,548.8	1,515.4

### Turnover

There were 242 social work employee leavers in 2023-24. This equates to a turnover rate of 15.1% almost identical to the previous year (15.0%).

Starters leavers and turnover			
	Starters	Leavers	% Turnover
Social workers	195	242	15.1%

Cafcass has a more stable permanent workforce when compared to the average for other social work organisations. Cafcass' staff turnover rate and agency rate are below the average for social workers nationally.

### Age and gender

Social work staff are predominantly female (89.0%) compared to male (11.0%), which is broadly in line with the gender distribution of the wider children's social work workforce. 0.24% of staff are recorded as having completed gender re-assignment.

Gender	Headcount	% Headcount
Female	1,506	89.0%
Male	186	11.0%

In 2023-24, 60.0% of Cafcass social work staff were between the age of 30 and 49, with a further 25.2% aged 50 to 59 and 11.7% aged 60 years or older. Cafcass age distribution is therefore significantly older than the wider children's social work workforce and we monitor retirement rates to support workforce forward planning and forecasting.

There has been no significant change (0.1%) in the proportion of our social workers aged over 50, compared to last year. The average age of new social work joiners in 2023-24 was 39.5 years.

Age Groups	Headcount	% Headcount
18 - 29	53	3.1%
30 - 39	501	29.6%
40 - 49	514	30.4%
50 - 59	426	25.2%
60+	198	11.7%

### The qualification of social workers

72.7% of Cafcass' qualified social workers achieved their initial social work qualification more than 10 years ago.

Time since initial social work qualification	% Headcount
Less than 5 years	5.3%
Between 5 and 10 years since qualification	22%
More than 10 years since qualification	72.7%

### Time in service with Cafcass

On 31 March 2024, 51.3% of social workers had been employed for less than five years with us. A further 24.7% had been in post for between five and ten years, with another 24% in post for ten years or more. Cafcass social work staff have on average significantly longer tenure than in the wider children's social work workforce.

Tenure	Headcount	% Headcount
Less than 2 years	440	26.0%
2 years or more but less than 5 years	429	25.3%
5 years or more but less than 10 years	417	24.7%
10 years or more	406	24.0%



## Social work roles

On 31 March 2024, there were 1,866 qualified social workers in the organisation including all employees, senior managers, agency workers and Cafcass Associates.

Of the 1,692 who were employees undertaking social work roles, the significant majority are family court advisers, and these are front-line case holding roles.

Role	Headcount	% Headcount
Family court adviser	1,398	81.6%
Service manager/Assistant service manager	272	15.9%
Head of practice/Social work qualified senior manager <sup>13</sup>	44	2.6%

## Social work ethnicity

16.8% of Cafcass social work staff identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group, compared to 18.1% for all Cafcass employees, 24.6% for the wider child and family children's social care workforce<sup>14</sup> and 19.3% for the wider working age population.<sup>15</sup>

Ethnicity	Headcount	% Headcount <sup>16</sup>
Asian - British	10	0.6%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	4	0.2%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	2	0.1%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	32	2.0%
Asian/Asian British: Other Asian	3	0.2%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	16	1.0%
Black British	24	1.5%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	44	2.7%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	56	3.4%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Other Black	4	0.2%
Mixed – British	25	1.5%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed	8	0.5%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	6	0.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	7	0.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	25	1.5%
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	8	0.5%
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	1,258	77.1%
White: Irish	26	1.6%
White: Other White	73	4.5%
Not declared	61	

<sup>13</sup> This includes an additional 22 staff who are qualified social workers but who are not undertaking social work roles and not therefore included in previous figures.

<sup>14</sup> Children's social work workforce, Reporting year 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Working age population - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk).

<sup>16</sup> Figures include rounding and are expressed to 1 decimal place.

## Social work disability

10.8 % of Cafcass social work staff have a declared disability which is similar to the 11.0% figure for all Cafcass employees. In comparison almost one in four of the working-age (people aged 16 to 64) population report having a disability.<sup>17</sup>

## Corporate and business services

There were 566 staff in corporate and business services roles in post on 31 March 2024 (527.2 FTE), an increase of 2.7% from the same point in the previous year.

Employed corporate and professional FTE				
2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
436.9	466.0	497.8	514.5	527.2

## Turnover

The headcount of leavers in the preceding 12 months was 44. This equates to a turnover rate of 7.9% which reflects a decrease from the previous year (12.0%).

	Starters	Leavers	% Turnover
Corporate and professional	62	44	7.9%

## Age and gender

The corporate and business services workforce is predominantly female (77.9%) compared to male (22.1%).

Gender	Headcount	% Headcount
Female	441	77.9%
Male	125	22.1%

On 31 March 2024, the majority of corporate and business services staff were in the age range 30 to 49 (56.4%). Younger employees aged 18 to 29 made up 15% of the workforce with 28.7% aged 50 or over.

Age Groups	Headcount	% Headcount
18 - 29	85	15.0%
30 - 39	178	31.4%
40 - 49	141	24.9%
50 - 59	122	21.6%
60+	40	7.1%



<sup>17</sup> Employment of disabled people 2023 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2023/employment-of-disabled-people-2023>

## Time in service with Cafcass

On 31 March 2024, 39.7% of corporate and business services staff had been in post for less than five years. A further 22.8% had between five and ten years, with 37.5% having ten years or more service.

Tenure groups	Headcount	% Headcount
Less than 2 years	114	20.1%
2 years or more but less than 5 years	111	19.6%
5 years or more but less than 10 years	129	22.8%
10 years or more	212	37.5%

## Ethnicity

22.2% of Cafcass corporate and business services staff identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group. In comparison, the figure for all Cafcass staff is 18.1%, and for the wider working age population is 19.3%.<sup>18</sup>

Ethnicity	Headcount	% Headcount
Asian - British	12	2.2%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	12	2.2%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	4	0.7%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	30	5.6%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	12	2.2%
Black British	4	0.7%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	8	1.5%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	18	3.4%
Mixed - British	4	0.7%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed	3	0.6%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	6	1.1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	1	0.2%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	3	0.6%
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	2	0.4%
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	378	70.5%
White: Irish	7	1.3%
White: Other White	32	6.0%
Not declared	30	

<sup>18</sup> Working age population - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk).

## Disability

11.6% of Cafcass corporate and business services staff have a declared disability which compares with 11.0% for the Cafcass workforce as a whole. In comparison almost one in four of the working-age (people aged 16 to 64) population report having a disability.<sup>19</sup>

## Remuneration

### Remuneration policy

Cafcass Board members are appointed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) according to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Membership, Committee and Procedure) Regulations 2005, which sets out all terms of appointment except remuneration, which is determined by the Secretary of State. Board members are statutory office holders and, as such, do not hold a contract of employment. Cafcass Board members are appointed on one, two, three or four-year terms.

The remuneration of Cafcass Directors is recommended for approval by the Chief Executive to the Remuneration Committee, made up of the Chair of the Cafcass Board and the Chairs of each of its committees. The MoJ determines the salary of the Chief Executive. Cafcass salaries are established by considering factors such as relevant external comparator pay levels, internal benchmarks, affordability, recruitment and retention risks, and political sensitivity. There was no change to this policy for the 2023-24 financial year.

### Service contracts

Cafcass' appointments of directors are made in accordance with the Cafcass Recruitment and Retention Policy. This policy recognises that in order to provide a high-quality service to the children and families whom we serve, it is vital that we recruit and retain people through fair and open competition who share our aims and values and have the requisite skills and abilities to perform to a consistently high standard.

Unless otherwise stated, staff covered by this report hold appointments that are open-ended. Members of Cafcass' Corporate Management Team (CMT) are required to provide four or six months' notice to terminate their contract. Early termination by Cafcass, other than for gross misconduct, would result in the individual receiving compensation by way of payment in lieu of notice, as set out in the individual contract of employment. No such payments were made to senior executives during the year 2023-24.

### Remuneration of Cafcass Board members and senior management

Remuneration includes gross salary, benefits-in-kind, and pension benefits (employer's pension contributions). More detail on these is set out below in the remuneration tables.

<sup>19</sup> Employment of disabled people 2023 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2023/employment-of-disabled-people-2023>

### Single total remuneration figures for Cafcass Board members (subject to audit)

Board members	Salary (£000)		Bonus payments (£000)		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension benefits (£000)		Total (£000)	
	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23
Sally Cheshire CBE	30-35	30-35	-	-	3,000	1,400	-	-	30-35	30-35
Paul Grant (until 30th September 2023)	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	10-15	-	-	200	200	-	-	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	10-15
Joanna Nicolas	10-15	10-15	-	-	200	800	-	-	10-15	10-15
Catherine Doran	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Sophie Humphreys (until 31st October 2022)	-	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5-10 (10-15 annualised)
Mandy Jones	10-15	10-15	-	-	200	200	-	-	10-15	10-15
Rohan Sivanandan	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	200	-	-	10-15	10-15
Professor Eileen Munro CBE	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Helen Jones	10-15	10-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	10-15	10-15
Catharine Seddon	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	300	-	-	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)
Peter Fish	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	300	100	-	-	10-15	5-10 (10-15 annualised)
Steven Cox (from 1st September 2023)	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-
Dalwardin Babu (from 1st September 2023)	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5-10 (10-15 annualised)	-

### Single total remuneration figures for Cafcass Directors (subject to audit)

Board members	Salary (£000)		Bonus payments (£000)		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension benefits (£000)		Total (£000)	
	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23
Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive	180-185	175-180	-	-	100	100	29	23	210-215	200-205
Julie Brown, Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive	145-150	140-145	-	-	100	100	30	38	175-180	180-185
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy	135-140	130-135	-	-	100	100	42	38	180-185	170-175
Jack Cordery, Operational Director	150-55	145-150	-	-	100	100	55	52	210-215	200-205

### Salary (subject to audit)

'Salary' includes: basic salary, London weighting, honorarium, overtime, market supplement (discretionary payment for some posts to aid retention and recruitment), buy-back of untaken annual leave, and Pay in lieu of Notice (PILON).

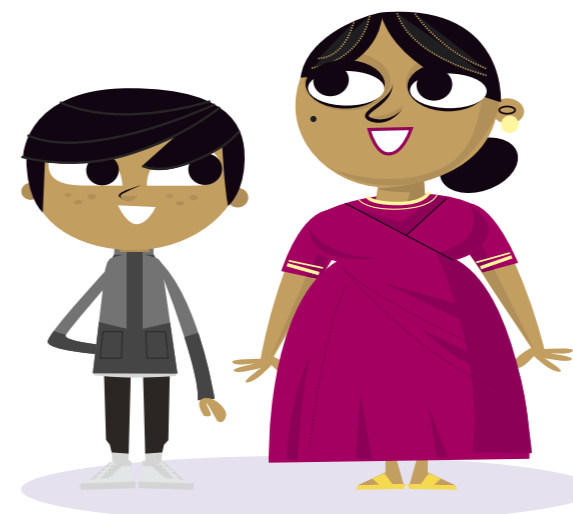
### Bonus payments and performance related pay (subject to audit)

Cafcass has moved away from including PRP clauses in any new director contracts and therefore no performance related payments were made in 2023-24 or in any of the previous three years.

The Chief Executive may make recommendations for non-contractual performance related payments which would require the endorsement of the Remuneration Committee. PRP for the Chief Executive would be determined by the Remuneration Committee and the Ministry of Justice.

### Payments to former directors (subject to audit)

No payments were made to any person who was not a director at the time but had been a director of Cafcass previously. Any previous payments to former directors are included in prior years' reports.



### Benefits in kind (subject to audit)

The monetary value of benefits in kind covers any non-cash benefits provided by Cafcass and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as a taxable emolument. Board members' travel costs to the Cafcass National Office are administered via Payroll/PAYE, which acts as a benefit in kind although none were reported in 2023-24. Benefits in kind for Directors includes cost of membership of Birmingham Hospitals Saturday Fund which is a health and wellbeing cash plan. The same benefit is provided to all Cafcass employees.

### Pension entitlements for directors (subject to audit)

Pension benefits are provided by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), to which Cafcass makes employer's contributions. Further information on the Cafcass pension schemes can be found on page 146 of the Annual Accounts. The accrued pension at retirement age is the pension earned that the member is entitled to receive when they reach pension age, or immediately on ceasing to be an active member of the scheme if they are already at or over pension age.

