



Ministry
of Justice



Department
for Education

Family Justice Board Meeting 02 September 2025

Attendees

Members

Sarah Sackman KC MP (Minister for Courts and Legal Services at the Ministry of Justice) Co-Chair
Janet Daby MP (Minister for Children and Families at the Department for Education) Co-Chair
Helen Waite (Director, Children's Social Care - Practice and Workforce, DfE)
Gemma Hewison (Interim Director General, Policy Group, MoJ)
Neal Barcoe, (Interim Director, Civil, Family, Tribunals and Administration of 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)
Barbara Mills KC, (Chair of the Bar Council)
Helen Lincoln (Executive Director for Children, Families & Education, Essex County Council)
Albert Heaney (Director, Social Services, Welsh Government)

Apologies

Nick Goodwin (CEO, HM Courts and Tribunals Service) – covered by Adam Lennon.
Fon Roberts, (Head of Children's Services, Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru)

Observers

Sir Andrew McFarlane (President of the Family Division)
Representatives of the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)
Alistair Nixon (Chair of Cleveland & South Durham Local Family Justice Board)

Meeting

Item 1: Co-Chairs' Introduction and Opening Remarks

1. Minister Sackman (SS) opened the meeting by introducing herself, welcoming new Board members - Barbara Mills and Helen Waite - and outlining a commitment to using the Board as a vehicle for coordinated, whole system effort to drive better outcomes.

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

2. The FJYPB shared highlights of their successful 2025 Voice of the Child conference which attracted over 90% more visitors than in 2024 at over 1500 registered attendees. Reflections from attendees were noted - including a

commitment to challenging their own unconscious bias and using new tools to communicate with children and young people.

3. The FJYPB discussed their new guide for keeping children and young people at the centre of their proceedings which was launched at the conference. Minister Daby (JD) and SS thanked the FJYPB for their presentation and ongoing work, **taking an action to share the guide with members of the Board**. Members noted the growth of the FJYPB and how much value they add as a crucial voice within the family justice system.

Item 3: Family Justice Regional Improvement, Performance Data and KPIs

Performance Data and KPIs

4. MoJ officials presented data for the first quarter of the financial year. Progress against priority 1 was rated red across most regions owing to a lack of movement since the start of the financial year. Priority 2 saw a mix of RAG ratings across regions. Notably, London and the North East demonstrated significant improvement, and some DFJ areas reported as having no cases over 52 weeks.
5. Priority 3 shows some progress, with notable performance in the North East but nationally the target is unlikely to be achieved by the end of the year. Priority 4 has seen slower progress over the past quarter, despite year-on-year improvement overall.
6. Members commented on the improvements within London and elsewhere and emphasised a need for continued tailored support, recognising that each area faces a unique combination of challenges context specific solutions.

Family Justice Regional Improvement

7. Officials set out work to date and planned across areas of focus (London, South East, Greater Manchester) and noted action plan reporting from LFJBs was expected by the end of September.
8. Members noted the positive impact of work driven forward by the London Oversight Group including funded CPOs, improved listing practice and a focus on compliance with the Public Law Outline (PLO).
9. Exploring the low take-up of mediation in Manchester was noted, as was engagement to date in the South-East. SS and members discussed the need to support areas facing challenges, commenting that court users should not have such varied experiences based on geography.
10. The Board noted a concerning upward trend in public law demand and the need to further explore this. **The Board agreed to table discussion at a future meeting following investigation via subgroups. The Board agreed to the formal publication of national targets, at the earliest suitable opportunity**

Item 4: NAO Recommendations and next steps

11. Officials from MoJ and DfE led discussion on this item, sharing questions for the Board to consider in addressing each recommendation.
12. The Board agreed that the recommendations highlight the need to better communicate the good work the system is collectively undertaking. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's upcoming report was also flagged **and the Board agreed to extend an invite to the commissioner to attend its next meeting.**

13. Members agreed to publish a family justice strategy as soon as possible, followed by annual updates as recommended by the NAO. Members further raised the need to ensure the strategy is centred on children.
14. The Board noted the need to ensure an impactful and timely launch of the strategy and associated priorities, particularly for LFJBs where work is undertaken in addition to busy day jobs.

Item 5: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

15. JD and DfE officials outlined progress in the Bill's development, and addressed concerns over the Bill's potential impacts on private law.
16. Officials illustrated ongoing engagement with system partners, before discussing the Families First Partnership Programme the shift towards early intervention..
17. The Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) policy within the programme and Bill was discussed in detail, officials noting it should be offered as early as possible and that 80% of LAs already have a family group conference offer. It was noted FGDM was offered at early help in 60% of local authorities (LAs). Officials have received robust and peer reviewed evidence on impacts that demonstrates FGDM successfully diverts children from care proceedings. Examples cited include that 13.6% of children offered were diverted from care proceedings, generating significant savings for LAs. The majority of children diverted from care via FGDM are expected to remain with the parents. Officials shared that feedback received from the sector is positive about upcoming reforms and will continue to engage to avoid unintended consequences. Officials presented concerns raised by stakeholders, with accompanying actions / mitigations to address these, including around resultant private law demand and differences in protections and representation, as well as the compilation of s.7 reports. Members discussed concerns from the modelling examples, noting FGDM has been in place for some years, and the figures may represent a doubling of impact as a result. Children's representation was raised as a key point to address, and it was suggested that a chapter could be drafted into working together in family justice given its wide use in the social work profession.
18. **JD agreed to take away consideration of these points, noting the need for continued dialogue ahead of implementation and the importance of child representation, which the Board agreed to continue review of.**

Item 6: AOB

19. Members **raised the importance of assessments considering the safety of children staying with family, in light of recent serious case reviews where harm was caused by extended family members.**
20. Officials noted work was ongoing to explore and identify the risks and any learning from a recent HMCTS data issue which had received some coverage in the press.
21. JD discussed an upcoming visit to, and letter on Family Drug and Alcohol courts that will be sent to the President of the Family Division