

Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Annual Report 2016-2017



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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

# Foreword by the Chief Executive

The significant increase in work this year has been particularly challenging for Cafcass Cymru. It was only possible for the organisation to respond to this increase and provide a timely service to children and the courts as a result of the commitment and professionalism of our staff. During the year we received a 17% increase in public law referrals, a 25% increase in Section 31 applications and a 26% increase in the number of private law applications. In total we worked with nearly 8,500 children and young people.

Despite the significant increase in the number of children subject to care proceedings, rising from 1,371 in 2015-16 to 1,642 in 2016-17, cases in Wales were completed in an average of 24.5 weeks compared to an England and Wales performance of 27 weeks. This was achieved by the commitment of all agencies and professionals involved in the Family Justice system in Wales working together.

Highlights during the year included:

- Inviting the Family Justice Young People's Board to inspect our meeting rooms to provide critical feedback on what we could do to make them friendlier and more informative places for children and their families to visit.
- Engaging with young people and stakeholders to refresh and update our logo and corporate identity.
- Working with staff to develop and implement a new electronic case planning and recording system.
- Progressing the work of our Innovation Programme and delivering further improvements to support our practitioners and achieve greater efficiency.
- Implementing a Learning and Development Programme aimed at supporting and promoting the ongoing professional learning and development of our staff.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank Gillian Baranski, who was Chief Executive of Cafcass Cymru from November 2010 until October 2016, for the valuable contribution she made in leading and managing the organisation through a period of significant change.

During the year Catriona Williams ended her ten year term as the Chair of the Cafcass Cymru Advisory Committee. Catriona was both a strong advocate and critical friend of Cafcass Cymru. I am delighted that Jackie Murphy, Chief Executive of Tros Gynnal, took over the role of Chair in January 2017.

I look forward to the year ahead, which I am sure will bring new challenges and opportunities. It is a privilege to be the Interim Chief Executive of Cafcass Cymru and work with staff and stakeholders who are committed to providing the best possible service to children and young people in Wales.

Nigel Brown

Interim Chief Executive

# Our achievements and developments during the year

Despite a significant increase in public and private law work in 2016-17, we continued to allocate new cases within agreed timescales thus ensuring children and their families received a timely service when they needed it most.

The need to introduce a revised case planning and recording system for practitioners to record their work electronically was identified as a key priority for 2016-17. Following a period of testing and staff feedback on the initial system, we have made a number of significant changes to support the quality of case planning and recording and to streamline the system that will be introduced in April 2017. Our new simplified model:

- Focuses on the child and the identified issues.
- Provides a balanced and evidence-based account of events throughout the life of the case.
- Provides an analysis of key information and how decisions are reached.
- Maintains professional and organisational accountability.

In the context of continued financial constraint, we held Innovation Workshops with staff in 2016-17 aimed at reviewing what we do and exploring opportunities to do things more efficiently and effectively. As a result a number of projects and workstreams emerged focusing upon several areas of our work, including:

- A Safeguarding Enquiry Report (SER) pilot with key involvement of our Business Support staff.
- A workstream focusing on the work of our Central Administration Team resulting in improvements in the team's performance.
- Working with our staff and the judiciary to review how we work public law cases and focusing on reviewing, clarifying and streamlining our report templates and practice guidance in public law cases.

In 2016-17 we offered placement opportunities to two student social workers in our Gwent operational area as part of their 'practice' journey to becoming qualified social workers. This decision is linked to our ambition to play a part in nurturing the development of a healthy social work workforce in Wales and our ongoing commitment to becoming a 'learning' organisation.





January 2016 saw the launch of our new 'Strategic Plan 2016-19 – Providing a Voice'. For the period of this plan, we identified four strategic goals to provide us with clear direction and long-term focus for our effort and resource in the coming years. We have, so far, made good progress against each of our four strategic goals:

1. To provide high quality, timely, independent expert advice and information to children, families and courts.
2. To ensure our intervention promotes the voice of the child and is centred on their rights, welfare and best interests.
3. To influence the Family Justice System and services for children in Wales.
4. To enable staff to be the best they can be within a dynamic, diverse and open organisation.

We continued to develop and improve relationships with partners and stakeholders during 2016-17 at a national, regional and local level, both within and outside of Welsh Government. These include regular meetings with the Senior Family Judge for Wales and with the Designated Family Judges; meetings between Local Authority Heads of Children's Services and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS); and active participation in the three regional Local Family Justice Boards. Alongside the appointment of a new chair for our Advisory Committee, we reviewed its membership and new members have joined to strengthen representation from agencies and services that both work with and represent children and young people.