Cash equivalent transfer value (CETV) is the actuarially assessed capitalised value of the pension scheme benefits accrued by a member at a particular point in time. A CETV is a payment made by a pension scheme or arrangement to secure pension benefits in another pension scheme (or arrangement) when the member leaves a scheme and chooses to transfer the benefits accrued in their former scheme. CETVs are calculated within the guidelines and framework prescribed by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries.

The pension figures shown relate to the benefits that individuals have accrued as a consequence of their total membership of the pension scheme, not just their service in a senior capacity to which disclosure applies. The CETV figure includes the value of any pension benefit in another scheme or arrangement which the individual has transferred to the pension provider and for which the pension provider has received a transfer payment commensurate to the additional pension liabilities being assumed. They also include any additional pension benefit accrued to the member as a result of their purchasing of additional years of pension service in the scheme at their own cost.

The real increase in CETV effectively funded by the employer excludes increases due to inflation and contributions paid by the director (including the value of any benefits transferred from another pension scheme or arrangement). It uses common market valuation factors for the start and the end of the period.

#### Pension entitlement for directors (subject to audit)

	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at retirement age (£2,500 bands) (£000)	Total accrued pension at retirement age at 31st March 2024 and related lump sum (£5,000 bands) (£000)	CETV at 31st March 2023 (£000) <sup>7</sup>	CETV at 31st March 2024 (£000)	Real increase in CETV after adjustment for inflation and changes in market investment factors (nearest £000)
Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive	0-2.5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	20-25 plus 0-5 lump sum	292	399	77
Julie Brown, Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive	0-2.5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	45-50 plus 0-5 lump sum	555	743	131
Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy	2.5-5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	15-20 plus 0-5 lump sum	179	273	76
Jack Cordery, Operational Director (from 05/03/21)	2.5-5 plus 0-2.5 lump sum	10-15 plus 0-5 lump sum	111	186	64

#### Compensation for early retirement or loss of office (subject to audit)

No senior managers received any compensatory payments during 2023-24.

#### Fair pay disclosure (subject to audit)

This shows the relationship between the remuneration of the highest-paid director in the organisation as well as the 25th percentile, the median and 75th percentile remuneration of the organisation's workforce. This is based on full-time equivalent salaries and the two tables below include figures for total pay and benefits and also accounting for salary only.

Total Pay and Benefits	2023-24	2022-23
Highest earner's total banded remuneration (£000)	180-185	175-180
25th percentile	£41,616	£40,018
Ratio	01:04.4	01:04.4
Median total remuneration	£46,398	£44,616
Ratio	01:03.9	01:04.0
75th percentile	£46,398	£44,715
Ratio	01:03.9	01:04.0
Total Salary Only	2023-24	2022-23
Highest earner's total banded salary (£000)	180-185	175-180
25th percentile	£41,550	£39,952
Ratio	01:04.4	01:04.4
Median total salary	£46,332	£44,550
Ratio	01:03.9	01:04.0
75th percentile	£46,332	£44,649
Ratio	01:03.9	01:04.0

The structure of Cafcass' workforce means that the majority of staff are undertaking the same role with similar pay, and this is the reason that figures in the table above for median and 75th percentile are the same. There have been no performance payments to staff in either 2022-23 or 2023-24 so there is no additional bonus payment quartile data to disclose. There have been no significant changes to pay ratios from the previous reporting period.

The table below compares the annual % change of salary, allowances and any performance pay and bonuses for the highest paid director as well as the average equivalent % changes for the workforce as a whole.

Annual % Changes to Pay, Allowances and Bonuses		2023-24	2022-23
Highest Paid Director	Salary and Allowances	4.00%	2.51%
	Performance Pay and Bonuses	0.00%	0.00%
Whole Workforce	Salary and Allowances	4.26%	3.02%
	Performance Pay and Bonuses	0.00%	0.00%

In 2023-24, no employees received remuneration in excess of the highest paid director (2022-23 was also nil). Remuneration ranged from £14,000 to £185,000 (2022-23 was £14,000 - £180,000). Total remuneration includes salary, non-consolidated performance-related pay and benefits-in-kind. It does not include severance payments, employer pension contributions and the cash equivalent transfer value of pensions.

## Staff report

### Number of senior civil servant (SCS) equivalent staff

Cafcass has 18 staff who are the equivalent of senior civil servants (SCS): 13 members of the Operational Management Team and 5 senior managers in corporate teams (this excludes directors, whose remuneration has been set out above).

Salary band	Number of SCS equivalent within band
£75,000 - £85,000	2
£85,000 - £95,000	0
£95,000 - £105,000	3
£105,000 - £115,000	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

### Staff numbers and costs (subject to audit)

Cafcass staff members are subject to levels of remuneration and terms and conditions of service (including superannuation) within the general pay structure approved by the Ministry of Justice. An analysis of staff numbers and costs is set out below, distinguishing between staff with permanent contracts, and staff who are flexible, agency, and self-employed contractors. All staff numbers are presented on an actual basis as at the reporting date (31 March 2024) and reflect head count; staff costs are presented on total cost during the reporting period (April 2023 - March 2024).

Category	Social worker	Other	Total
Cafcass board members		12	12
Corporate staff		169	169
Operational staff	1,594	395	1,989
Employed flexible staff (bank / sessional)	98	2	100
<b>Total employees (Exc. Cafcass board members)</b>	<b>1,692</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>2,258</b>
Agency staff	43	8	51
Cafcass associates (active)	109		109
Total flexible workforce	152	8	160
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>1,844</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>2,430</b>

## Cafcass pay framework

Cafcass staff are employed on the Cafcass pay scale bands 1-10. Each band has a commencement point and a target point with progression based on an assessment of performance after 18 months in post. The pay scale is underpinned by the Cafcass job evaluation framework. Senior management roles (not including directors) are appointed to spot salaries which are subject to internal and external benchmarking. The Cafcass pay framework does not directly align with and is not linked to civil service pay grades.

### Staff composition - gender, ethnicity and disability

Staff composition groups	Female	Male	Black Asian and Minority Ethnic	Disability
1. Directors	3	1		1
2. Senior civil service equivalent (excluding directors)	13 (72.2%)	5 (27.8%)	3 (16.7%)	1 (5.9%)
3. Other Cafcass staff	1,931 (86.4%)	305 (13.6%)	390 (18.2%)	230 (11.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,947 (86.2%)</b>	<b>311 (13.8%)</b>	<b>393 (18.1%)</b>	<b>232 (11.0%)</b>

### Staff costs (subject to audit)

	Note	Cafcass board members £000	Corporate national office staff £000	Regional staff £000	Total £000
<b>2023-24</b>					
Salaries and wages		114	10,967	84,210	<b>95,291</b>
Apprentice levy		0	53	409	<b>462</b>
Social security costs		6	1,085	9,182	<b>10,273</b>
Current service cost	22	0	1,985	15,548	<b>17,533</b>
Other pension costs		0	1	(71)	<b>(70)</b>
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	9	<b>9</b>
<b>Total payroll costs</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>14,091</b>	<b>109,287</b>	<b>123,498</b>
Temporary staff costs		0	113	289	<b>402</b>
Outward secondments		0	0	(50)	<b>(50)</b>
<b>Total staff costs</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>14,204</b>	<b>109,526</b>	<b>123,850</b>
<b>2022-23</b>					
Salaries and wages		130	9,623	78,382	<b>88,135</b>
Apprentice levy		0	47	382	<b>429</b>
Social security costs		6	1,010	8,779	<b>9,795</b>
Current service cost	22	0	3,946	31,800	<b>35,746</b>
Other pension costs		0	(30)	(42)	<b>(72)</b>
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	13	<b>13</b>
<b>Total payroll costs</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>14,596</b>	<b>119,314</b>	<b>134,046</b>
Temporary staff costs		0	134	342	<b>476</b>
Outward secondments		0	0	(47)	<b>(47)</b>
<b>Total staff costs</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>14,730</b>	<b>119,609</b>	<b>134,475</b>

### Sickness absence data

7.5% of our workforce had some level of absence due to Covid-19 during 2023-24 which is a notable reduction from the previous year (19%). All absences were due to individual illness rather than caring for dependents. All forms of sickness absence (including Covid-19) are included in the following table.

Category	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Social workers average working days lost (excluding leavers)	12.6 (10.9)	10.7 (8.9)	11.1 (10)	8.7 (7.5)	9.6 (7.7)	9.9 (8.3)
Corporate and professional average working days lost (excluding leavers)	8.3 (7.4)	9.9 (8.9)	9.6 (8.7)	8.3 (7.3)	10.9 (9.1)	8.8 (8)
Overall average working days lost (excluding leavers)	11.5 (10)	10.5 (8.9)	10.8 (9.7)	8.6 (7.5)	9.9 (8.0)	9.6 (8.2)

### Consultancy

Expenditure on consultancy during 2023-24 amounted to £12,000 all of which related to scoping work to support a pathfinder pilot in partnership with Ministry of Justice and HM Courts and Tribunal Service to assess the effectiveness of a revised approach to private law proceedings.

### Off payroll engagements

Cafcass conforms to relevant regulations in respect of tax arrangements for all off-payroll appointments and this includes an assessment of employment status as required under IR35. Where workers are engaged through an intermediary, Cafcass undertakes an assessment of employment status for tax purposes and issues the required status determination statement. Where relevant, Cafcass instructs that required deductions for income tax and national insurance are made. Cafcass had previously liaised closely on these matters during 2020-21 with the Ministry of Justice and the Government Tax Centre of Excellence in readiness for the changes to IR35 which took effect from April 2021 and have been audited subsequently on the same. There have been no identified instances of non-tax compliant off-payroll engagements as at 31 March 2024 and no challenges of status determination.

Off payroll engagements within Cafcass includes agency workers and Cafcass Associates and those that were in post on 31 March 2024 are reported in the table on page 136. Of those there were 14 engagements that were deemed to be 'high paid'. Cafcass provides separate more detailed annual reporting to meet the Public Expenditure System (PES) requirement through the Ministry of Justice. There were no high-paid off-payroll engagements in any position with significant financial responsibility.

### Exit packages (subject to audit)

There have been no paid exit packages during 2023-24 or in either of the prior two annual reporting periods.

### Pension costs

Cafcass participates in the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) scheme and the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). The WYPF scheme is a multi-employer defined benefit scheme in which Cafcass' share of the underlying assets and liabilities are identified. The employer contribution rate for 2023-24 was 19.1%. Aon Hewitt Limited are the currently appointed fund actuaries. The contribution rate is based on a combination of future service and the effects of past service deficits and ill health retirements. Employer's contributions to the scheme for the year to March 2024 amounted to £17.663m (costs relating to voluntary early retirement were nil) with 2,421 employees participating in the scheme (2022-23 employer's contributions were £16.762m, voluntary early retirement costs were nil, participating employees 2,461). The last independent actuarial valuation of the WYPF scheme was published on 31 March 2023 and revealed that the scheme was 103.7% funded in relation to past service. That valuation was based on assets and liabilities at 31 March 2022. Following the actuarial valuation, the revised employer contribution rates for Cafcass were set as follows:

	Contribution rate %	Additional cash contribution
2023-24	19.1%	£Nil
2024-25	18.6%	£Nil
2025-26	18.1%	£Nil

The PCSPS is an unfunded multi-employer defined benefit scheme for which Cafcass is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities. The scheme's actuary reviews employer contributions every four years following a full scheme valuation. The most recent actuarial valuation was carried out as at 31 March 2020 but was not published until September 2023. Full details can be found at Civil Service Valuation Report 2023. For 2023-24, employer's contributions of £0.0103m (2022-23 was £0.0099m) were payable to the PCSPS at 27.1% of pensionable pay, based on salary bands (band 2 of PCSPS contribution rates). The contribution rates reflect benefits as they are accrued, not when the costs are actually incurred and reflect past experience of the scheme.

### Staff secondments and redeployments

As an arms-length body Cafcass employees are public servants but not civil servants and we do not therefore engage in civil service interdepartmental loans. Each year a small number of staff may be temporarily seconded to other roles both externally and internally and we also receive a small number of inbound secondments such as Civil Service fast streamers.



Number of secondments by headcount:

Grade	Cafcass employee seconded externally	Seconded to Cafcass from other organisations	Internal secondment	Total
Business services	1		8	9
Family court adviser	11		3	14
Head of Practice			2	2
Service manager			12	12
Specialist staff		9	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>50</b>

Average duration of secondments:

	Cafcass employee seconded externally	Seconded to Cafcass from other organisation	Internal secondment	Total
Grade	Average of duration in weeks			Average of duration in weeks
Business services	52.1		27.9	30.6
Family court adviser	13.4		40.9	19.3
Head of practice			5.1	5.1
Service manager			20.5	20.5
Specialist staff		23.6	41.4	29.0
Average duration total in weeks	16.6	23.6	26.5	23.6

Trade Union recognition and industrial relations

Cafcass formally recognises and has a partnership agreement with Napo and Unison, with National Partnership Meetings taking place quarterly. During the reporting period managers also met with unions on a number of occasions for pay negotiations. There have been no instances of industrial action during 2023-24.

