



Cafcass strategic plan 2015-2020

A stronger voice for children

Introduction

This plan builds on the progress made and successes achieved through the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan. With five clear strategic priorities to guide us, our strategy over the last two years has brought Cafcass to a point where our work with children across the organisation has been externally validated as good, our performance against the key measures agreed with government remains solid and our contribution to family justice reform is both broad and embedded.

Our vision

In our last plan we acknowledged both recent challenges and more to come. We must continue to ensure we deliver our services as effectively and as efficiently as possible within the resources that are available. This plan sets out our vision and commitment to strengthening the voice of the child in the family court process, building on our own unique role and capability to improve outcomes for children.

We set out this vision against the background of the next Spending Review which we know will require very difficult decisions to be taken about spending priorities. There will also be General Elections at both the beginning and end of the period covered by the plan. We will work within parameters set for us, as we always have, and continue to ensure that we support to the best of our ability every child referred to us. We will continue to explore the application of our social worker expertise in helping separated parents to resolve disputes about their children as part of a pathway that begins at an earlier stage, before court proceedings.

So while we can be confident about our assumptions in the first years of this plan, we will need to keep under review our work programmes in the latter period of this plan, and make revisions if our circumstances change.

Our statutory responsibility

Cafcass is involved in public and private law cases, as the independent voice of the child, primarily at the request of the family court. Legislation defines our role and statutory responsibilities. These are set out in our Operating Framework, accessible through our website at www.cafcass.gov.uk. We are also the eyes and ears of the court on the issues children are facing, usually through recommendations we set out in reports to court and the actions on a child's behalf we persuade those responsible to take. Through all of our work, we aim to reduce the risks to a child's health and wellbeing and to promote their welfare and development.

Programmes to deliver our strategic priorities

Quality

<p>Show continuous improvement in our performance and in the quality of our work, and do well in our next scheduled Ofsted inspection in 2017.</p>	<p>Extend and embed the domains of our Quality Account to provide an innovative and rich analysis of the quality of our organisation and its work.</p>	<p>Improve our capacity to identify and measure experiential outcomes for children from our involvement, including use of feedback from children and families to understand the impact of our work and to apply the lessons learnt</p>	<p>Develop our practice models as set out in the Operating Framework to practice at an increasingly expert social work level, evidenced by quality assurance.</p>
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Family Justice Reform and Innovation

<p>Meet all Key Performance Indicators for Cafcass and evidence our contribution to the Key Performance Measures for the family justice system.</p>	<p>Innovate and reform in public and private law, so as to use our resources to best effect.</p>	<p>Play a key role on the National Family Justice Board and on Local Family Justice Boards, demonstrating we are making a difference.</p>	<p>Anticipate and shape future remits we might be given, being clear what the irreducible level of value in our service to vulnerable children is.</p>
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Influence

<p>Use our unique position and insight to generate high impact and timely research to inform our own practice and influence that across the family justice system.</p>	<p>Maintain positive working relationships with all partner organisations, interest and pressure groups and share our tools and knowledge to bring improvements in others.</p>	<p>Build on and share our ideas and thinking about children and their families' rights and needs in the UK today, drawing on our knowledge and that from the FJ Young People's Board.</p>	<p>Become known for expert social work in family court cases, and to earn more widespread respect for our contribution to improving children and their families' lives.</p>
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Diversity

<p>Make sure we bring the uniqueness of each child to the court's attention, including any diversity related needs.</p>	<p>Promote a culture of urgency and a 'team around the child' in the court setting, including the support a child needs after a set of court proceedings comes to an end.</p>	<p>Promote a greater awareness of all dimensions of the child's journey and that of their family, including international contexts, and what children need in these circumstances.</p>	<p>Develop an evidence base that analyses the diversity related needs of current and emerging service users and in turn briefs and trains our staff to respond to these changes.</p>
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Efficiency and Effectiveness

<p>Continue delivering savings packages required by continuing to innovate throughout all front and back office functions and across organisational boundaries.</p>	<p>Innovate further with technology to support service delivery both within Cafcass, between Cafcass and its partners and directly to children and families, including expanding our digital services.</p>	<p>Full implementation of our Talent Management and Succession Planning strategies so that the organisation remains stable, e.g. through completion of a professional and career progression framework, including progression for as many practitioners as possible to Advanced Social Worker Status.</p>	<p>Continue the strategy of estates rationalisation, supported by a clear assessment of the rationale for retention of a smaller number of collaborative spaces to ensure all Cafcass staff remain connected into our operational culture and requirements.</p>
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Our top five strategic objectives



Our strategic priorities to improve outcomes for children are:

- Continue with further improvements to the quality of our work.
- Implement our part of the family justice reform programme and bring innovation to our services.
- Build further on our understanding of diversity in casework, always seeing the uniqueness of each child we have responsibilities towards.
- Continue to pursue efficiency and effectiveness in all services, looking to make further savings in our budget
- Use our influence positively as the voice of the child and the eyes and ears of family courts

And how our young people describe them:

- Continuing to make further improvements to the quality of our work with children and young people.
- Changing the family justice system to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.
- Understanding that each case is different, always seeing the uniqueness of each child and young person we have responsibilities towards.
- To find the best ways we can make our money go further while still providing the best outcome for children and young people.
- Using our influence positively as the voice of the child.