Likewise, in view of the positive impact of our Working Together for Children programme (linked to Child Arrangements Activities) in the Family Court context, we have been working closely with the Children and Families Division in Welsh Government to explore the potential of making the programme more widely available and accessible to families in Wales.

**"I would like to take this opportunity to show my sincerest gratitude and thanks to the professionalism and compassion shown by the FCA. I feel very privileged to have had the access to people with experience within this sector..." – A father**

# Service delivery

## Budget

Our budget for 2016-2017 was 10.162m, the majority of which was staff costs (90%); we employ 142 social work practitioners across Wales in addition to 78 support staff. The remaining 10% of our budget was made up of running costs and court ordered family support services.



## Key Performance Indicators

There are two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure and assess how well we are performing:

- KPI 1: Average working days to allocate Section 31 cases – Target = less than three working days.
- KPI 2: Proportion of open private law workload allocated – Target = greater than or equal to 95%.

Despite the pressures facing the organisation in meeting the increased demand on our staff we achieved the target for KPI 1 by allocating Section 31 cases in an average of 1.2 working days in 2016-17.

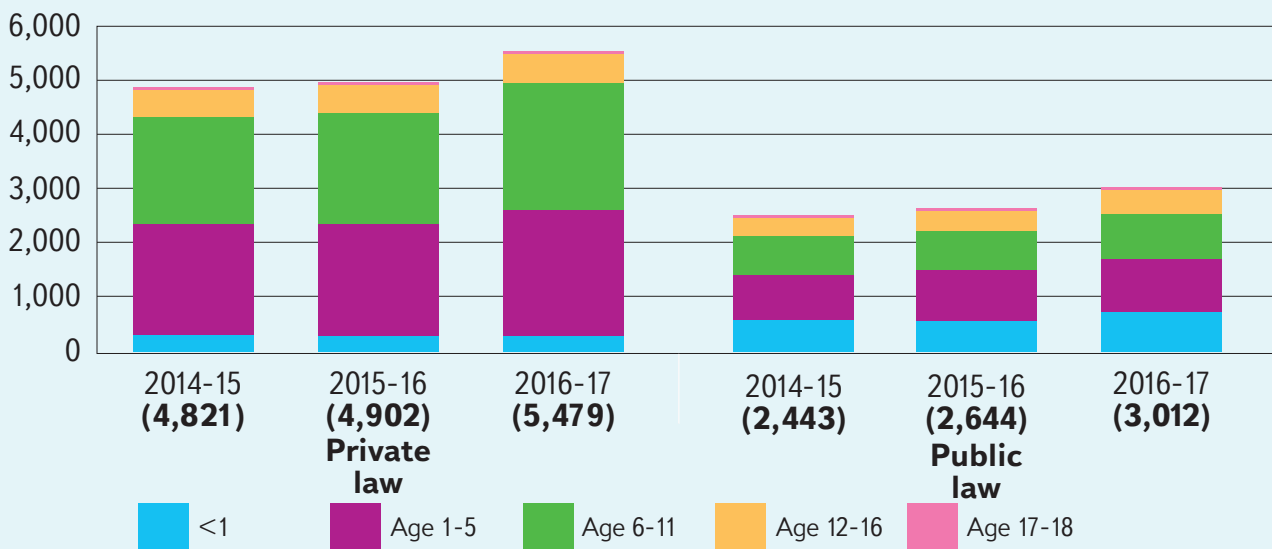
Our performance against KPI 2 was just below our 95% target for the year, with an average of 91.9%.

**“The FCA was very professional. She was very clear in court about the boys being at risk in fathers care in the Section 7 Report and as a witness at the final hearing”  
- A mother**

## The Number of Children We Worked With

During 2016-17 we worked with nearly 8,500 children and young people, a 12% increase compared to the 7,500 in 2015-16. There has been an increase of 17% in the volume of children involved with Cafcass Cymru since 2014-15. Most of the children we worked with (83%) were aged ten years and under.

Our work is mainly split into two areas: public law and private law. The demand placed on each area of work varies significantly and the following information provides an overview of the level of demand for these services.