Trade Union facility time

Number of employees who were relevant union officials during 2023-24	Full-time equivalent employee number
11	9.67
<b>Percentage of time</b>	
0%	0
1-50%	11
51-99%	0
100%	0
<b>Summary</b>	
<b>Total cost of facility time</b>	£111,357.71
<b>Total pay bill</b>	£123,577,836
<b>% pay bill spent on facility time</b>	0.09%

There were no trade union officials with more than 50% of their time allocated to trade union duties. The overall proportion of the pay bill allocated to trade union facility is unchanged from the previous year which was also 0.09%.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

In July 2022, our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy was published. This has continued to provide a framework for us to meet our statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It also helps us to provide services that meet the needs of children and families from all backgrounds and an inclusive working environment in which all colleagues can thrive. We continue to measure our progress against four strategic objectives in our strategy, each owned by a member of our Corporate Management Team. Governance is provided through the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group. Membership includes our board member lead for equality diversity and inclusion, staff diversity network chairs and the FJYPB.





## Priority 1: BETTER DATA AND INSIGHT

### Carer confident employer

This year, analysis of our diversity data and IT systems played a key role in our accreditation as a 'Carer Confident Employer'. This is a benchmarking scheme which recognises employers who are committed to building a supportive and inclusive workplace for staff who are or will become carers. Our application was co-ordinated and submitted in partnership with our staff network for Carers. During 2024-25 we will be continuing our work in this area with the aim of progressing from Level 2 'Accomplished in providing carer support' to Level 3 'Ambassador for carer support both internally and externally'.

Our new priorities for 2024-25 include:

- Reviewing existing policies using our Equality Impact Assessment toolkit to ensure the priorities are reflected and incorporated into the process of developing and reviewing strategies and policies. This is important evidence of compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).
- Developing use of socio-economic background within our equality, diversity and inclusion considerations. This is a factor which can cause significant disadvantage and the impact can worsen when it intersects with protected characteristics. We plan to review methodology for capturing socioeconomic background data from our existing workforce and new starters.
- Submitting a 3-yearly application for renewal of our current accreditation as a 'Disability Confident Leader'. This requires submission of evidence of our commitment to continuous work to improve how we recruit, retain, develop and support disabled people across the employee life cycle. We will be progressing this work in partnership with Ability Matters, our staff network for disabled people, to ensure we incorporate scrutiny from people with lived experience of the challenges we are trying to address.

## Priority 2: LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT

### Strategic lead for equality, diversity and inclusion

The role of 'strategic lead' for equality, diversity and inclusion is held by our Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive. This role is a key element of visibility and governance of our equality, diversity and inclusion work. This year the strategic lead has continued to champion our vision, values and commitments by chairing the equality, diversity and inclusion steering group and driving delivery of our strategy. The strategic lead works closely with key stakeholders and meets regularly with the Cafcass board member lead for equality diversity and inclusion and our staff network chairs. This ensures a range of views and perspectives are used to shape our work and embed equality, diversity and inclusion considerations in everything we do.

Our new priorities for 2024-25 include:

- Incorporating a relevant equalities objective into Performance Learning Reviews (PLRs) for all practice and corporate and business colleagues.

- Ensuring actions identified following staff survey feedback on abuse, bullying and harassment from parties in proceedings incorporate consideration of this behaviour when it is targeted at protected characteristics.
- Completing Level 3 of the Carers UK accreditation framework.
- Reviewing the accessibility of all Cafcass buildings.

## Priority 3: PEOPLE CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

### Staff diversity networks

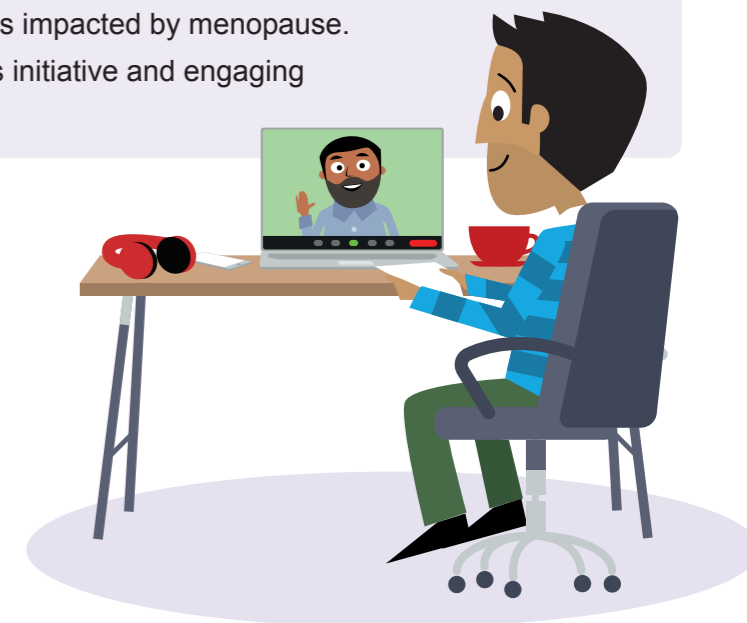
Our staff networks have continued to provide a safe space for colleagues who are connected through shared characteristics and lived experience. They have continued to facilitate peer support between members and offer supportive challenge to the organisation on equality, diversity and inclusion issues. They have continued to help us provide an accessible and inclusive service to children and families and a working environment in which staff from all backgrounds have opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Our staff networks are:

- Ability Matters network.
- Carers network.
- Faith network.
- Kaleidoscope (For Black and Asian colleagues and those from other minority ethnic backgrounds).
- Mental health network.
- Neurodiversity network.
- Pride (LGBT+ colleagues).

Our new priorities for 2024-25 include:

- Taking a more proactive approach to 'neurodiversity' to help us understand the experiences of neurodivergent children and colleagues.
- Increasing our support to colleagues impacted by menopause.
- Reviewing our Diversity Champions initiative and engaging new volunteers.





## Priority 4: SKILLED AND CONFIDENT PRACTITIONERS AND WIDER WORKFORCE

### Learning and engagement

Learning and engagement have continued to play a key role in our equality, diversity and inclusion activity. In September 2023, Practice Week helped the whole organisation to connect for a week of shared learning. One of the most popular workshops explored intersectionality. This is a concept which acknowledges that we each have unique lived experience, depending on overlapping aspects of identity, such as race and disability, as well as wider elements such as our socioeconomic circumstances. Additional workshops delivered by our staff networks included 'What's in a name?' delivered by the Kaleidoscope network. This session explored names as an integral part of our identity and the importance of pronouncing people's names correctly.

Our new priorities for 2024-25 include:

- Providing the 'Getting to know me' Diversity Spinner as a resource to support practitioners.
- Reviewing and updating our current learning and development offer.
- Implementing the new Performance Learning Review framework for both practice and corporate and business services colleagues. The new format includes Management Quality Standards where equality, diversity and inclusion have been incorporated.

### Whistleblowing

Effective whistleblowing is a key component in our strategy to challenge inappropriate behaviour in the organisation. It is both an instrument in support of good governance and a manifestation of a more healthy and ethical organisational culture. Our whistleblowing policy and procedure is accessible to all staff via our intranet. It provides advice and guidance on the process for raising a complaint and advises on the protection afforded to whistle blowers who raise concerns. The policy explains how these concerns can be raised with relevant senior managers and this includes the ability to raise concerns directly with a nominated Board Member. Although there have been no instances of whistleblowing during the reporting period upon which to assess the effectiveness of our whistleblowing arrangements, the policy and procedure are kept under regular review.

### Conflict of interest

Our Conflict of Interest Policy sets out how we manage conflicts of interest as they arise both in terms of case work and any independent work carried out by Cafcass employees. The Policy sets out arrangements to avoid such conflicts including the responsibility of staff to raise these and for managers to consider any action to mitigate and conflict. This applies to all staff. Board members are also required to declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest.

### Anti-bribery and corruption

Further detail on our anti-bribery and corruption measures can be found on our website.

### Management of health and safety

All health and safety issues are overseen and directed by the work of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Group which includes representation from our recognised trade unions. Health and safety incidents are reported quarterly to the operational and corporate management teams. These reports include any instances of violence toward staff. Information on health and safety is available to all staff via the Cafcass intranet and through regular communication.

In the year ahead, we are developing a new strategic priority on health and safety with an associated work programme sponsored by the Director of Resources. This is in response to an increase in threatening behaviour and harassment of Cafcass staff by parties in proceedings.

### Employee consultation and participation

Consultation on organisational change is conducted in line with the Cafcass Management of Organisational Change Policy including collective and individual consultation as appropriate. In addition, Cafcass engages with its workforce through staff surveys and senior management 'leadership live' events. Cafcass also operates a number of staff groups and networks covering matters such as diversity, working carers and health and wellbeing. Through these various channels all Cafcass staff have opportunity to share their knowledge, contribute their ideas and participate in organisational and workforce development.

### Staff survey

Cafcass does not participate in the Civil Service People Survey and instead commissions a tailored staff survey that meets our regulatory obligations as part of a social work health check, and bespoke staff survey.

The survey provides Cafcass with invaluable insights about how our staff are feeling and their perceptions of Cafcass against the following core staff engagement themes:

- 'How I feel about working for Cafcass';
- 'How leaders manage and communicate change and strategic priorities';
- 'How I feel about my manager';
- 'How it feels to be in my team';
- 'How my work environment feels';
- 'My wellbeing'; and
- a separate 'Social Work Health Check' (for social work colleagues only).

Findings were discussed and presented to the Cafcass Board and the People Committee, after which a Staff Engagement Plan was put in place and a set of national priorities for staff engagement agreed. The national priorities which Cafcass is currently focusing on include: pay and benefits, social work colleagues' workloads, learning and development, leadership visibility in leading change, induction, and supporting staff when behaviour of parents towards them is unacceptable.

The last survey had an excellent response rate, with 1,782 responses. This represents an overall organisational response rate of 84%, and an increase of 9% from the staff survey conducted in 2021-22. The next shorter staff survey focusing on progress against is expected to take place in November 2024.

## 4.3

# Parliamentary accountability and audit report

**This information shows how we have spent the money provided to us by Parliament. It also shows that our annual accounts have been audited.**

### Our accounts

The Statement of Accounts of Cafcass for the year ending 31 March 2024 has been prepared in a form directed by the Secretary of State with consent of the Treasury, in accordance with the Accounts Direction dated 12 April 2002 given under Schedule 2, paragraph (13)2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

The Accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, who is appointed by statute. The audit fee is £87,000. There have been no non-audit services during 2023-24.

### Treatment of pension liabilities

Employees of Cafcass are members of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), which is funded on a pay as-you-go basis. One member of Cafcass staff retained membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) by virtue of their earlier employment with one of Cafcass' predecessor organisations.

The amount charged to the staff costs for the PCSPS represents the contributions payable to the scheme in respect of current employees in the accounting period. Contributions are charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators. The assets of the WYPF, which is a defined benefit scheme, are held separately from those of Cafcass. The scheme assets are measured at realisable value. Scheme liabilities are measured using a projected unit method and discounted at the current rate of return on a high-quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liability.

The pension scheme surplus (to the extent that it is considered recoverable) or deficit is recognised in full on the face of the Statement of Financial Position. The movement in the scheme surplus/deficit is split between operating charges (within staff costs) and reserves in the case of actuarial gains and losses. Net interest receivable on pension scheme assets is shown in operating cash flows.

### Long-term liabilities

There have been significant changes in the organisation's long-term liabilities due to actuarial gain associated with the pension liabilities. Further details explaining the movement in pensions are provided in Note 22 of the Annual Accounts.

### Long-term expenditure trends

There have been significant changes in the organisation's long-term expenditure trends relating to staffing costs. Further details explaining the movement in staffing costs can be found in the 'Remuneration and staff report'.

### Remote contingent liabilities (subject to audit)

There are no remote contingent liabilities.

