



Ministry
of Justice



Department
for Education

Family Justice Board Meeting 17 December 2024

Attendees

Members

Lord Ponsonby (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice) Co-Chair
Frances Oram (Portfolio Director, Children's Social Care Reform, DfE)
Ed Lidington, (Director, Courts, Criminal and Family Justice, MoJ)
Isabelle Trowler, (Chief Social Worker for Children and Families)
Yvette Stanley, (National Director for Social Care, Ofsted)
Jacky Tiotto (Chief Executive, Cafcass) Nigel Brown, (Chief Executive, Cafcass Cymru)
Sarah Johal (National Adoption Lead)
Helen Lincoln (Executive Director for Children, Families & Education (DCS), Essex County Council)
Albert Heaney (Director, Social Services, Welsh Government)

Apologies

Janet Daby MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Education) Co-Chair
Nick Goodwin (Head of Business Architecture, HM Courts and Tribunals Service) – covered by Adam Lennon and Mark Stewart.

Observers

Sir Andrew McFarlane (President of the Family Division)
Representatives of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)
Rebecca Roberts, (Chair of West Yorkshire Local Family Justice Board)

Meeting

Item 1: Co-Chairs' Introduction and Opening Remarks

1. Lord Ponsonby (LP) welcomed members to the meeting, introduced himself as co-chair, and outlined his priority areas across family justice. These include reducing delay across the system; and more specifically for private law – continued delivery of the Pathfinder pilots and the programme of work around Early Resolution
2. Fran Oram (FO) shared apologies from co-chair Janet Daby MP and highlighted Minister Daby's experience of working in the children's social care system. FO then set out DfE priorities linked to family justice, including new work on family help and child protection, children's social care and progress in introducing the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Item 2: Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) Presentation

3. LP invited representatives from the FJYPB to discuss their recent work.
4. The FJYPB presented their workplan, progress on priorities and recent achievements. This included continued focus on the impact of domestic abuse

on children and young people, work with Local Family Justice Boards, creating a Safe Family Time guide which has been shared with professionals, and a lesson plan for PSHE (Personal, Social, Health & Economic) classes on family life changes, such as divorce or separation.

5. LP and members noted the 'judges writing to children' toolkit, and the need to ensure that key partners in the system were prepared to support this and thanked the FJYPB for their presentation and ongoing work.

Item 3: Review of Performance to date against Family Justice System Priorities

6. MoJ officials introduced the discussion on family justice system performance, noting that six months of data (to October 24) provided an opportunity to review mid-year progress. It was noted that impacts from individual workstreams may not be seen for some time.
7. Officials took the Board through progress against FJB priorities, noting red BRAG rating in public law priorities 1 and 2 (the priorities are in Annex A of this paper) as targets are not likely to be achieved by the end of the financial year, despite progress being made. Private law priority 1 was also noted as red, however private law priority two is close to being achieved and is marked as green. Private law priority 3 is not yet recordable, and public law priority 3 will read as 100% until the data from October is available, so currently neither have a BRAG rating.
8. The importance of work with HMCTS to ensure the closure of cases this year against public and private law priority 1, was highlighted by members and officials.
9. Officials presented the regional performance breakdown, noting challenges in London and the South-East. Members discussed whether ongoing work is sufficient in addressing this issue and whether the root causes for it are understood – noting that there is no single driver for delay. Members outlined issues including case complexity, social work workforce challenges, culture of non-compliance with timelines, the need for additional expert assessments, international elements with cases, and variable regional issues with fee-paid judicial capacity, flagging the importance of these in understanding the underlying context and day to day interactions that can lead to delay.
10. Members agreed the need for a detailed discussion to understand the complexity of the situation in London, noting the persistent challenges and emerging plan of work to address delay.

Item 4: Initial discussion on Family Justice System Priorities for 2025-2026

11. DfE officials outlined the opportunity to pause and examine where we are as a system in the context of developing priorities for 2025-2026, asking members to consider wider government missions and what more we should be doing in the year ahead.
12. DfE officials discussed reforms to Children's Social Care and the settlement DfE received to undertake this in the most recent Spending Review. LP and members discussed Deprivation of Liberty Orders and the importance of avoiding unintended consequences and negative interactions between different reforms. Members highlighted the value of multi-agency child protection teams and the potential of multi-disciplinary assessment for child protection.

13. The group agreed that the strategic aims and priorities for 2024-2025 remained relevant and that delay should continue to be a focus for 2025-2026. Updated priorities will be developed via the Policy and Delivery Group. The Board noted the need to ensure priorities are aligned with wider Government missions and ambitions such a halving Violence against Women and Girls, and that future Board discussions should include looking at other forms of abuse – such as interfamilial sexual abuse.
14. Members agreed that regional targets will need to be included given significant differences in performance.
15. Members asked to table an item on findings from the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel at a future Board.

Item 5: Any Other Business

16. LP thanked members for their contributions to the meeting and set out key actions and items to bring to future meetings of the Board, including Pathfinder, a focus on London and system capacity. The board agreed to meet again in March 2025.

Annex A: FJB Priorities 2024-2025

Strategic Aims

what are we trying to change as a whole system

PRIMARY FOCUS 1) Ensure children and families have timely outcomes (**delay**)

2) Ensure the system runs effectively and efficiently with the resources available (**efficiency, capacity**)

3) Ensure children's wishes and feelings are heard, and they understand what is happening, when, and why (**experience**)

Public Law Priorities

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

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

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

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

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

Private Law Priorities

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

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

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

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

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