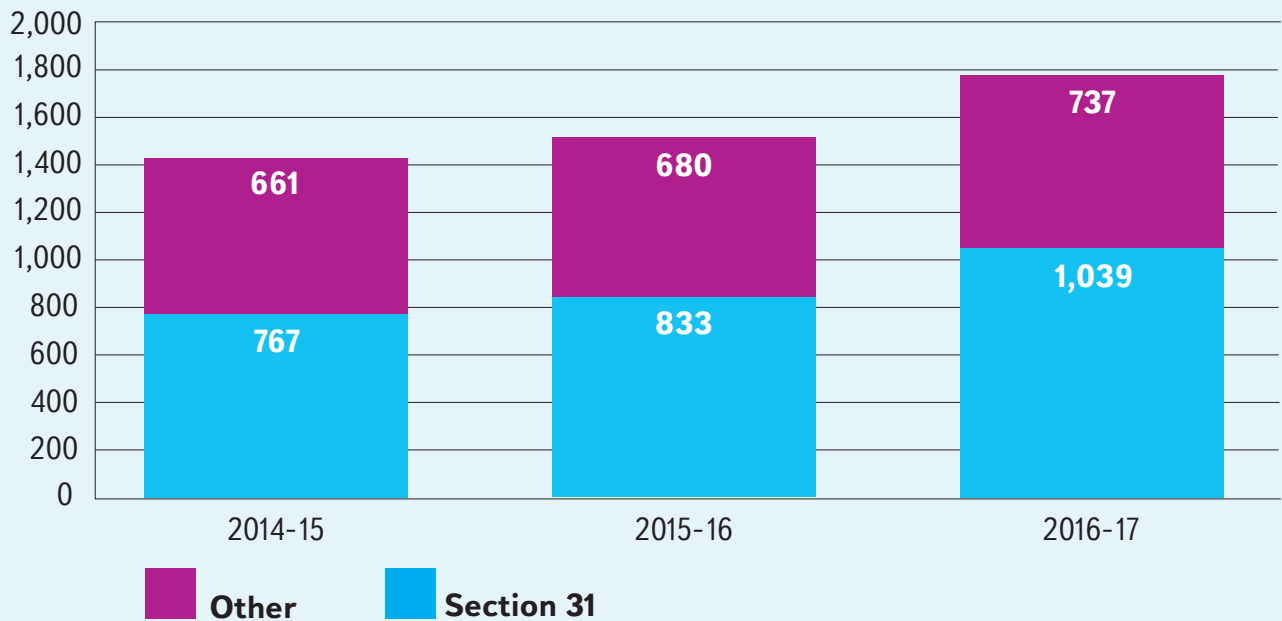


## Public Law

The total number of children involved in public law proceedings in 2016-17 was 3,012, an increase of 17% on the previous year. Public law applications have increased over the past three years, with a 24% increase since 2014-15.

The main driver in public law work is Section 31 (care) applications. Section 31 applications are made to the court by a local authority where it has significant concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. We received 1,039 applications in 2016-17, a 25% increase on the previous year.

### Public Law Applications





## Private Law

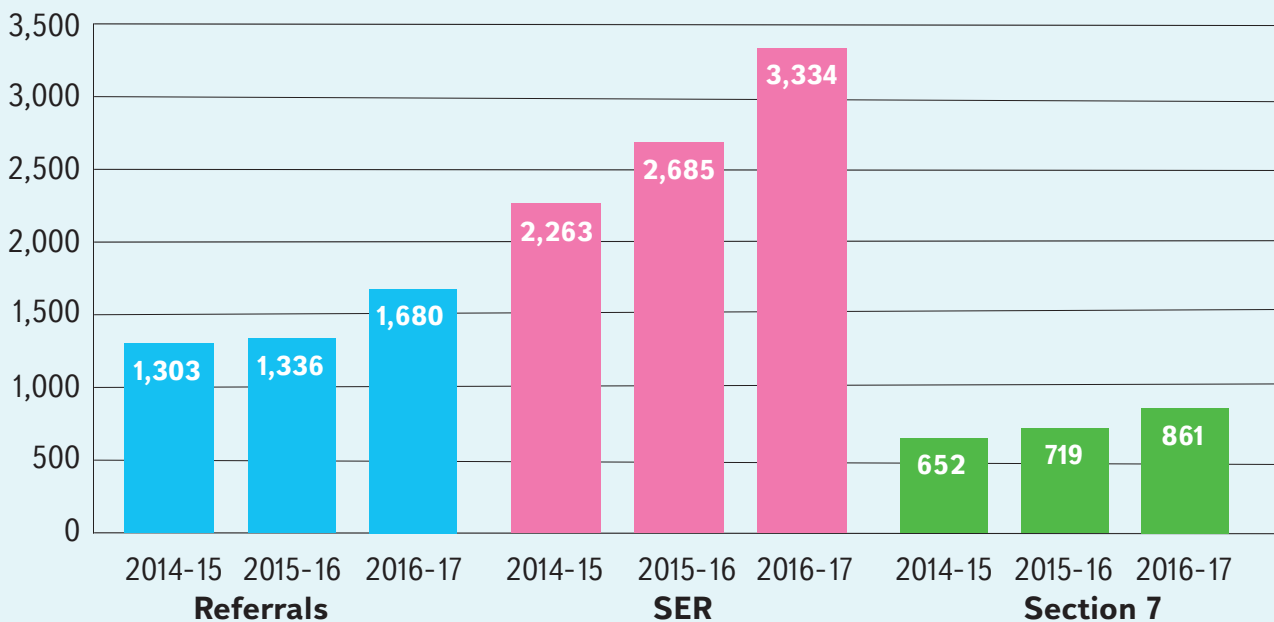
Private law cases arise when there is a post-separation dispute regarding child arrangements, such as where the child should live and/or who the child sees, that family members are unable to resolve without intervention from the court. At the first hearing, we meet with the parties to help them to agree an arrangement for their child that is safe and in the child's best interests. Where an agreement cannot be reached due to dispute between the parents or safeguarding matters, the court can ask us to undertake an assessment and write a report to assist the court in making a decision.