### Losses and special payments (subject to audit)

	2023-24		2022-23	
	£000	Number of cases	£000	Number of cases
<b>Losses statement</b>				
Administrative write-offs	-	-	20	1
Fruitless payments	-	-	-	-
<b>Total value of losses</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Special payments</b>				
Compensation payments	21	8	23	8
Ex gratia payments	23	7	59	8
<b>Total special payments</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Total losses and special payments</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>17</b>

There were £0.044m of losses and special payments charged to the Accounts as at 31 March 2024 (2022-23: £0.102m). The actual cash amount paid in the period was £0.044m (2022-23: £0.082m). These payments were made in accordance with HM Treasury guidance.

Signed: **Jacky Tiotto**  
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Date: 10 December 2024

# THE CERTIFICATE AND REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

## Opinion on financial statements

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service ('Cafcass') for the year ended 31 March 2024 under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

The financial statements comprise Cafcass':

- Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024;
- Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, Statement of Cash Flows and Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity for the year then ended; and
- the related notes including the significant accounting policies.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in the preparation of the financial statements is applicable law and International Accounting Standards as interpreted by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual.

In my opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of Cafcass' affairs as at 31 March 2024 and its net expenditure after interest for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and Secretary of State directions issued thereunder.

## Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects, the income and expenditure recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

## Basis for opinions

I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs UK), applicable law and Practice Note 10 Audit of Financial Statements and Regularity of Public Sector Bodies in the United Kingdom (2022). My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of my certificate.

Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Financial Reporting Council's Revised Ethical Standard 2019. I am independent of Cafcass in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to my audit of the financial statements in the UK. My staff and I have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

## Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that Cafcass' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on Cafcass' ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Accounting Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this certificate.

The going concern basis of accounting for Cafcass is adopted in consideration of the requirements set out in HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual, which requires entities to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements where it is anticipated that the services which they provide will continue into the future.

## Other Information

The other information comprises information included in the Annual Report but does not include the financial statements and my auditor's certificate. The Accounting Officer is responsible for the other information.

My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my certificate, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

My responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements, or my knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

## Opinion on other matters

In my opinion the part of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the parts of the Accountability Report subject to audit have been properly prepared in accordance with Secretary of State directions made under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000; and
- the information given in the Performance and Accountability Reports for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements and is in accordance with the applicable legal requirements.

## Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of Cafcass and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Performance and Impact Report and Accountability Report.

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept by Cafcass or returns adequate for my audit have not been received from branches not visited by my staff; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the financial statements and the parts of the Accountability Report subject to audit are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of remuneration specified by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual have not been made or parts of the Remuneration and Staff Report to be audited is not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with HM Treasury's guidance.

## Responsibilities of the Accounting Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities, the Accounting Officer is responsible for:

- maintaining proper accounting records;
- providing the C&AG with access to all information of which management is aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
- providing the C&AG with additional information and explanations needed for his audit;
- providing the C&AG with unrestricted access to persons within Cafcass from whom the auditor determines it necessary to obtain audit evidence;
- ensuring such internal controls are in place as deemed necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements to be free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error;

- preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.
- preparing the annual report, which includes the Remuneration and Staff Report, in accordance with Secretary of State directions issued under the Criminal Justice and Court Service Act 2000; and
- assessing Cafcass' ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Accounting Officer anticipates that the services provided by Cafcass will not continue to be provided in the future.

## Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a certificate that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

## Extent to which the audit was considered capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations including fraud

I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud. The extent to which my procedures are capable of detecting non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud is detailed below.

## Identifying and assessing potential risks related to non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud, I:

- considered the nature of the sector, control environment and operational performance including the design of Cafcass' accounting policies, key performance indicators and performance incentives.
- inquired of management, Cafcass' head of internal audit and those charged with governance, including obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation relating to Cafcass' policies and procedures on:
  - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations;
  - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud; and

- the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations including Cafcass' controls relating to Cafcass' compliance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and Managing Public Money.
- inquired of management, Cafcass' head of internal audit and those charged with governance whether:
  - they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations;
  - they had knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
- discussed with the engagement team regarding how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud.

As a result of these procedures, I considered the opportunities and incentives that may exist within Cafcass for fraud and identified the greatest potential for fraud in the following areas: revenue recognition, posting of unusual journals, complex transactions, bias in management estimates and the valuation of the defined benefit pension liability. In common with all audits under ISAs (UK), I am required to perform specific procedures to respond to the risk of management override.

I obtained an understanding of Cafcass' framework of authority and other legal and regulatory frameworks in which Cafcass operates. I focused on those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on material amounts and disclosures in the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of Cafcass. The key laws and regulations I considered in this context included the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 200, Managing Public Money, employment law, pensions legislation and tax legislation.

#### Audit response to identified risk

To respond to the identified risks resulting from the above procedures:

- I reviewed the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with provisions of relevant laws and regulations described above as having direct effect on the financial statements;
- I inquired of management and the Audit and Risk Committee concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- I reviewed minutes of meetings of those charged with governance and the Board and internal audit reports;
- I addressed the risk of fraud through management override of controls by testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements on estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

I communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential risks of fraud to all engagement team members including internal specialists and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: [www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities](http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities). This description forms part of my certificate.

#### Other auditor's responsibilities

I am required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control I identify during my audit.

#### Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.

**Gareth Davies**

Comptroller and Auditor General

National Audit Office  
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road  
Victoria  
London  
SW1W 9SP

**Date**

13 December 2024

# 2023-24 Annual accounts



## Financial statements

### Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024

	Note	2023-24		2022-23	
		£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Staff costs		123,841		134,462	
Past pension service cost	4/22	9		13	
Total staff costs	4	123,850		134,475	
Self-Employed Contractors and agency staff	20	6,823		6,609	
Depreciation and amortisation	7/7.2/8	2,790		1,930	
Partnerships	21	1,994		1,820	
Other expenditure	5	20,116		19,336	
			<b>155,573</b>	<b>164,170</b>	
<b>Income</b>					
Income from activities	3/6	(120)		(130)	
			(120)	(130)	
Net expenditure			<b>155,453</b>	<b>164,040</b>	
Right of use interest cost	7.2		116	74	
Pension net interest cost	22		157	6,154	
Net expenditure after interest			<b>155,726</b>	<b>170,268</b>	
<b>Other comprehensive expenditure</b>					
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7		(3)	(14)	
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8		0	(3)	
Gain on re-measurement of pension benefits	22		(14,155)	(249,322)	
<b>Total comprehensive net expenditure / (income) for the year ended 31 March 2024</b>			<b>141,568</b>	<b>(79,071)</b>	

The Notes on pages 159 to 187 form part of these Accounts.

## Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024

	Note	31 March 2024		31 March 2023	
		£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Non-current assets</b>					
Property, plant and equipment	7	2,295		1,485	
Right of use assets	7.2	9,600		10,528	
Intangible assets	8	208		123	
Pension assets	22	2,045		0	
<b>Total non-current assets</b>			<b>14,148</b>		<b>12,136</b>
<b>Current assets</b>					
Trade and other receivables	11	3,430		3,521	
<b>Other current assets</b>					
Cash and cash equivalents	12	1,489		1,895	
<b>Total current assets</b>			<b>4,919</b>		<b>5,416</b>
<b>Total assets</b>			<b>19,067</b>		<b>17,552</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>					
Trade and other payables	13	(4,650)		(4,465)	
<b>Total current liabilities</b>			<b>(4,650)</b>		<b>(4,465)</b>
<b>Non-current assets less net current liabilities</b>			<b>14,417</b>		<b>13,087</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>					
Provisions	14	(3,816)		(2,704)	
Right of use liabilities	16	(10,239)		(10,906)	
Pension liabilities	22	0		(12,083)	
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>			<b>(14,055)</b>		<b>(25,693)</b>
<b>Assets less liabilities</b>			<b>362</b>		<b>(12,606)</b>
<b>Taxpayers' equity</b>					
General reserve			20		(12,976)
Revaluation reserve			342		370
			<b>362</b>		<b>(12,606)</b>

The Financial Statements on pages 154 to 187 were approved by the Board on 10 December 2024 and signed on its behalf by:



**Jacky Tiotto**

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Date: 10 December 2024

## Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 March 2024

	Note	2023-24	2022-23
		£000	£000
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>			
Net expenditure after interest	3	(155,726)	(170,268)
Depreciation and amortisation	7/7.2/8	2,790	1,930
Decrease in trade and other receivables	11	91	772
Increase in trade payables	13	185	629
Increase in payables not passing through SoCNE		0	(34)
Non-cash pension current and past service cost and net interest cost	22	27	25,138
Increase in provisions	14	1,112	201
Right of use assets movement in provisions not passing through SoCNE	7.2	(784)	36
Right of use interest on lease liabilities	7.2	116	74
Right of use net cash (outflow) / inflow for lease costs and incentives	7.2	(33)	22
Impairments	7.2/10	71	0
<b>Net cash outflow from operating activities</b>		<b>(152,151)</b>	<b>(141,500)</b>
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	7	(966)	(1,258)
Purchase of intangible assets	8	(114)	(101)
<b>Net cash outflow from investing activities</b>		<b>(1,080)</b>	<b>(1,359)</b>
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>			
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		151,460	141,689
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,080	1,846
Other grant funding received		1,996	1,823
Right of use repayment of principal on leases	7.2	(1,711)	(1,290)
<b>Net cash inflow from financing activities</b>		<b>152,825</b>	<b>144,068</b>
<b>Total cash and cash equivalents</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period	12	1,895	686
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	12	1,489	1,895
<b>Net (decrease) / increase in cash and cash equivalents</b>		<b>(406)</b>	<b>1,209</b>

## Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity as at 31 March 2024

	Note	General reserve £000	Revaluation reserve £000	Total £000
<b>Balance at 31 March 2023</b>		<b>(12,976)</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>(12,606)</b>
<b>Changes in taxpayers' equity</b>				
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7	0	3	<b>3</b>
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8	0	0	<b>0</b>
Release of revaluation reserve to general reserve due to disposals		31	(31)	<b>0</b>
Net expenditure after interest	3	(155,726)	0	<b>(155,726)</b>
Pension fund actuarial gain	22	14,155	0	<b>14,155</b>
<b>Total comprehensive expenditure</b>		<b>(141,540)</b>	<b>(28)</b>	<b>(141,568)</b>
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		151,460	0	<b>151,460</b>
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,080	0	<b>1,080</b>
Other grant funding received		1,996	0	<b>1,996</b>
<b>Balance at 31 March 2024</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>Balance at 31 March 2022</b>		<b>(237,646)</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>(237,035)</b>
<b>Changes in taxpayers' equity</b>				
Net gain on revaluation of property, plant and equipment	7	0	14	<b>14</b>
Net gain on revaluation of intangible assets	8	0	3	<b>3</b>
Release of revaluation reserve to general reserve due to disposals		258	(258)	<b>0</b>
Net expenditure after interest	3	(170,268)	0	<b>(170,268)</b>
Pension fund actuarial gain	22	249,322	0	<b>249,322</b>
<b>Total comprehensive expenditure</b>		<b>79,312</b>	<b>(241)</b>	<b>79,071</b>
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for resource expenditure		<b>141,689</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>141,689</b>
Grant-in-Aid from parent department for capital expenditure		1,846	0	<b>1,846</b>
Other grant funding received		1,823	0	<b>1,823</b>
<b>Balance at 31 March 2023</b>		<b>(12,976)</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>(12,606)</b>

## Notes to the Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024

### 1. Accounting policies

These Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the 2023-24 Government Financial Reporting Manual (FRoM) issued by HM Treasury. The accounting policies contained in the FRoM apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector.

Where the FRoM permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be most appropriate to the circumstances of Cafcass to give a true and fair view has been selected.

The policies adopted by Cafcass for 2023-24 are described below. They have been applied consistently in dealing with items that are considered material to the Accounts.

Please also reference the "Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities" contained within the Accountability Report.

#### a) Accounting convention

The Accounts are prepared under the historical cost convention, modified to include assets at their value to the business by reference to current costs. Without limiting the information given, the Accounts meet the accounting and disclosure requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and accounting standards issued or adopted by the Accounting Standards Board insofar as those requirements are relevant. The Accounts are also fully consistent with IFRS.

#### b) Going concern

Parliament has voted Grant-in-Aid to Cafcass for 12 months following the Statement of Financial Position date.

It is expected that Cafcass will continue to be fully funded and operate as a going concern for the 12 months following the publication date of this Annual Report and Accounts. As such, Cafcass operates as a going concern.

