



Cafcass NATIONAL STANDARDS

National Standards set out what service users, partner agencies and practitioners in the family justice system can expect from Cafcass.

These Standards update the 2003 Cafcass Service Standards and Principles, and will be phased in from 1 June 2007 with the exception of those marked with an asterisk which have a later implementation date indicated against the standard.

The Standards are safe national minimum standards. Full attainment of some Standards will be dependent on the support of other agencies in the family justice system. A tool to support the implementation of the standards is attached.

The President of the Family Division, Sir Mark Potter, has endorsed the Standards, and they are also supported by our partner agencies.

VISION STATEMENT

Cafcass will

1. Put children first.
2. Keep children as safe as possible.
3. Ensure each child has a voice that is heard, understood and respected in the family courts, in a way that is consistent with and responds to each child's wishes, competence and understanding.
4. Start with the child and stay with the child, throughout the life of cases¹.
5. Be clear about the needs, wishes and feelings of individual children in family court cases, as the core business of Cafcass.
6. Make a contribution to securing the safest, high quality outcomes possible for each child, and evaluate this contribution after a case is closed.
7. Respect the importance of family life and family members for each child.
8. Respect the diversity and individuality of each child and family.
9. Throughout the organisation, keep the focus on front line services.
10. Maintain our independence and objectivity at all times in all circumstances.

NB: Child is used throughout to refer to children and young people

¹ Voice of the Child in Care Blueprint Report (2005)

STANDARDS

Standard 1: Safeguarding

Value statement

Cafcass' primary purpose is to safeguard the welfare and represent the interests of each child or young person referred to us. This means Cafcass will safeguard against harm, safeguard a child's right to maintain important attachments, safeguard a child's right to fully participate in our work with them, and safeguard a stable and secure life for the children and young people we work with as far as we can.

Safeguarding work will take place within the framework of the DfES definition, set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006): - 'the process of protecting from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances with the provision of safe and effective care which is undertaken so as to enable children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully'.

- 1.1 Cafcass will continuously analyse and assess the risks to individual children in all family court cases referred to us until our involvement ceases.
- 1.2 The Cafcass safeguarding policy framework, including toolkits such as that for Domestic Violence, will be followed at all times.
- 1.3 Cafcass will be explicit about its safeguarding focus, and the specific risks to a child that we are working to eliminate. This applies to our role in public law cases where we are critiquing local authority work, and to our role in private law cases where we carry out a primary social work role.
- 1.4 A continuous risk identification process will be applied to all cases, using a unified risk assessment tool in which all staff will be trained. *the tool will be available from September 2007

Standard 2: Early intervention

Value statement

Cafcass can offer most to children and young people through becoming involved in cases as soon as we are made aware of them.

- 2.1 Cafcass will provide an early intervention service, based on early assessment and analysis in all cases.
- 2.2 All incoming referrals will be screened on the first working day of receipt.
- 2.3 Cafcass will allocate each case to a lead practitioner for the duration of the proceedings. The lead practitioner may be supported by other Cafcass staff on individual cases on a basis defined by the lead practitioner.
- 2.4 When and where needed, duty systems will be used to support the Cafcass early intervention standard in the first few days of a case.
- 2.5 Early intervention in a public law case involves reviewing and quality assuring of the assessments undertaken and commissioned, and the care plan proposed by a local authority, highlighting the additional steps or action needed.

- 2.6 Early intervention in a private law case means supporting parents and carers in dispute to make a safe and 'built to last' agreement for the future care of their child/children. Where this is not possible, a plan identifying future work needed and a recommended legal framework for this will be submitted to court.

Standard 3: Case planning

Value statement

Case planning is a continuous process. Case plans will be drawn up as early as possible, following a case analysis. The case plan will address how a Cafcass intervention will be applied to each case and will set out how the case will be reviewed regularly in line with Cafcass guidance on case planning.

- 3.1 An analysis of the needs, wishes and feelings of each individual child will be made in all cases, giving due consideration to all elements of the Welfare Checklist, and taking account of relevant research evidence and case law.
- 3.2 Each case analysis will draw on the assessments of other agencies, as needed.
- 3.3 Relevant equalities and diversity issues will always be explored, understood and applied to the assessment, analysis and case plan for every child and family.
- 3.4 Case plans will be reviewed regularly for effectiveness.
- 3.5 The case plan and analysis will be updated if and when circumstances change significantly.