In private law, when a party has applied for a Child Arrangements Order, we will prepare a Safeguarding Enquiries Report (**SER**) for the court before the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment (**FHDRA**). Information for the report is obtained from the police and

social services, and from telephone interviews with the parties. The purpose of the report is to detail any risk for the court to consider when making decisions about a child at the FHDRA.

If, after the first court hearing, parties are not able to reach an agreement about the child or there are concerns about the child's welfare, the court may ask us to write a report known as a **Section 7**.

Private law referrals have increased over the past two years, with a 26% increase in 2016-17. The total number of children involved in private proceedings in 2016-17 was 5,479. There has been a significant increase in the number of SERs over the past two years, with a 19% increase in 2015-16 followed by a further 24% increase in 2016-17. The number of Section 7 reports we have produced has also risen, with an increase of 10% and then 20% over each of the last two years.



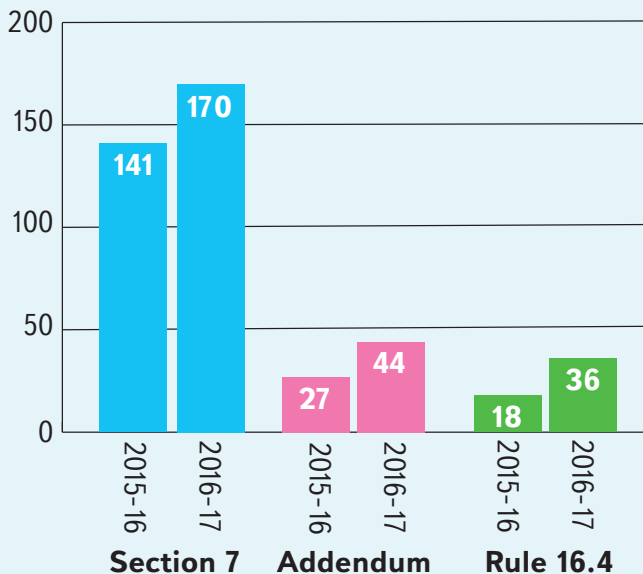
## Private Law Reports by Court Area

A Rule 16.4 is a provision, under the Family Procedure Rules 2010, to be considered if a child is involved in a complex private law case in which the court has the power to make the child a party to the proceedings by appointing a Guardian for the child.

There has been an increase in the volume of Section 7, Addendum and Rule 16.4 Private Law reports required across all geographical areas compared to previous years. North Wales has seen increases of 21%, 63% and 100%, South East Wales has seen increases of 15%, 47% and 15% and South West Wales has seen increases of 29%, 42% and 35% respectively.