#### c) Property, plant and equipment

Property, plant and equipment, except for leasehold properties and right of use assets, have been stated at their fair value to the business using appropriate indices published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Revaluations above the depreciated historic cost of these assets are credited to a revaluation reserve. Any downward revaluation of property, plant and equipment below the asset's depreciated historic cost is recognised when it occurs through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Property, plant and equipment include those assets costing £2,500 or more. Assets valued at less than the threshold are capitalised if they constitute integral parts of a composite asset that is in total valued at more than the threshold. Furniture and fittings are not capitalised but fully expensed in the year of acquisition.



#### d) Right of use lease liabilities and assets

IFRS 16 provides a single lessee accounting model, requiring lessees to recognise assets and liabilities for all leases, unless the lease term is 12 months or less, or the underlying asset is of low value.

##### Cafcass as lessee: Scope and exclusions

In accordance with IFRS 16 Leases, contracts or parts of contracts that convey the right to control the use of an asset for a period are accounted for as leases.

Contracts for services are evaluated to determine whether they convey the right to control the use of an identified asset, incorporating both the right to obtain substantially all the economic benefits from the asset and to direct its use. If so, the relevant part of the contract is treated as a lease.

As adapted by the FReM, IFRS 16 has been applied to leases with nil or nominal (that is, significantly below market value) consideration and arrangements for accommodation between Government departments.

Cafcass excludes two types of leases. Firstly, those relating to low value items which it considers as those where the underlying asset would have a cost of less than £3,500 when new, provided those items are not highly dependent on or integrated with other items. Secondly, contracts whose term (comprising the non-cancellable period together with any extension options, Cafcass is reasonably certain to exercise and any termination options Cafcass is reasonably certain not to exercise) is less than 12 months.

##### Cafcass as lessee: Initial recognition

At the commencement of a lease Cafcass recognises a right of use asset and a lease liability.

The lease liability is measured at the value of the remaining lease payments, discounted either by the interest rate implicit in the lease, or where this is not readily determinable, the incremental rate of borrowing advised by HM Treasury. This rate is advised annually by HM Treasury (3.51% for leases recognised in 2023 and 4.72% for those recognised in 2024). Where the lease includes extension or termination options, the lease payments will be for the non-cancellable period together with any extension options that are reasonably certain to exercise, and any termination options that is reasonably certain not to exercise. The measurement of lease payments excludes any VAT payable, and irrecoverable VAT is expensed at the point it falls due in line with IFRIC 21 Levies.

The right of use asset is measured at the value of the lease liability, adjusted for: any lease payments made before the commencement date; any lease incentives received; any incremental costs of obtaining the lease; and any costs of removing the asset and restoring the site at the end of the lease.

Peppercorn leases (leases with nil or nominal consideration) are measured at their existing use value, with the difference between the carrying amount of the right of use asset and lease liability treated as notional income.

##### Cafcass as lessee: Subsequent measurement

The lease liability will be adjusted for the accrual of interest, repayments, reassessments, and modifications. Reassessments are reappraisals of the probability of the options given by the existing lease contract, for example where we no longer expect to exercise an extension option; modifications are changes to the lease contract. Reassessments and modifications are accounted for by discounting the revised cash flows: using a revised discount rate where Cafcass becomes or ceases to be reasonably certain to exercise or not exercise an extension or termination option, or the lease is modified to amend the non-cancellable period, change the term of the lease, change the consideration or the scope; or at the existing discount rate where there is a movement in an index or rate that will alter the cash flows, or the amount payable under a residual value guarantee changes.

After initial recognition, the right of use asset will be measured using the fair value model. Cafcass considers that the cost model (measurement by reference to the lease liability) is a reasonable proxy for fair value, in the case of non-property leases, and for property leases of less than five years or with regular rent reviews. For other leases, the asset will be carried at a revalued amount.

The value of the asset will be adjusted for subsequent depreciation and impairment, and for reassessments and modifications of the lease liability. Where the amount of a reduction to the asset exceeds the carrying value of the asset, the excess amount is recognised in expenditure.

Expenditure for each financial year includes interest on the lease liability and a straight-line depreciation charge on the right of use asset over the life of the lease, together with any impairment of the right of use asset and any change in variable lease payments, that was not included in the measurement of the lease payments during the period in which the triggering event occurred. Rental payments in respect of leases of low value items, or with a term under 12 months, are also expensed.

##### Estimates and judgements

Where a lease is embedded in a contract for services, the amount to be recognised as the right of use asset and lease liability should be the stand-alone price of the lease component only. Where this is not readily observable, a determination will be made by reference for other observable data, such as the fair value of similar assets or price of contracts for similar non-lease components.

Cafcass has determined the lease term by assessing the level of certainty as to whether termination or extension options will be exercised. In making these judgements, reliance has been placed on the professional judgement of estates staff, supported by other business strategies, ongoing business needs and market conditions.

Cafcass has determined that the cost model is a reasonable proxy for fair value in most cases because the rents payable is aligned to open market rates. In the case of longer leases where there are not regular rent reviews, there is a greater chance of divergence between cost and fair value, hence a professional revaluation is appropriate.

Cafcass leases various non-property assets such as vehicles and IT equipment. It has determined that, at the present time, all non-property leases which are not individually low value, are immaterial. Consequently, no non-property leases have been recognised in these Accounts.

#### Rolling leases judgement

If a lease has expired but Cafcass remains in occupation with no renewal term pending, Cafcass has considered the broader economic situation for each contract to determine whether there is an enforceable period. Cafcass has recognised such contracts in the Financial Statements.

#### e) Intangible fixed assets

Intangible assets consist of software and website and intranet costs. These have been stated at their fair value to the business using appropriate indices published by the ONS.

Revaluations above the amortised historic cost of these assets are credited to a revaluation reserve. Any downward revaluation of intangible assets below the asset's amortised historic cost is recognised when it occurs through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Intangible assets include those assets costing £2,500 or more. Assets valued at less than the threshold are capitalised if they constitute integral parts of a composite asset that is in total valued at more than the threshold.

Intangible assets are periodically reviewed to ensure that they have been accurately stated at their value to the business.

#### f) Depreciation and amortisation

Depreciation is provided to write-off property, plant and equipment and right of use assets, and amortisation to write-off intangible assets, on a straight-line basis over their expected useful lives, or for leased assets and right of use assets, over the life of the lease.

Expected useful lives are as follows:

Leasehold improvements	Lease term
Information technology	Five years
Telecoms	Five years
Office equipment	Seven years
Right of use assets	Lease term

#### g) Pensions

Employees of Cafcass are members of the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) which is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). It is a funded defined benefit pension scheme.

Contributions are charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators.

The assets of the WYPF are held separately from those of Cafcass.

The scheme assets are measured at fair value. Scheme liabilities are measured using a projected unit method and discounted at the current rate of return on a high-quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liability. The net pension liability is the present value of the defined benefit liabilities less the fair value of the assets. All estimates are performed by Aon Hewitt Ltd, the independent actuary for WYPF and in accordance with International Accounting Standard 19 – Employee Benefits (IAS 19).

The pension scheme surplus (to the extent that it is considered recoverable) or deficit is recognised in full on the face of the Statement of Financial Position. The movement in the scheme surplus / deficit is split between operating charges (within staff costs) and reserves in the case of actuarial gains and losses.

Net interest receivable on pension scheme assets is shown in operating cash flows.

One member of Cafcass staff retains membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) due to their earlier employment with one of Cafcass' predecessor organisations. The scheme is a funded defined benefit pension scheme, with contributions charged on a year-by-year basis in accordance with the requirements of the scheme administrators.

#### h) Funding

Grant-in-Aid, used to finance activities and expenditure that supports the statutory and other objectives of Cafcass, is treated as financing and credited to the general reserve, because it is regarded as contributions from a controlling party.

Other grant funding (Contact Services funding) is used to provide grants to Child Contact Centres and is also treated as financing and credited to the general reserve.

#### i) Income from activities

Income from activities is generated from training, student placements and one-off receipts in the year. Income is recognised on the issuing of an invoice. All income is stated net of VAT.

#### j) Insurance

Except for comprehensive insurance on contract lease and hire vehicles, Cafcass does not insure but carries its own risks for fire, accidental damage and similar accidents and claims at common law.

#### k) Accounting for Value Added Tax

Cafcass is registered for VAT. It is unable to recover most of the VAT incurred on expenditure, although a small amount of VAT can be recovered where it is related to the costs recovered in court cases. Expenditure is therefore stated inclusive of any irrecoverable VAT.

#### l) Financial instruments

Cafcass does not hold any complex financial instruments. The only financial instruments included in the Accounts are receivables, cash, and payables (notes 11, 12 and 13).

Financial assets comprise trade receivable and other receivables. Receivables are recognised at carrying value, reduced by appropriate allowances for estimated irrecoverable amounts.

Trade creditors are short term and are stated at carrying value in recognition that these liabilities fall due within one year.

#### m) Provisions

A provision is recognised in the Statement of Financial Position when Cafcass has a present legal or constructive obligation arising from past events, and it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will be required to settle the obligation.

## 2. Change of accounting policy

### New standards, amendments and interpretations issued but not effective for the financial year beginning 1 April 2023 and not early adopted.

There were no significant changes to the accounting policies, as described in Cafcass' 2022-23 Annual Report and Accounts.

## 3. Analysis of net expenditure and non-current assets by segment

	Operational service areas	Other	Total
	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>			
Gross expenditure	105,595	50,251	<b>155,846</b>
Income	0	(120)	<b>(120)</b>
<b>Net expenditure</b>	<b>105,595</b>	<b>50,131</b>	<b>155,726</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>	<b>2,080</b>	<b>10,023</b>	<b>12,103</b>
<b>2022-23</b>			
Gross expenditure	101,699	68,699	<b>170,398</b>
Income	0	(130)	<b>(130)</b>
<b>Net expenditure</b>	<b>101,699</b>	<b>68,569</b>	<b>170,268</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>	<b>1,258</b>	<b>10,878</b>	<b>12,136</b>

'Operational service areas' and 'Other' reflect the structure of the standard monthly management information provided to Cafcass' chief operating decision makers.

## 4. Staff costs

	Note	Cafcass board members £000	Corporate national office staff £000	Regional staff £000	Total £000
<b>2023-24</b>					
Salaries and wages		114	10,967	84,210	<b>95,291</b>
Apprentice levy		0	53	409	<b>462</b>
Social security costs		6	1,085	9,182	<b>10,273</b>
Current service cost	22	0	1,985	15,548	<b>17,533</b>
Other pension costs		0	1	(71)	<b>(70)</b>
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	9	<b>9</b>
<b>Total payroll costs</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>14,091</b>	<b>109,287</b>	<b>123,498</b>
Temporary staff costs		0	113	289	<b>402</b>
Outward secondments		0	0	(50)	<b>(50)</b>
<b>Total staff costs</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>14,204</b>	<b>109,526</b>	<b>123,850</b>
<b>2022-23</b>					
Salaries and wages		130	9,623	78,382	<b>88,135</b>
Apprentice levy		0	47	382	<b>429</b>
Social security costs		6	1,010	8,779	<b>9,795</b>
Current service cost	22	0	3,946	31,800	<b>35,746</b>
Other pension costs		0	(30)	(42)	<b>(72)</b>
Past pension service cost	22	0	0	13	<b>13</b>
<b>Total payroll costs</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>14,596</b>	<b>119,314</b>	<b>134,046</b>
Temporary staff costs		0	134	342	<b>476</b>
Outward secondments		0	0	(47)	<b>(47)</b>
<b>Total staff costs</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>14,730</b>	<b>119,609</b>	<b>134,475</b>

Please also reference the 'Remuneration and staff report'.