Standard 4: Active intervention and case management

Value statement

Cafcass' work will comprise an evidence-based intervention for each child, whatever the case nature or type. Each intervention will have a clear goal of effecting beneficial change for children. The case analysis will identify the key issues for the child and the case plan will set out the appropriate level and type of intervention needed. The level of service provision on each case will never fall below the minimum necessary, and will be the maximum affordable, taking all the cases needing our help into account.

- 4.1 Case plans will set out the evidence-based intervention proposed on behalf of individual children and the associated resource implications.
- 4.2 All Cafcass interventions will comply with family justice system time—scales.
- 4.3 Intervention in cases will be proportionate, as well as evidence-based.
- 4.4 All Cafcass reports will be focused, and built around a well-argued independent case analysis. (Cafcass reports are interventions in themselves when written as a catalyst for change, yet a report is only part of the intervention, and complements other work defined in the case plan).

- 4.5 Reports will contain clear recommendations, helping the court to make the best decisions in the interests of the child. The intended outcomes for individual children within each recommendation will be clearly set out.
- 4.6 Private law cases will be subject to case management, based on the needs of each individual child, not a standard filing time for written reports.
- 4.7 Needs Wishes and Feelings statements may be filed in court, normally alongside a current s7 report, based on the needs of each individual case, and always with the child's agreement.
- 4.8 A Cafcass intervention will neither duplicate work done well elsewhere nor take on the responsibilities of other organisations. It will highlight gaps in service provision where children's welfare is impeded as a result, and seek to close those gaps by persuading the relevant parties, such as local authorities in public law cases, to take appropriate action.
- 4.9 Cases will be returned to court for Directions where such advocacy and negotiation fails.
- 4.10 Our proposals for the future in public law cases will be formally handed over to the manager with overall responsibility for looked after children and the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). * *(implementation of this standard will be reviewed following the publication of the Looked After Children White Paper in Summer 2007)*

Standard 5: Children's active involvement

Value statement

Cafcass will ensure that all children are seen, heard and understood and their active involvement in all aspects of their case is promoted, in a way that is consistent with and responds to each child's wishes, competence and understanding. Cafcass will work with the children and young people using its service to develop a shared values framework with those children and young people.

- 5.1 Children will always be seen, including in extended dispute resolution programmes (private law) and case planning (public law). The only exceptions to this are where a Cafcass practitioner acts in the role of Reporting Officer in adoption proceedings; in short court-based dispute resolution appointments where no further assessment or continuing work is required; and in unavoidable circumstances, such as where the child is out of the jurisdiction or too ill to be seen. The reason for not seeing a child will be recorded on the case file.*
- 5.2 Direct work with children and young people will be consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as reflected in the Qualities for Children's Services standards developed by the Cafcass Children's Rights Service.*
- 5.3 Through evidence giving or a written Cafcass analysis, Cafcass aims to be the voice of the child in court when the child cannot speak directly.*
- 5.4 Cafcass will be alert to and sensitive to the pressures on children who may have been coached to give a false or rehearsed story for a specific purpose.*
- 5.5 As far as possible, children will be protected from any involvement or exposure in a case in which they are likely to become more vulnerable as a result.*
- 5.6 Where a child requires support from services outside of Cafcass then, with parental and, if appropriate, the child's agreement, a referral will be made.*
- 5.7 Cafcass will ensure that the outcome of each case is fed back to the child sensitively. *

- 5.8 All Cafcass records will be retained until a child is 22 years old, and we will provide counselling for any child, young person or young adult who wishes to find out about their history and how their case was handled.*
- 5.9 Children will be actively involved in the overall development of Cafcass services, including in the recruitment of staff, the provision of training, and in quality assurance work. (NB Initially, members of the Cafcass Young Peoples Board will do this).*

(All the above standards will be implemented from September 2007)

Standard 6: Quality of Service

Value statement

Cafcass aspires to excellence in every aspect of its work and commits itself to being a learning organisation, to applying the learning from research to service delivery, and to continuously improving the quality of its service to children and families, including regular evaluation of its services. Cafcass also commits itself to ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to achieve this Standard.

- 6.1 Cafcass will satisfy itself that each member of staff, including those with managerial and supervisory roles, has the core and specialist competences to fulfill the responsibilities of their post to Cafcass standards.
- 6.2 Cafcass will supervise, support, train and develop each member of staff in order to enable them to work in a way that meets Cafcass standards – no practitioner will be left alone with a case.
- 6.3 Staff will participate fully in Cafcass' performance management and quality assurance processes in order to continuously improve practice and performance.