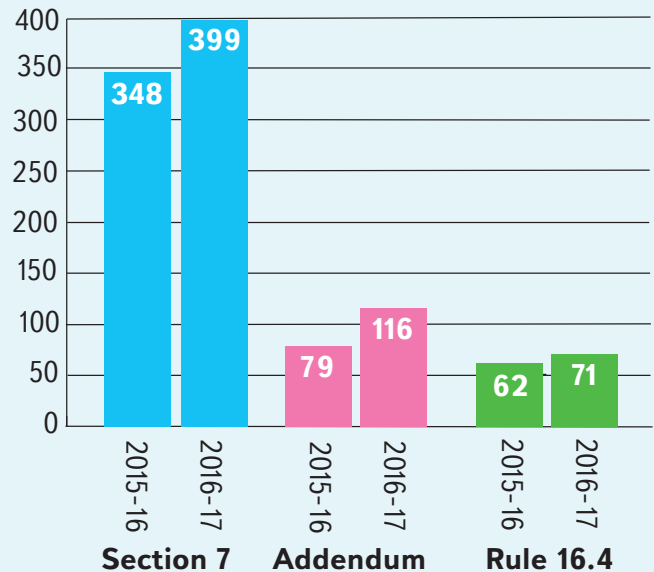
### North Wales

Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, and Powys-North



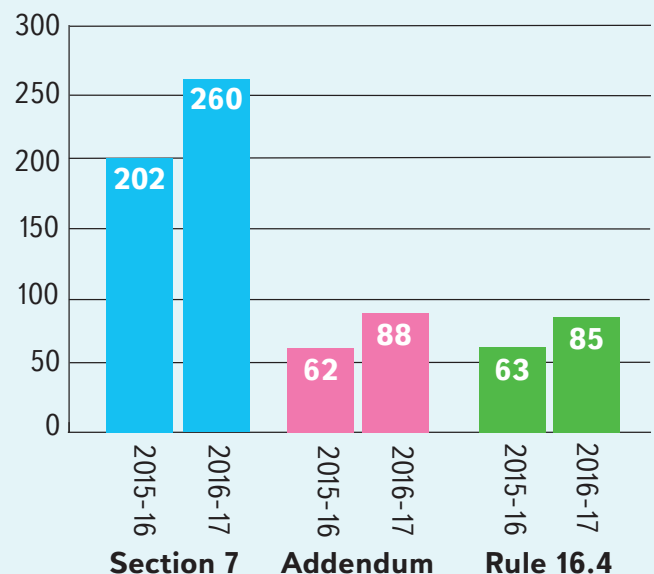
### South East Wales

Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Vale of Glamorgan, Newport, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire



### South West Wales

Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Powys-South, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion



# Participation

In 2016-17 we built upon the successful implementation of the Your Voice Participation Programme, our three year programme of interrelated projects which empowers the organisation to build upon the day to day participation our staff have with children and young people, enabling those young people to influence the way they, and future children, receive our services.

During the year we have engaged with children and young people to make changes to our service to include:

- Creation of a 'Jargon Buster' to help children and young people better understand the words and phrases that are commonly used in the Family Court.
- Creation of letter and picture templates for children and young people to communicate with the decision maker on their case.
- Conducted a review and made changes to the children and young people's complaints process.
- Formal inclusion and involvement of children and young people in the induction process for our staff.

- Engaging the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) to design and lead reviews of six of our offices to ensure they are appropriate for children and young people.
- Engaging children and young people on the rebrand of Cafcass Cymru, creating a logo and brand which reflects the child-focused and dynamic nature of the organisation.
- Creation of a suite of new Cafcass Cymru characters for use on children and young people's documentation.
- Bespoke training for our practitioners on the UNCRC.
- Creation of a Voice of the Child case recording item on our electronic case system.

To further embrace and support the culture of participation, we are in the process of moving from a central board model to a more inclusive and staff-led model, by establishing a Participation Network. The network is made up of 30+ members, with links to other organisations and participation groups across Wales and England. In 2017-18, the network will begin to lead on key participation areas across Wales including improving the means for young people to provide feedback to us, investigating how we can involve children and young people in our recruitment and selection of new staff and updating our children's information packs.



# Learning and development

Learning and Development is a key priority for the organisation with all staff having an opportunity to influence our annual training plan. This has been a very busy and vibrant year with a wide range of training opportunities incorporating priorities identified by our staff.

All training events reflected active participation by staff who demonstrated their commitment to professional development to support improving the service we provide to children and families. Some of the highlights included:

- Collaboration with Social Care Wales to host multi-agency events across Wales centred on a presentation regarding the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- We facilitated workshops following the enactment of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015; we considered recent legal judgements relating to domestic abuse case law, the impact on children of adult relationships where there is coercive controls, and research on “Adverse Childhood Experiences”.

