

Cafcass strategic plan 2013-15

Even closer to children

Introduction

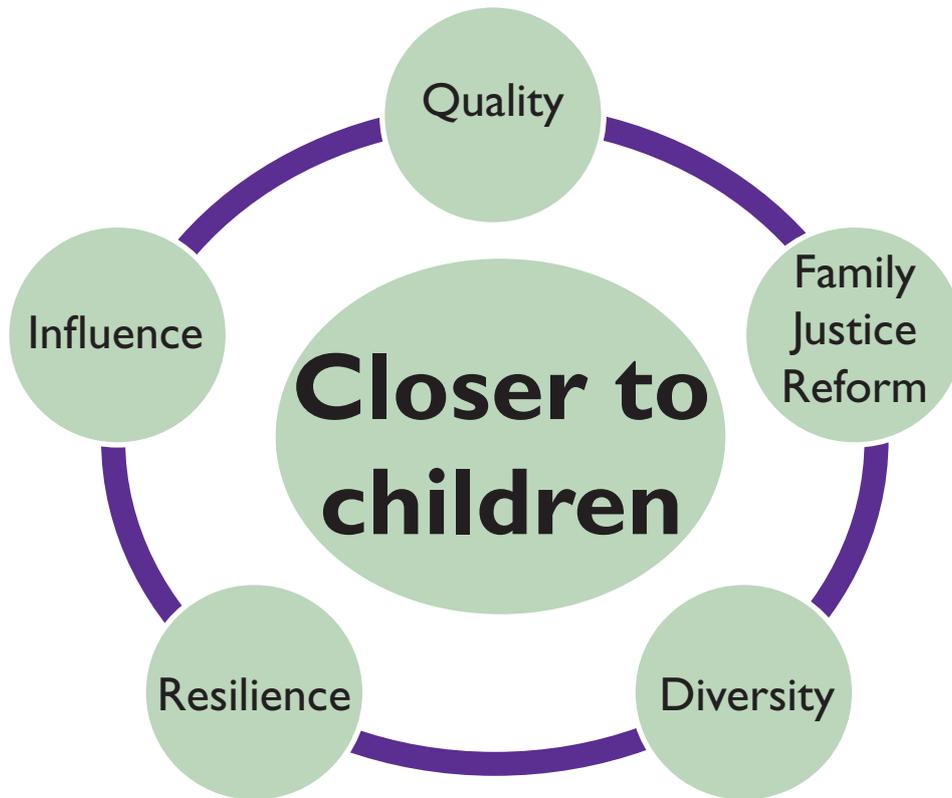
The last few years have been challenging. And the future is likely to bring more challenges still. We will need to continue to do 'more for less'. As demand for our services continues to rise, we must continue to ensure we deliver our services as effectively and as efficiently as possible, with the resources that are available. At a time of great and rapid change, in society as well as in public services, certainties reduce. Forecasting future demand becomes less certain. However, what we can be absolutely certain about is the importance of the work we do to help children. Our commitment to supporting every child referred to us by the family courts lies at the heart of our plans for the next two years.

Our statutory responsibility

Cafcass is asked by family courts to become involved in public and private law cases, as the independent voice of the child. 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, advising the court on the issues children are facing, usually through recommendations we set out in reports to court. 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.

Our remit letter for 2013-14 from our sponsor, the Department of Education, notes the expectation for the transfer of Cafcass from that department to the Ministry of Justice will take place in April 2014. Work with both departments on this transfer continues, assessing the impact of a transfer and ensuring that this is carried out in a way which provides minimal disruption to frontline services and sees staff supported throughout the process.

Our top five strategic objectives



Our strategic priorities to improve outcomes for children are:

- Making further improvements to the quality of our work.
- Implementing our part of the family justice reform programme and actively supporting the overall reform programme.
- Enhancing our understanding of diversity in casework, given the uniqueness of each child we have responsibilities towards.
- Becoming even more resilient by handling higher volumes of work whilst making further savings in our budget.
- Using our influence positively as the voice of the child and the eyes and ears of family courts.

Our recent performance in numbers

Our strategy for the past three years has been to manage increased workload through improving productivity and increasing staff engagement, so that the children we work with – 145,810 children in 2011-12 – receive the best possible service from us.