Standard 7: Cafcass as a public sector business

Value statement

Cafcass aims to be a high-performing, effective organisation, making the best possible use of modern technology.

- 7.1 All staff will be supported to become competent in all IT matters relevant to Cafcass business.
- 7.2 Cafcass will provide relevant online and multi-media services to children and families.
- 7.3 Optimum use will be made of secure, encrypted video-conferencing; telephone conferencing; office visits; and will make the most efficient use of its property assets.
- 7.4 Cafcass will provide its staff with the best tools in its power to do the job, to raise skills and confidence, including decent IT and credible, manageable practice guidance.
- 7.5 Bureaucracy will be reduced to the essential minimum – a process is a means to an outcome, never an outcome in itself.
- 7.6 Where Cafcass commissions a service for children and families, it will be commissioned on a best value basis.
- 7.7 Cafcass will seek to play an active part in the broader development of services for children and families in England including through joint commissioning and joint provision of services where appropriate.

Standard 8: Customer Care

Value statement

Cafcass aims to operate the highest standards of customer care, internally and externally, at all levels, and in all aspects of its work.

- 8.1 Cafcass will inform service users, including children, family members and carers, about its role at the earliest possible stage of involvement so as to reduce the risk of a clash of expectations, e.g. through use of written agreements and contracts.
- 8.2 Cafcass will provide service users with regular and timely information about its work on their behalf.
- 8.3 Cafcass will at all times observe recognised confidentiality principles and protocols on information sharing.
- 8.4 Cafcass will actively seek the views of service users, children, family members and carers, including those received through complaints, and use them to improve services. The views of children and young people through the use of programmes such as Viewpoint will be obtained and used to improve services.
- 8.5 Cafcass will respond in a timely way to all concerns and complaints within the timescales set out in the Cafcass complaints procedures, striving at all times to resolve concerns and complaints if possible.
- 8.6 Written information will be provided for children, proportionate to their age and understanding, as well as to their parents and carers. Contemporary formats will be used and the information will be provided in the relevant accessible language. Plain language will be used in all documents, including in court reports. Interpreters and/or translators from approved services will be used where required.
- 8.7 3rd party information will only be used in court reports if its use and accuracy have been checked with its originator. Where it is not possible to validate the information, the hearsay rules applicable to family proceedings must be followed.

Standard 9: Partnership and multi-agency working

Value statement

Cafcass recognises the inter-dependence of partner agencies in the family justice system and that to be successful, collaborative working is essential. Cafcass believes that multi-agency working produces the greatest reduction in delay, best case management, most coherent listing and time-tabling of cases, pro-active dispute resolution between agencies, and the quickest improvements to case plans for individual children when these are needed.

- 9.1 Cafcass will work jointly with all family justice partner agencies in the best interests of individual children, without compromising its independence from them.
- 9.2 As one agency amongst many, Cafcass will support the development of integrated children's services in England, and will play a full part in this.
- 9.3 Cafcass will apply partnership working principles to its work with children, families and carers.
- 9.4 Multi-agency protocols for information sharing and other key areas will be developed and maintained.
- 9.5 Partner agencies will be involved in developing and monitoring the Cafcass National Standards in order to develop a stronger shared understanding of what constitutes effective interventions and practice.

Standard 10: Leadership, accountability and governance

Value statement

Cafcass regards strong leadership, and good governance as important principles underpinning its vision and in how these standards will be taken forward.

- 10.1 Cafcass will work to good governance principles as set out in Cafcass codes of conduct and practice and in external ethical codes such as GSCC standards, to which all staff and contractors will be expected to adhere.
- 10.2 Cafcass will promote respectful relationships in work, in which all members of staff, contractors and partner agencies are viewed as equally important, with a vital inter-dependent role to play.
- 10.3 Relationships with interested stakeholders will be managed in line with the principles set out in Standard 10.2.
- 10.4 All Cafcass work will be conducted in accordance with its own equalities and diversity strategies, for which leadership and accountability at every level of the organisation will be continuously demonstrated.
- 10.5 All standards, policies and procedures will be assured through Cafcass quality assurance systems.
- 10.6 Where change in the way it works is needed, Cafcass will strive to change at the right speed and manage the change well through mechanisms such as impact analysis.
- 10.7 Cafcass will contribute to joint leadership on the issues faced by the family justice system.
- 10.8 Cafcass will include children, families and partner agencies in its governance arrangements, through its Children and Young Peoples Board and its Participation Boards.

June 2007