- We delivered a Core Induction Practitioner Programme for new practitioners which included high quality presentations from experienced staff across the organisation. The first event was supported by a seminar from a judge providing a “View from the Bench” which included a question and answer session.
- Administrative staff have provided a critical role in delivering training to support the implementation of our new Integrated Recording and Information System.
- We have continued to encourage all staff to pursue leadership and training opportunities within Welsh Government.
- All staff also have access to Community Care Inform (CCI), which provides a wealth of practice guidance, tools, learning, research and legal information.

In 2017-18 we will update our learning and development programme and continue to deliver a range of staff learning and development opportunities. It is anticipated this will include workshops on writing succinct and analytical reports, safeguarding children at risk of child sexual exploitation, sibling relationship, impact on children of domestic abuse, radicalisation, and the impact on children of high levels of intractable parental conflict.



# Quality assurance

This year we have been developing a Quality Assurance, Learning and Improvement Framework. To be launched in 2017-18, the new framework will bring all elements of quality assurance together making the necessary connection to internal learning and organisational improvement with the outcome of the child at the centre of everything we do. It will also provide a structure for collating and sharing key information with external bodies in order to contribute towards identified change and improvements for future generations.

A dedicated Quality Assurance Team will drive the framework forward. The framework promotes a system that enables the organisation to be a reflective and learning organisation and one which works closely with others to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

The framework includes:

- Improving our internal systems for collating and sharing key data.
- Reviewing our Key Performance Indicators.
- Strengthening our links to key external bodies, including Local Authorities, to share information to inform wider service planning and development.

- Using our data to inform improvements in services and outcomes across the family justice system.
- Improving our feedback methods with service users and stakeholders to increase the number of responses we receive to evidence our successes and identify service improvements.
- Implementing new internal auditing methods:
  - Practice Reviews – using a strengths-based model we will focus on reviewing the quality of practice to strengthen the consistency and quality of our services. Practice Reviews will be a component of our revised supervision model and be undertaken with practitioners throughout the year, evidencing good practice and areas for development;
  - Thematic audits – These are internal reviews of information we hold that can be shared with key professionals for wider learning.

The framework will have a direct link to the organisation's Learning and Development Plan, Strategic Plan and Annual Report.

**“ I'd just like to thank you, I believe if it wasn't for you I could have lost my children. They are my world! Thanks again!” – A mother**

## Compliments and Complaints

During the year, we received 48 compliments from parents, other family members, solicitors and the judiciary. All compliments are recorded and used to improve the service we provide.

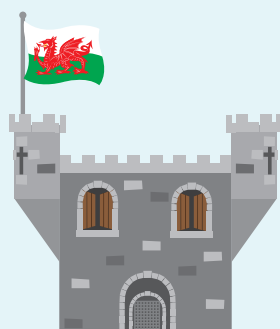
Much of the positive feedback received from parents complimented Family Court Advisors and Family Court Social Workers on the positive work they had undertaken with their children, including the support given in what can be a very difficult time. The organisation also received several compliments from judges and solicitors praising the quality of reports prepared by Family Court Advisors and Family Court Social Workers and their professionalism during court proceedings.

We aim to continuously improve the service we provide and welcome the learning opportunities

that arise from complaint investigations. Where these are identified, they are fed back into our Learning and Development process.

During the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, Cafcass Cymru worked with nearly 8,500 children and young people. In this time, we received and investigated only one complaint from a young person. The other 78 complaints we investigated were from adult service users. This is a reduction of just over 10% on the previous year.

Complaints are received via telephone, email, letter and online form. Of the 79 investigations we carried out, the majority related to our private law work. We responded to 86% of them within our target time of 30 working days and 25 were either fully upheld or had elements of the complaint upheld.



# Looking to the year ahead

In 2017-18 we will build on what has been achieved through the innovation work, and continue to work with our staff and key stakeholders to review how we best respond to the demand for our services. Clearly there is a challenge in trying to continue to deliver the best possible service and meet these increases in the context of existing resources.

We play a crucial role in safeguarding and promoting the interests of children and young people, influencing families and courts to make the very best decisions for them. We will continue to aim to allocate all work in a timely way by ensuring our resources are best deployed to deliver a timely and consistent service to children, families and courts across Wales.

**“I would just like to thank you again for the way in which you dealt with our parental order proceedings. It was a positive experience for us, contrary to our preconceptions about the process” – A father**