Our service and recent performance

Children and casework:

- In 2013-14, we worked with 142,711 children and young people across England.
- Of the children referred to us in new cases, 45,255 were male (51%) and 42,891 were female (49%) and most of the children we work with are aged ten years and under.
- The vast majority of our public law work involves local authority care applications. Cafcass received 10,606 applications during 2013-14.
- During 2013-14 we received 46,465 new private law cases.

Improvements and innovation:

- We played an instrumental part in the continued implementation of the revised Public Law Outline (PLO), the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP), and new provisions in the Children and Families Act 2014.
- In March 2014 Ofsted carried out its first national inspection of Cafcass.
- The overall judgement was **good**. Ofsted reported that 'Cafcass leads effective services that meet the requirements for good. It is Ofsted's expectation that as a minimum all children, young people and families receive a service where the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private and public law practice is good:

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with families Good

The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with families Good

The leadership and governance of the national organisation Outstanding

The leadership and management of local services Good

- Cafcass has also worked to better embed learning from complaints, compliments and children's feedback, at the local and national levels.
- Ofsted found that Cafcass had appropriately invested in its IT infrastructure, enabling staff to work more flexibly and to be more productive.
- Further changes to the Cafcass estate were achieved with 13 offices being closed and five new offices opened, leaving a total of 44 properties on the Cafcass portfolio.

Our performance:

- Our sickness absence levels are amongst the lowest in the wider public sector. Levels fell to 7.3 days on average during 2013-14.
- Cafcass' progress against sustainability commitments is now also monitored by the Sustainability Steering Group, (SSG) which meets on a quarterly basis and whose sponsor is the Chief Executive.
- Key performance indicators (October 2014 unless otherwise stated):
 - Proportion of open public law care workload allocated to an appointed Children's Guardian 99.7% (Green)
 - Timeliness of allocation to an appointed Children's Guardian, for all care applications received 0.5 days (Green) (2013/14)
 - Proportion of open private law workload allocated to a Family Court Adviser 99.6% (Green)
 - Proportion of Section 7 reports that meet their agreed filing times 97.6% (Green)

Our service users

Cafcass completed its second national adult service user feedback survey in October 2014. The survey formed one aspect of the quality programme of the Cafcass Strategic Plan (2013-2015) to gain more feedback from the children and families we work with. Following a review by the FJYPB, we introduced feedback forms specifically for children and young people to encourage them to express their views. A number of offices have introduced 'feedback trees' and other child-friendly means of providing feedback on the work we carried out.

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) has continued to support developments within Cafcass practice through a system of commissions. FJYPB members are invited to sit on interview panels for new staff members and have devised a 'Recipe for an FCA', which forms part of the Cafcass recruitment pack. It highlights the characteristics that children and young people value in their FCA.

Our staff

At 31st March 2014 Cafcass employed 1,713.80 staff; 93.1% of whom are frontline staff consisting of:

- 68.7% Family Court Advisers
- 6.6% Frontline Managers
- 17.8% Frontline Administration Support.

The remaining 6.9% are specialist staff including Operational Area Senior Managers (Heads of Service and Assistant Directors), Human Resources (HR); Finance; Legal Services; Policy; Governance; Management Information; IT and Communications.

The range of workforce initiatives that have been developed and achievements of the last year include:

- Learning and Development – focussing on the provision of a range of blended development programmes.
- Health and Wellbeing Plan – a comprehensive health and wellbeing plan has been made available to every staff member.
- Equality and Diversity (E&D) Strategy, 2013-2015 –to strengthen the quality and focus of E&D considerations in frontline practice.
- myWork –enabling staff and managers to directly access a range of personal and team metrics related to learning, development and their core work.

Our partners

Our managers have played a strong leadership role at a local level, raising the profile of family justice services with local authorities and strengthening links with the local judiciary. Cafcass is represented on the national Family Justice Board and chairs 10 out of 42 local Family Justice Boards (and has a strong leadership role on all others). We also continued to manage the provision of contact activities on behalf of DfE in 2013-14 and now do so for the MoJ. Cafcass practitioners refer to these services when they identify families that need a short period of additional help.