What we've achieved so far:

- Nationally, we have been meeting our Key Performance Indicators for allocation in public and private law for some time. Since April 2012, care cases have been allocated, on average, to Children's Guardians (CG) in less than three working days and, since January 2011, more than 97% of care cases have been allocated to CG at month end. Since October 2010, over 97% of private law cases were allocated to an FCA at month end, and since March 2011 over 97% of section 7 reports in private law cases have been filed by the date agreed by the court.

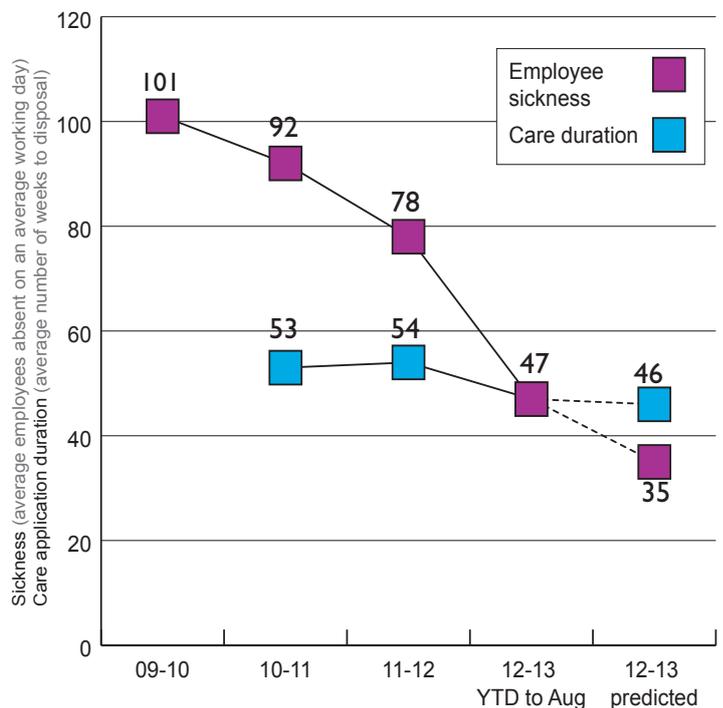
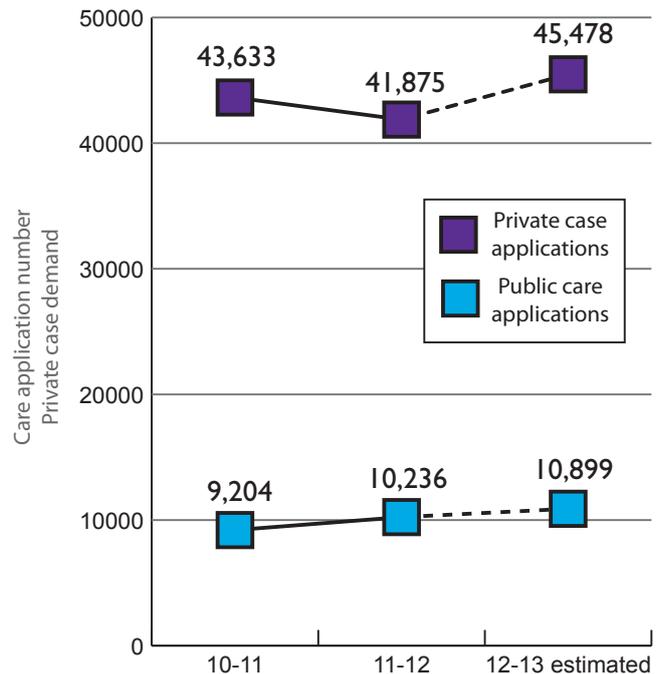
- We have had reductions in grant funding in real cash terms since 2008-09 in the order of £12m, representing a 9% decrease. There has been an 11% increase in demand in public law from 2010-11 to 2011-12, and demand for the first six months of 2012-13 indicates a further increase, estimated at 8% for the whole 2012-13 year.

