



3rd Floor
21 Bloomsbury Street
London
WC1B 3HF

Sent by email.

Tel: 0300 456 4000

Email: Claire.evans@cafcass.gov.uk

17 November 2020

Colleagues,

Cafcass protocol for the prioritisation of casework

I am writing to you to advise you that we are close to triggering the use of our prioritisation protocol (appendix A) in the region that includes South Yorkshire and Humberside. In short, we have had to develop this protocol to enable us to prioritise the most urgent incoming work should we find ourselves with too many open active cases to allocate to Cafcass social workers. The national family justice recovery group, including senior judges, HMCTS, MOJ, DfE, Cafcass, Cafcass Cymru and ADCS have all been sighted through its development and sign off.

You will be aware that since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, demand for family justice has not reduced and in fact in recent months we have seen increases in both Public and Private law applications in the context of a drop in national throughput through the family courts of about 20%. The net impact on Cafcass is that we have about 20% more open work, with longer durations and more requests for additional work to support our reports to the courts. Of course, the whole family justice and local authority children's services systems are under pressure and will be for some extended period with significant impact on all aspects of work to support vulnerable children and their families. Whilst there is a strong focus on reform as a solution and good progress is being made, we have the immediate challenges now of balancing the safety of social work caseloads with the needs of children and their families. No options are good and so it is with regret that we are having to make the really difficult decision to decide where, within all of our new open work, we prioritise social work resource.

By way of context, the affected region has 16% more open active cases (public and private) than it did in February this year. Last week, we continued to receive a high number of public law cases (81 – which will represent approximately 130 children) of which a number (32 cases at the time of writing) could not be safely allocated given the caseloads of the staff in the region. Those cases are currently being regularly reviewed by practitioners on duty which means they will receive some

Sally Cheshire CBE Interim Chair
Jacky Tiotto Chief Executive



Cafcass, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, is a non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice
Cafcass National Office, 3rd Floor, 21 Bloomsbury Street, London, WC1B 3HF

Wherever possible Cafcass uses recycled paper and black ink to reduce costs and our carbon footprint.

oversight but they are not allocated to a Guardian to start the work. You will be aware that one of our KPIs measures our ability to allocate public care cases within 3 working days. In this region currently, only 54% are being allocated in this time frame.

Our Covid-19 programme board has therefore been formally asked by the Regional Assistant Director, Hilary Barrett and the Director of Operations, Anji Owens, to consider triggering the protocol as early as next Monday 23 November. A final decision is to be made this week (18 November) subject to four final options that the team were asked to explore further. These include, whether the public law work that is awaiting allocation can be transferred to another region (unlikely), whether any additional agency or temporary staff would sufficiently relieve the pressure and whether there are Cafcass Associates with capacity to take on new work.

If we are to trigger the protocol, this would essentially mean that new work in the lower priority category (without known safeguarding issues) would not be allocated to a Cafcass social worker. Cases would be reviewed weekly by a manager and where information comes to light that alters the assessment of any risk of harm to a child, the case would be allocated. The continuing application of the protocol would be considered fortnightly with DFJs and Cafcass senior managers in the regions where it is triggered. You will see in the attached document (appendix A) that we expect to allocate all cases in priority groups 1 and 2. This covers most public law work and any private law work where it is assessed that children are exposed to harm and risk from parental disputes about their care and contact arrangements.

At this point in time, we estimate about 80% of our work is in these two higher priority categories, with only a small proportion (the remaining 20%) in categories 3 and 4. We are therefore unclear as to whether not allocating work assigned to priority 3 and 4 will create enough headroom. This will be kept under regular review both locally and in national recovery conversations. We will also keep you updated as key partners.

Once again, I am sorry to be mailing with such difficult news. If you do have any questions, please come back to me through claire.evans@cafcass.gov.uk or morgan.proverbs@cafcass.gov.uk

Kind regards



Jacky Tiotto
Chief Executive

Appendix A – Cafcass Practice Prioritisation Protocol