## 5. Other expenditure

		2023-24	2022-23
	Note	£000	£000
Outsourced finance and ITC services		7,778	7,299
Accommodation costs		3,769	4,106
Travel and subsistence		2,688	2,219
Office supplies, printing and stationery		973	932
Telecommunications and postage		902	805
Staff related costs		517	592
Interpreters and translators		501	508
Training costs		419	379
Fuel and utilities		375	402
Legal costs		321	313
Recruitment costs		320	359
Vehicle costs		118	85
External audit costs		87	86
Internal audit costs		64	63
Other		885	892
<b>Total cash</b>		<b>19,717</b>	<b>19,040</b>
Provisions created in year	14	2,296	1,020
Provisions no longer required	14	(1,184)	(760)
Movement in right of use assets due to provisions	7.2	(784)	36
Impairments	10	71	0
<b>Total non-cash</b>		<b>399</b>	<b>296</b>
		<b>20,116</b>	<b>19,336</b>

## 6. Income

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Training	91	130
Other income	29	0
	<b>120</b>	<b>130</b>

## 7. Property, plant and equipment

	Leasehold improvements	Assets under construction	Information technology and telecoms	Office equipment	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>					
<b>Cost or valuation</b>					
Balance at 1 April 2023	396	1,050	990	22	<b>2,458</b>
Additions	892	0	74	0	<b>966</b>
Reclassifications	816	(816)	0	0	<b>0</b>
Disposals	0	0	(73)	0	<b>(73)</b>
Revaluations	0	0	3	0	<b>3</b>
Impairments	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>2,104</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3,354</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>					
Balance at 1 April 2023	188	0	763	22	<b>973</b>
Charged in year	69	0	90	0	<b>159</b>
Disposals	0	0	(73)	0	<b>(73)</b>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>257</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1,059</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>1,847</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,295</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,485</b>
<b>Asset financing</b>					
Owned	1,847	234	214	0	<b>2,295</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>1,847</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,295</b>

<b>2022-23</b>					
<b>Cost or valuation</b>					
Balance at 1 April 2022	328	0	1,887	22	<b>2,237</b>
Additions	208	1,050	0	0	<b>1,258</b>
Disposals	(140)	0	(911)	0	<b>(1,051)</b>
Revaluations	0	0	14	0	<b>14</b>
Impairments	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>396</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>990</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2,458</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>					
Balance at 1 April 2022	328	0	1,584	22	<b>1,934</b>
Charged in year	0	0	90	0	<b>90</b>
Disposals	(140)	0	(911)	0	<b>(1,051)</b>
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>188</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>973</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,485</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2022</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>Asset financing</b>					
Owned	208	1,050	227	0	<b>1,485</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,485</b>

## 7.2 Right of use assets

	<b>Building leases</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>
<b>2023-24</b>		
<b>Cost or valuation</b>		
Balance at 1 April 2023	14,260	<b>14,260</b>
Additions	414	<b>414</b>
Disposals	(1,304)	<b>(1,304)</b>
Movement due to provisions	784	<b>784</b>
Remeasurements	547	<b>547</b>
Impairments	(71)	<b>(71)</b>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>14,630</b>	<b>14,630</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>		
Balance at 1 April 2023	3,732	<b>3,732</b>
Charged in year	2,602	<b>2,602</b>
Disposals	(1,304)	<b>(1,304)</b>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>5,030</b>	<b>5,030</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>9,600</b>	<b>9,600</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>10,528</b>	<b>10,528</b>
<b>2022-23</b>		
<b>Cost or valuation</b>		
Balance at 1 April 2022	6,991	<b>6,991</b>
Additions	7,169	<b>7,169</b>
Disposals	0	<b>0</b>
Movement due to provisions	(36)	<b>(36)</b>
Remeasurements	136	<b>136</b>
Impairments	0	<b>0</b>
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>14,260</b>	<b>14,260</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>		
Balance at 1 April 2022	1,910	<b>1,910</b>
Charged in year	1,822	<b>1,822</b>
Disposals	0	<b>0</b>
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>3,732</b>	<b>3,732</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>10,528</b>	<b>10,528</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2022</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>5,081</b>

### Amounts recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Depreciation	2,602	1,822
Interest on lease liabilities	116	74
Low value and short-term leases	1,877	63
<b>Amounts recognised in the SoCNE</b>	<b>4,595</b>	<b>1,959</b>

### Amounts recognised in the Statement of Cash Flows

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Legal expenses and lease incentives	(33)	22
Interest on lease liabilities	116	74
Repayment of principal on leases	(1,711)	(1,290)
<b>Amounts recognised in the SoCF</b>	<b>(1,628)</b>	<b>(1,194)</b>

### 8. Intangible assets

	Information technology	Websites that deliver services	Assets under construction	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>				
<b>Cost or valuation</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2023	2,146	89	101	2,336
Additions	0	215	(101)	114
Disposals	0	(90)	0	(90)
Revaluations	0	0	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>2,146</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,360</b>
<b>Amortisation</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2023	2,124	89	0	2,213
Charged in year	22	7	0	29
Disposals	0	(90)	0	(90)
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>2,146</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,152</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>123</b>

<b>2022-23</b>				
<b>Cost or valuation</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2022	2,143	89	0	2,232
Additions	0	0	101	101
Disposals	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	3	0	0	3
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>2,146</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>2,336</b>
<b>Amortisation</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2022	2,106	89	0	2,195
Charged in year	18	0	0	18
Disposals	0	0	0	0
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>2,124</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,213</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2023</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>NBV at 31 March 2022</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>37</b>

## 9. Financial instruments

As the cash requirements of Cafcass are met through the Estimates process, financial instruments play a more limited role in creating and managing risk than would apply to a non-public sector body.

Most of Cafcass' financial instruments are consistent with the expected purchase and usage requirements of a non-departmental public body and relate to contracts to buy non-financial items. As such, Cafcass is exposed to minimal credit, liquidity, and market risks.

## 10. Impairments

	Net cost charged to SoCNE	Release of revaluation reserve to SoCNE	Net impact in SoCNE
	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>			
Right of use assets	71	0	71
	<b>71</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>2022-23</b>			
Right of use assets	0	0	0
	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 11. Trade receivables and other current assets

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
<b>Amounts falling due within one year</b>		
Other receivables	1,650	1,724
Provision for bad debts	(2)	(1)
Prepayments	1,781	1,797
Travel advances	1	1
	<b>3,430</b>	<b>3,521</b>

## 12. Cash and cash equivalents

	Cash	Bank	Total
	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>			
Balance at 1 April 2023	4	1,891	1,895
Net change in cash and cash equivalent balance	(2)	(404)	(406)
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>2</b>	<b>1,487</b>	<b>1,489</b>
The following balances were held at:			
Government Banking Service and cash in hand	2	1,487	1,489
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>2</b>	<b>1,487</b>	<b>1,489</b>

	Cash	Bank	Total
	£000	£000	£000
<b>2022-23</b>			
Balance at 1 April 2022	4	682	686
Net change in cash and cash equivalent balance	0	1,209	1,209
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>4</b>	<b>1,891</b>	<b>1,895</b>
The following balances were held at:			
Government Banking Service and cash in hand	4	1,891	1,895
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>4</b>	<b>1,891</b>	<b>1,895</b>

## 13. Trade payables and other current liabilities

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
<b>Amounts falling due within one year</b>		
Taxation and social security	1	1
Trade payables	294	903
Other payables	47	24
Accruals and deferred income	4,308	3,537
	<b>4,650</b>	<b>4,465</b>

Accruals and deferred income comprise £4.308m accruals plus £nil deferred income (2022-23: £3.519m plus £0.018m).

#### 14. Provisions for liabilities and charges

	Employment and legal claims	Annual leave amount	Dilapidations	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>2023-24</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2023	171	651	1,882	<b>2,704</b>
Provided in the year	460	977	859	<b>2,296</b>
Not required written back	(112)	(651)	(421)	<b>(1,184)</b>
Utilised in the year	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<b>519</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>2,320</b>	<b>3,816</b>

<b>Analysis of expected timing of discounted flows</b>				
Not later than one year	519	0	1,937	<b>2,456</b>
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	977	132	<b>1,109</b>
Later than five years	0	0	251	<b>251</b>
	<b>519</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>2,320</b>	<b>3,816</b>

<b>2022-23</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2022	154	466	1,883	<b>2,503</b>
Provided in the year	171	651	198	<b>1,020</b>
Not required written back	(154)	(466)	(140)	<b>(760)</b>
Utilised in the year	0	0	(59)	<b>(59)</b>
Balance at 31 March 2023	<b>171</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>1,882</b>	<b>2,704</b>

<b>Analysis of expected timing of discounted flows</b>				
Not later than one year	171	0	1,538	<b>1,709</b>
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	651	298	<b>949</b>
Later than five years	0	0	46	<b>46</b>
	<b>171</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>1,882</b>	<b>2,704</b>

IAS 37 requires the recognition of a provision (a liability that is of uncertain timing or amount) when it exists at the Statement of Financial Position date. It must therefore fulfil the criteria of being a present obligation arising from a previous event, where it is probable there will be a transfer of economic benefits to settle the obligation and where a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. Cafcass makes provisions for legal or constructive obligations (liabilities), which are of uncertain timing or amount at the Statement of Financial Position date, based on the best estimate of the expenditure required to settle the obligation.

#### Employment and legal claims

Employment claims relate to employment tribunal cases that are likely to be brought against Cafcass, which may or may not result in court attendance. Legal claims relate to one compensation claim and two claims for legal costs that may be brought against Cafcass.

#### Annual leave amount

The annual leave amount is the monetised value of holiday entitlement approved by management for carry over to the new financial year. It is the liability that Cafcass would have to settle, should it cease to exist as a going concern and accumulated staff leave be crystallised into actual payments.

#### Dilapidations

Cafcass operates from a number of leasehold properties which include provision for the payment of dilapidations on exit from the premises.

Cafcass considers it appropriate to recognise these liabilities through the creation of a provision whilst premises are in active use, and to accrue for these liabilities once settlement has been agreed.

Provisions have been maintained for these using actual information and industry information on the most likely costs for dilapidations per square metre.

#### 15. Capital commitments

There were no material contracted capital commitments as at 31 March 2024 (2022-23: £nil).



## 16. Commitments under leases

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
<b>Finance lease commitments</b>		
Obligations under finance leases comprise:		
<b>Buildings</b>		
Not later than one year	1,928	1,744
Later than one year and not later than five years	3,236	3,510
Later than five years	5,579	6,233
	<b>10,743</b>	<b>11,487</b>
Less interest element	(504)	(581)
	<b>10,239</b>	<b>10,906</b>

Maturity analysis: Present value of obligations under finance leases comprise:

<b>Buildings</b>		
Not later than one year	1,833	1,648
Later than one year and not later than five years	2,961	3,200
Later than five years	5,445	6,058
	<b>10,239</b>	<b>10,906</b>

## 17. Other financial commitments

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Not later than one year	2,302	2,011
Later than one year and not later than five years	2,589	4,138
Later than five years	0	0
	<b>4,891</b>	<b>6,149</b>

Cafcass signed a three-year contract with Littlefish, commencing May 2023, to provide an integrated information and communication technology service across the organisation.

## 18. Related party transactions

Cafcass is an executive non-departmental public body that is sponsored by the Department (the MoJ). The Department as such is regarded as a related party. During 2023-24, Cafcass had various material transactions with the Department, including the receipt of £154.536m grant and additional funding from the Department (2022-23: £145.358m).

Transactions with the Department not related to Grant-in-Aid or other funding are considered not to be material. Cafcass does have occasional small transactions with other Central Government bodies and Local Authorities that are considered not to be material.

All payments made to senior managerial staff are disclosed in the Remuneration and Staff Report. A register of interest is held for all Board Members and there were no material related party transactions with Board Members or the Corporate Management Team during the year other than those associated with remuneration for normal duties.

## 19. Events after Statement of Financial Position date

In accordance with the requirements of IAS 10 'Events After the Reporting Period', post Statement of Financial Position events are considered up to the date on which the Accounts are authorised for issue. This is interpreted as the same date as the date of the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

## 20. Self-Employed Contractors

In 2023-24 we contracted the services of 138 Self-Employed Contractors (2022-23: 135), to whom payments made amounted to £3.268m in the year (2022-23: £3.274m).

As Self-Employed Contractors, they are ordinarily responsible for meeting travel, office and all other expenses related to their work, as well as related tax and national insurance liabilities.

Further to this, agency staff costs amounted to £3.555m in the year (2022-23: £3.335m).

## 21. Partnership costs

Partnership costs of £1.994m (2022-23: £1.820m) represent the cost of services provided by Cafcass through third party organisations such as contact centres and mediation centres. This expenditure is funded by the Department separately to Grant-in-Aid and in compliance with FReM is credited to the general reserve as other grant funding. In 2023-24 Cafcass received other grant funding of £1.996m from the Department (2022-23: £1.823m).

Cafcass also engages third party organisations for court ordered contact activities. Expenditure on these activities is shown net of reimbursement claimed back and received from the Department.

## 22. Pension liabilities

Under the requirements of IAS 19, WYPF's actuary, Aon Hewitt Limited, carried out an accounting valuation for Cafcass as at 31 March 2022, based on a roll forward from the last actuarial funding valuation in 2019. The accounting valuation aims to measure the assets and liabilities of the pension scheme on a best estimate basis in terms of the calculation approach and data used at the end of the accounting period, whilst the actuarial funding valuation carried out every three years determines the scheme's funding position and the cash contribution by employers in future years.