- Our productivity has improved – we deal with more cases in less time, and we are closing more cases than new cases are being received. In public law, despite record levels of incoming care (s31) applications in recent years, Cafcass has reduced its stock of open cases by 13% (1,616 cases) between December 2011 to December 2012. In private law, demand is also rising, yet we have managed to reduce the number of open cases by 9.1% (2,262 cases) in the same time period.

- Our workforce is healthier. Our average sickness rate for social work qualified staff has reduced from 16.2 days per annum in 2009-10 to 6.28 days per annum in 2012-13. In addition, the number of staff on long term sickness is now an average of 20 on any typical day, compared to over 50 in 2009-10, and sickness due to stress has reduced by an average of 80% since 2009-10. This reduction means that we have more capacity to respond to demand.

These improvements have made our service stronger.

The following programmes we are now working on give you an indication of how we are preparing for 2013-15.



Our practice model

We are jointly developing a model of family court social work for all social workers who report or work in the family courts. This is a major family justice system reform programme. This means our practitioners will continue to produce concise and focused reports for court, concentrating on the main issues affecting children subject to family court applications, such as:

- What has happened for the child to be in the situation they are now in?
- Can their parents change and improve the quality of their care quickly enough to meet the needs of their child?
- How good and realistic is the plan for the child?

Our service users

We want to find out more about the impact of our work and the work of the wider family justice system and whether this makes a difference. We are carrying out a pilot outcome study with children, young people and parents who have used our private law service, as a first step in developing a greater understanding about impact and outcomes, so that we can use the findings to further improve the way we work. We will continue to systematically embed learning from our service user feedback, and from complaints, compliments, audits and inspection findings.

Our staff

We are developing programmes to support our staff to hold large, fast moving and complex workloads, which is the reality of social work today. These programmes include a health and wellbeing plan for individuals; individual performance monitoring so that staff can reflect on their performance and regulate its improvement with support; better IT support, such as more up to date lightweight laptops and tablets to support faster working when out on visits and in courts; and a review of terms and conditions so that we can support and promote flexible working under pressure. We also acknowledge the importance of non-practice roles in delivering greater efficiencies.

Programmes to deliver our strategic priorities

Quality

Steadily increasing the percentage of our work graded by ourselves and by Ofsted as good or outstanding.	Introducing individual and team performance scorecards and improving personal performance as a direct result.	Producing outcome statements on a sample of cases and more systematically gaining feedback from children and families about the impact of our work on them.	Becoming expert social workers within the parameters set out in the Family Court Social Work Model and as expected of us by judges and family justice system partner agencies.
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Family Justice Reform

Meeting all Key Performance Indicators for Cafcass and evidencing our contribution to the Key Performance Measures for the family justice system.	Steadily improving the quality and timeliness of case analyses we write and file in court, and steadily improving our engagement with parties on this.	Playing a key role on the National Family Justice Board and on local Family Justice Boards, demonstrating we are making a difference.	Implementing the Family Court Social Work Model now being developed with ADCS, including joint training with local authorities and the judiciary.
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Influence

Publishing at least four studies a year into the issues affecting children and how children's cases are handled by us and others.	Maintaining positive working relationships with all partner organisations, interest groups and pressure groups, nationally and locally.	Becoming known as a powerhouse of ideas and thinking about children's rights and needs in the UK today, drawing on our knowledge and that from the FJS Young People's Board.	Becoming known for expert social work in family court cases, and to earn more widespread respect for our contribution to improving children and young people's lives.
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Diversity

Making sure we bring the uniqueness of each child to the court's attention, including any diversity-related needs.	Promoting a culture of urgency and a 'team around the child' in the court setting, to challenge any cultures of delay.	Promoting a greater awareness of the child's journey through care (in care cases) and through relationship breakdown (in private law cases), and what children need in these circumstances.	Supporting the court's case management so that courts can complete cases as quickly as possible in the child's best interests.
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Resilience

Full implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Plan, so that staff, team and organisational resilience increase as a direct result.	Equipping all staff with IT which supports their job role and overall Cafcass business objectives e.g, ultrathin laptops, a tablet, or a faster desktop.	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 to Advanced Social Worker status.	Delivering the savings package required in 2013-15 by continuing to change working practices on cases, and centralising more functions into the National Business Centre – examples of doing 'more for less'.
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