The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of Cafcass and are invested in funds managed externally to Cafcass.

Cafcass accounts for scheme liabilities in accordance with IAS 19 – Employee benefits. The in-year current service cost has been reflected in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Cafcass considers and follows the recommendations from the actuary for significant estimates and assumptions, including future increases in pay levels.

### Introduction

The disclosures below relate to the funded liabilities within the West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) which is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The LGPS is a funded defined benefit plan with benefits earned up to 31 March 2014 being linked to final salary. Benefits after 31 March 2014 are based on a Career Average Revalued Earnings scheme. Details of the benefits earned over the period covered by this disclosure are set out in 'The LGPS Regulations 2013' (as amended) and 'The LGPS (Transitional Provisions, Savings and Amendment) Regulations 2014' (as amended).

### Funding / governance arrangements of the LGPS

The funded nature of the LGPS requires Cafcass and its employees to pay contributions into the WYPF, calculated at a level intended to balance the pension liabilities with investment assets. Information on the framework for calculating contributions to be paid is set out in 'The LGPS Regulations 2013' and the WYPF's Funding Strategy Statement.

The last actuarial valuation was at 31 March 2022 and the contributions to be paid until 31 March 2026 resulting from that valuation are set out in the WYPF's Rates and Adjustment Certificate. Cafcass' contribution rates set out over the period are: 2023-24: 19.1%, 2024-25: 18.6% and 2025-26: 18.1%.

WYPF's Administering Authority, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, is responsible for its governance. Cafcass engages with the WYPF administrators to seek assurance on their management of risk.

The entitlement of staff to membership of the WYPF forms part of the constitution of Cafcass. The scheme is a defined benefit scheme and forms a significant financial staff benefit within the Cafcass reward strategy. Decisions on the collection of employer contributions are taken to provide predictability and stability to future budget requirements. The overall performance of the scheme is reported and reviewed annually by the Audit and Risk Assurance

Committee, informed by the work and findings of both the Government Actuary's Department and the LGPS Scheme Advisory Board.

### Assets

The assets allocated to Cafcass are notional and are assumed to be invested in line with the investments of the WYPF for the purposes of calculating the return over the accounting period. WYPF holds a significant proportion of its assets in liquid investments. As a result, there will be no significant restriction on realising assets if a large payment is required to be paid from the WYPF in relation to Cafcass' liabilities. The assets are invested in a diversified spread of investments and the approximate split of assets for the WYPF as a whole is shown in the disclosures. The WYPF 'Investment Strategy Statement' is available via the [wypf.org.uk](http://wypf.org.uk) website.

### Risks associated with the Fund in relation to accounting

#### Asset volatility

The liabilities used for accounting purposes are calculated using a discount rate set with reference to corporate bond yields at the accounting date. If assets underperform this yield this will create a deficit in the Accounts. WYPF holds a significant proportion of growth assets which, while expected to outperform corporate bonds in the long term, creates volatility and risk in the short term in relation to the accounting figures.

#### Changes in bond yield

A decrease in corporate bond yields will increase the value placed on the liabilities for accounting purposes although this will be marginally offset by the increase in the assets as a result (to the extent that WYPF invests in corporate bonds).

#### Inflation risk

The majority of the pension liabilities are linked to either pay or price inflation. Higher inflation expectations will lead to a higher liability value. The assets are not perfectly correlated with inflation meaning that an increase in inflation will increase the deficit.

#### Life expectancy

The majority of WYPF's obligations are to provide benefits for the life of the member following retirement, so increases in life expectancy will result in an increase in the liabilities.

#### Exiting employers

Employers which leave the WYPF (or their guarantor) may have to make an exit payment to meet any shortfall in assets against their pension liabilities. If the Employer (or guarantor) is not able to meet this exit payment the liability may in certain circumstances fall on other employers in the WYPF. Further the assets at exit in respect of 'orphan liabilities' may, in retrospect, not be sufficient to meet the liabilities. This risk may fall on other employers. 'Orphan liabilities' are currently a small proportion of the overall liabilities in the WYPF.

### Duration of liabilities

The duration of liabilities is the average period between the calculation date and the date at which benefit payments fall due. The calculated duration, based on the 2023-24 Accounting Results Schedule is, is 16.3 years.

### Impact of McCloud / Sargeant judgement

The December 2018 McCloud / Sargeant judgement found that transitional protection arrangements put in place during the reform of firefighters and judges pension schemes was discriminatory on grounds of age. The Government launched a consultation on proposed amendments to underpin in July 2020, and a response to the consultation was published in February 2021. The impact of the McCloud / Sargeant judgement was first accounted for in the 2019-20 Accounts under IAS 19, covering an allowance for the service since the scheme's reforms within the past service liabilities in the SoFP and an "underpin" liability within the current service cost. As the period of protection applies from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2022, the McCloud / Sargeant liability has been updated as part of the 2022 valuation within the past service liabilities and no allowance is made within the current service cost over this accounting period. The method for valuing the McCloud remedy is closely aligned with the method proposed by the Government in its consultation and consistent with the method adopted in the previous year.

### Accounting for a pension surplus under IAS 19 and IFRIC 14

Cafcass has a net pension asset position at the accounting date. The main accounting standard to consider in relation to the carrying value of this asset is IFRIC 14. This is alongside IAS 19.

#### The asset ceiling

The initial position calculated using IAS 19 is a surplus of £41.202m. As this is a surplus position, IAS 19 requires calculation of the maximum economic benefit Cafcass could recognise in the Accounts (referred to as the asset ceiling) calculated in accordance with IFRIC 14. If the asset ceiling is below the net pension asset (which in this case it is) the net pension asset is restricted to the asset ceiling.

The asset ceiling is defined as the present value of any economic benefits available in either i) the form of a refund from the scheme; or ii) reductions in future contributions to the plan. The figure recognised in the accounts is then the lower of the IAS 19 surplus and the asset ceiling. The standards do allow for the implementation of the asset ceiling to take the overall position from a surplus to a deficit.

Paragraph 6(1) of Schedule 2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 provides that Cafcass staff are to be appointed on terms and conditions determined by Cafcass, but paragraph 6(3) provides that any such determination by Cafcass requires the approval of the Secretary of State. Thus, any exit to secure a refund from the scheme would rely on the occurrence of an uncertain future event not wholly within our control; i.e. The approval of the Secretary of State. Under the standard this means that Cafcass do not have an unconditional right to a refund of the surplus and this method of calculating an asset ceiling is therefore not applicable.

IFRIC 14 lays out the method by which the economic benefit available as a reduction in future contributions should be calculated as: (a) any amount that reduces future minimum funding requirement contributions for future service because the entity made a prepayment; and (b) the estimated future service cost less the estimated minimum funding requirement contributions that would be required for future service in those periods if there were no prepayment as described in (a).

The estimated future service cost has been calculated as:

- The value of prospective current service costs (based on accounting assumptions at the accounting date) in perpetuity, less
- The value of prospective future service rates (as calculated at the last triennial valuation) in perpetuity.

Perpetuity is appropriate in these estimates as there is no intention to close the scheme.

Cafcass is paying contributions above the future service rate (i.e. secondary, or deficit, contributions), so we have considered if there is an additional liability due to the future payment of those contributions breaching the asset ceiling (i.e. where those contributions do not have any future economic benefit once they are paid into the Fund).

#### Asset ceiling calculation

For the asset ceiling calculation Cafcass has compared the present value of the Future Service contribution rate of 17.00% with the present value of employer future service costs of 17.22%. As the projected current service cost is 0.22% greater than the future service rate, there is a future economic benefit, which, when applied into perpetuity, results in an asset ceiling of £22.248m.

#### Recognition of an additional liability regarding minimum funding requirements

Cafcass is currently paying deficit contributions. Deficit contributions relate to the shortfall between current funding levels and past service cost, separate to the contributions for future service. Both are contained within the single overall contribution percentage. IFRIC 14 may require recognition of an additional liability if there is an obligation to pay deficit contributions in the future under a minimum funding requirement. The additional liability is equal to the value of the future deficit contributions that cannot be recognised as a net pension asset after they have been paid into the Fund (i.e. they would have no economic benefit to the Employer).

#### Additional liability calculation

Under the latest Triennial valuation, Cafcass is required to make additional contributions of 1.6% of pay and 1.1% of pay respectively. Cafcass has assumed that the deficit contributions will continue over the remainder of the Recovery Period from the last valuation and have therefore quantified the cost of 1.6% of pay for 24/25 and 1.1% of pay over 25/26 through 44/45 (for 20 years). This results in an additional liability of £20.286m.

The amounts recognised in the Statement of Financial Position are as follows:

	2024	2023
	£000	£000
Present value of funded obligations	(704,062)	(701,512)
Fair value of plan assets	745,264	689,429
	41,202	(12,083)
Adjustment loss due to restriction on surplus	(18,871)	0
Adjustment loss due to minimum funding requirement	(20,286)	0
Net asset / (liability)	<b>2,045</b>	<b>(12,083)</b>

The amounts recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure are as follows:

	2024	2023
	£000	£000
Current service cost	17,533	35,746
Past service cost	9	13
Service cost	17,542	35,759
Interest on obligation	32,579	24,551
Interest income on plan assets	(32,422)	(18,397)
Net interest cost	157	6,154
Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	<b>17,699</b>	<b>41,913</b>

Changes in the present value of the defined benefit obligation are as follows:

	2024	2023
	£000	£000
Opening defined benefit obligation	701,512	917,308
Current service cost	17,533	35,746
Interest on obligation	32,579	24,551
Member contributions	6,291	5,956
Past service cost	9	13
Actuarial gain due to changes in financial assumptions	(23,024)	(342,679)
Actuarial (gain) / loss due to changes in demographic assumptions	(11,295)	4,441
Actuarial loss due to liability experience	3,975	78,627
Benefits / transfers paid	(23,518)	(22,451)
Closing defined benefit obligation	<b>704,062</b>	<b>701,512</b>

Changes in the fair value of plan assets are as follows:

	2024	2023
	£000	£000
Opening fair value of plan assets	689,429	681,041
Interest income on plan assets	32,422	18,397
Re-measurement gain / (loss) on assets	22,968	(10,289)
Contributions by employer	17,672	16,775
Member contributions	6,291	5,956
Benefits / transfers paid	(23,518)	(22,451)
	<b>745,264</b>	<b>689,429</b>

### Asset allocation:

	Quoted value at 31 March 2024	Unquoted value at 31 March 2024	Total at 31 March 2024	Total at 31 March 2023
Equities	63.9%	15.5%	79.4%	80.8%
Property	1.0%	1.8%	2.8%	3.3%
Government bonds	8.5%	0.0%	8.5%	6.9%
Corporate bonds	4.2%	0.0%	4.2%	4.6%
Cash	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%	2.3%
Other	0.1%	3.2%	3.3%	2.1%
	<b>77.7%</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Actual return on assets:

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Interest income on plan assets	32,422	18,397
Re-measurement gain / (loss) on assets	22,968	(10,289)
	<b>55,390</b>	<b>8,108</b>

### The major financial assumptions used in the valuation were:

	2023-24	2022-23
Pension accounts revaluation rate	2.60%	2.70%
Rate of increase in salaries	3.85%	3.95%
Rate of increase in pensions	2.60%	2.70%
Nominal discount rate	4.80%	4.70%

### Estimated pension expense in future periods

Analysis of amount charged to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure on the provision of services next year:

	Year ending 31 March 2025	Year ending 31 March 2024
	£000	£000
Current service cost	16,538	16,936
Interest on net defined benefit liability	(527)	172
<b>Total estimated pension expense</b>	<b>16,011</b>	<b>17,108</b>
Allowance for administration expense included in current service cost	384	357
Estimated pensionable payroll over the period	96,037	89,244

### Reconciliation of re-measurement of pension benefits in the Statement of Financial Position

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Pension (assets) / liabilities as at 31 March current year	(41,202)	12,083
Less: Pension liabilities as at 31 March prior year	(12,083)	(236,267)
Less: Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	(17,699)	(41,913)
Plus: Contributions by employer	17,672	16,775
Adjustment loss due to restriction on surplus	18,871	0
Adjustment loss due to minimum funding requirement	20,286	0
<b>Gain on re-measurement of pension benefits</b>	<b>(14,155)</b>	<b>(249,322)</b>

### Reconciliation of in-year additional pension cost in the Statement of Cash Flows

	2023-24	2022-23
	£000	£000
Expense recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure	17,699	41,913
Less: Contributions by employer	(17,672)	(16,775)
<b>In-year additional pension cost</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25,138</b>

### Sensitivity analysis

The approximate impact of changing the key assumptions on the present value of the funded defined benefit obligation as at 31 March 2024 and the projected service cost for the period ending 31 March 2025 is set out below.

#### Discount rate assumption:

Adjustment to discount rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	692,797	704,062	715,327
% change in present value of total obligation	(1.6%)		1.6%
Projected service cost	15,827	16,538	17,266
Approximate % change in projected service cost	(4.3%)		4.4%

#### Rate of general increase in salaries:

Adjustment to salary increase rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	704,766	704,062	703,358
% change in present value of total obligation	0.1%		(0.1%)
Projected service cost	16,538	16,538	16,538
Approximate % change in projected service cost	0.0%		0.0%

#### Rate of increase to pensions and rate of revaluation of pension accounts:

Adjustment to pension increase rate	+0.1% p.a.	Base figure	-0.1% p.a.
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	714,623	704,062	693,501
% change in present value of total obligation	1.5%		(1.5%)
Projected service cost	17,266	16,538	15,827
Approximate % change in projected service cost	4.4%		(4.3%)

### Post retirement mortality assumption:

*Adjustment to mortality age rating assumption	-1 year	Base figure	+1 year
	£000	£000	£000
Present value of total obligation	722,368	704,062	686,460
% change in present value of total obligation	2.6%		(2.5%)
Projected service cost	17,133	16,538	15,943
Approximate % change in projected service cost	3.6%		(3.6%)

\*A rating of +1 year means that members are assumed to follow the mortality pattern of the base table for an individual that is 1 year older than them.

### Mortality assumption:

The mortality assumptions are based on actual mortality experience of members with the Fund based on analysis carried out as part of the 2022 Actuarial Valuation, and allow for expected future mortality improvements. Sample life expectancies at age 65 in normal health resulting from these mortality assumptions are shown below.

	31 March 2024	31 March 2023
<b>Males</b>		
Pensioner member aged 65 at accounting date	21.0	21.6
Active member aged 45 at accounting date	22.3	22.9
<b>Females</b>		
Pensioner member aged 65 at accounting date	24.2	24.6
Active member aged 45 at accounting date	25.2	25.7

### 23. Contingent liabilities

There were no qualifying contingent liabilities as at 31 March 2024 (2022-23: £nil).

### 24. Contingent assets

There were no qualifying contingent assets as at 31 March 2024 (2022-23: £nil).

# Appendix

## Glossary

**Cafcass and the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) have together created a glossary of the more commonly used terms and words in family proceedings. We thank the FJYPB and other colleagues for co-ordinating this, enabling readers to understand the terminology used in our annual report.**

For more information about the FJYPB's word busting project please visit the Cafcass website\*

\*Word Busting - Cafcass - Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

**Adjournment** – A decision made by the family court to hold the court hearing at another time because things are not ready or people need more time to do something.

**Adoption order** – A type of order made by the family court which transfers parental responsibility to new, adoptive parents and means that a child or young person is no longer legally the child of their birth parents. It allows them to start a new family.

**Agency staff/workers** – Social workers who do not normally work for Cafcass but will sometimes do work for Cafcass during busy periods.

**Area Quality Review (AQR)** – A way of measuring how well an area is working. People involved include the assistant director/heads of service in that area. The AQR findings help form the action and development plans for that area.

**Application** – This is how a person asks the family court to help them.

**Barrister** – A legally trained person who advises people going through the family court and speaks for them in court hearings.

**Bank workers** – Social workers who do not normally work for Cafcass but will sometimes do work for Cafcass during busy periods. These workers do not come through an agency.

**C100 form** – This is the form used to apply to the courts for a contact or child arrangements order.

**Cafcass worker** – Depending on what the family court has ordered Cafcass to do, the Cafcass worker (sometimes known as a practitioner or officer) can be known as a family court adviser or a children's guardian (for more detail, look for their descriptions).

**Care order** – An order made by the family court when the local authority can prove that a child or young person living in their area is not being looked after properly.

**Child record audits** – Internal audits which are completed by Cafcass managers to ensure consistency and best practice.

**Case management conference** – This is a hearing where the major issues for a child or young person are talked about and the judge sets out how the family court case is going to proceed.

**Child Contact Intervention (CCI)** – CCIs are short-term interventions of supervised contact. They are designed to help adults and children establish safe and beneficial contact when this is difficult to do on their own.

**Child contact centre** – This is a safe place where children and young people can see a parent who they do not live with. Usually, this allows for direct contact, supervised contact or supported contact.

**Child arrangements order** – When people cannot agree on where a child might live or who they should see, the family court might be asked to decide. The judge will look at what is best for the child or young person and make a decision setting out what people must do.

**ChildFirst** – Cafcass' electronic case management system which stores Cafcass' case related information including feedback and complaints.

**Children's guardian** – Sometimes when the problems within a family are really difficult then the family court will ask for a children's guardian to help them. The children's guardian is an independent person who is there to keep the court focused on what is best for the child or young person. They will also appoint a solicitor to act for the young person in court.

**Consent order** – Made by the court where all parties in the case have agreed to what it says.

**Direct contact** – When a child or young person spends time with someone that they do not live with.

**Early Intervention Teams (EIT)** – EIT operate in service areas, with Cafcass workers carrying out safeguarding checks to inform the safeguarding letter we provide at the first hearing.

**Family assistance order** – An order which the family court can make to provide short term (usually six months) support to a family who agree to it. This can be from a Cafcass worker or a social worker from the local authority.

**Family court** – This is where important decisions are made about children, young people and their families. It is different to criminal courts where people go when they might have done something wrong. Decisions in the family court are made by judges or magistrates when people cannot agree about what is best for a child or young person.

**Family Court Adviser (FCA)** – Sometimes the family court may ask an FCA to meet with a child or young person to talk about their wishes and feelings and to make sure the family court hears what they have to say. The FCA also gives their view to the court about what is best for the child. FCAs do not need to meet all children and young people because sometimes families can agree themselves on what is best.

**Family group conference** – All of the important people in a child's life get together to check that they are safe. It means that everyone knows what is happening and keeps them safe.

**Final order** – This is the last order made by the family court. The court expects all the people named in the order to keep to it and do as it says and can punish adults if they do not.

**Foster carer** – People who give a home to children and young people who need a safe place to live. They may have children of their own, or other foster children living with them, in which case you would all live in the same house together.

**Guardian’s report** – The family court will ask the children’s guardian to write a report to help it make decisions about a child or young person. The report will include information on their wishes and feelings and a recommendation from the children’s guardian on what they think is best for the child. The report will also include information from the other people involved such as the parents and any other individuals such as experts.

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** – IROs help to make sure the best decisions are made for children looked after by the local authority. Their main focus is to make sure that the care planning process for each child or young person is meeting their needs, and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

**Indirect contact** – A child or young person can use forms of contact such as letters, cards or gifts to communicate with a parent where the court considers it is safe and beneficial for them to do so.

**Interim care order** – This means that the local authority makes decisions about a child rather than their own parents for the short term, before the family court makes a final order. The child will get a social worker to make the decisions day to day.

**Issues Resolution Hearing (IRH)** – This is a special hearing where the family court decides which issues need to be sorted out and hears arguments about which is a true version of events.

**Judge** – Sometimes families have problems which they might find too hard to sort out by themselves. A judge works in a family court, listens to everybody and then decides what is best for the child or young person involved in the case. They have the final say and will make the decision about that child or young person’s life.

**Level 1 check** – A police criminal record check which is completed by Cafcass’ Police National Computer (PNC) team.

**Legal adviser** – A legally qualified person who helps magistrates in the family court apply the law. They do not play any part in the decision-making process but are there to advise.

**Litigants in person** – A party in a case who is self-representing i.e. they do not have legal representation/lawyer.

**Local authority** (also known as children’s social care or social services) – This organisation is responsible for making sure all children and young people in their local area are kept safe by the people who care for them.

**Magistrate** – This person is a member of the community who volunteers to make decisions that affect families, children and young people. They are similar to a judge but are not legally qualified. They are advised on the law by their legal adviser.

**Mediation** – When people cannot agree, they go to another person to help them sort it out (a mediator). The mediator talks to everyone and tries to help them find an outcome that they are all happy with. This might mean that they do not have to go to the family court.

**Non-molestation order** – This is a type of order the family court uses to keep adults, children and young people safe from someone who has been abusive toward them.

**Operational service area** – Cafcass divides up the country into 18 geographical regions called operational service areas, each managed by an assistant director and head of practice.

**Parental order** – An order which transfers legal parenthood from a surrogate to the intended parents.

**Parental responsibility** – Parental responsibility means all the rights, duties, and responsibilities that a parent has to a child or young person. A person or the people with parental responsibility can make decisions about a child such as who they will live with and what school they will attend.

**Placement order** – An order which allows the local authority to place a child with suitable adopters following care proceedings (even if the parents do not agree).

**Post-assessment hub** – Children’s cases are allocated to a post-assessment hub once the work ordered by the court has been completed and the FCA has no authority to continue working with the family. This means that once a report has been completed and filed with the court, the involvement of the FCA ends until the final hearing, where they may be ordered to attend.

**Pre-proceedings** – Work that is carried out by the local authority (sometimes involving Cafcass) before a decision on making a care application is made.

**Private law** – These cases are brought to the family court by private individuals, generally in connection with divorce or parents’ separation. The family court may make a child arrangements order, prohibited steps order or a specific issues order or no order at all.

**Prohibited steps order** – A parent can be prevented by the family court from doing something the other parent does not want them to do. The most common type is where one parent is stopped from moving abroad with the child or young person.

**Public law** – Public law cases are brought to the family court by local authorities where they are worried that a child or young person is not being looked after safely. The family court may make a care order, a supervision order, or no order at all. Relinquished babies and children – term used to describe where parents feel that adoption may be the best option for providing a permanent, safe future for their child (the child is ‘relinquished’).

**Rule 16.4 cases** – These are particularly difficult or complicated family court cases where the judge decides to make the child a party to the case under rule 16.4 of the Family Procedure Rules 2010. A Cafcass guardian will be appointed to represent the child in the case.

**Safeguarding letter** – This is a letter that a Cafcass worker will write and send to the family court. They will speak to the parties (usually the parents) and ask about the child or young person’s safety and any worries that they might have.



**Section 37 report** – S37 is the power by which a judge can order a local authority to investigate a child's circumstances and report back to the court within eight weeks explaining whether or not the local authority considers it necessary to initiate proceedings that would place the child in local authority care. If the local authority decides this is not necessary, they must set out the basis on which they have reached their decision.

**Section 7 report** – This report is ordered by the family court and makes either Cafcass or the local authority investigate all the circumstances of the family, often including the wishes and feelings of a child or young person, and send a report to the court.

**Section 8** – the court can make four different orders (i) Child Arrangements orders (ii) prohibited steps orders (iii) Specific Issue orders (iv) orders under the Inherent jurisdiction (a special power exercised only in the High Court).

**Section 16A risk assessment** – a duty held by Cafcass officers to undertake a risk assessment whenever they have cause to suspect that the child concerned is at risk of harm. Self-employed contractor – social work staff who are offered work on a case-by-case basis to assist in providing additional capacity and have a contract for services for each individual case.

**Sessional workers** – former Cafcass staff who stay to complete case work which occurs after their departure from the organisation, for example by attending a final hearing and/or closing an existing case rather than having to reallocate that case to a new worker.

**Social worker** – These specially trained people help to make sure children and young people are safe and properly looked after. They will work with families to help make it possible for children to stay safely with them. If the family court decides that it is not possible, they will help to make sure there is somewhere else that is safe where a child can live.

**Solicitor** – A legally trained person who provides advice to people going through the family court and can speak for them in court.

**Special guardianship order** – This family court order allows another person to become a child's 'special guardian'. It is for children who cannot live with their birth parents and gives parental responsibility to the special guardian so that they can make decisions alone about the child's life.

**Specific issue order** – This order is made by the family court when there is an important issue to be resolved but parents cannot agree on it. For example, which school a child should go to.

**Supervised contact** – This is a type of direct contact which requires a supervisor to make sure that the child is safe with the other person. This may be done in a contact centre.

**Supervision order** – A supervision order makes the local authority take responsibility for advising, assisting and befriending a young person, and ensuring that the child or young person is kept safe in the care of their parents.

**Supported contact** – This is direct contact whereby a child contact centre worker gives some support to the adults so that they can meet the needs of their child.

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