



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Cafcass Cymru Annual Report 2020-2021



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

Foreword from Nigel Brown, Chief Executive for Cafcass Cymru

This year has been extremely challenging for Cafcass Cymru as we took decisive action and adapted our way of working in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am very proud of all our colleagues who have worked incredibly hard, embracing changes to the way that we work. This year, we have rapidly adapted to the need to work remotely, implementing new technology and communication tools in order to ensure our staff could attend remote hearings and safely undertake direct work with children and families. In recognition of the impact the pandemic has had upon our staff, including having to work remotely and adapt to new ways of working, we have invested time and resources in prioritising and promoting their health and wellbeing.

The past year has also seen us forge even closer relationships with our key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Justice, HM Courts and Tribunal Service, the President of the Family Division, members of the judiciary and Cafcass England. The Family Justice system has only been able to continue to operate during the past year because of the collaborative way stakeholders have worked together.

Our relationship and work with our own advisory committee has also strengthened even further. The committee have provided invaluable insight and advice as we navigated the challenges presented by COVID-19 and I am deeply thankful to all members for their support. In particular I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to Jackie Murphy who has provided valuable oversight while chairing the committee during the year.

This year, we worked with a total of 11,085 children — an increase of 6% from last year and 15% from 2018-19. Further analysis of our data has shown that we have seen an increase of 18.5% in our average private law monthly caseload since last year and a 12.3% increase in our average monthly caseload in public law. Over the past year we have focused on adapting how we work and supporting our staff to ensure we can continue to deliver a timely and child focused service.

As we look to the future, we will work with our staff and the Family Justice Young People's Board to draw learning from the different ways of working we have adopted over the past year. We want our future working model to include some of the positive changes we have made this year for example embracing new technologies and flexible ways of working, in order to ensure we can continue to provide the best possible service to children, young people and their families and the Family Court.

Key Figures



This year, we worked with **11,085** children.



We received **1624** public law applications.



881 Section 31 applications came to Cafcass Cymru in 2020/21.



We were involved in
1827 First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointments:

413 were successfully resolved with no further work undertaken as parties agreed on arrangements which were safe, suitable and in the best interests of the child;

937 resulted in Cafcass Cymru undertaking a Child Impact Analysis (CIA) reports, where our practitioners met with children to better understand their needs before working closely with the parties involved.



Key Performance Indicators

We have made met our target of **95%** across **3** of our Key Performance Indicators whilst also seeing improvements on previous performance.



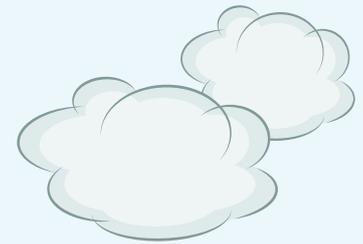
97% of the section 31 applications received, were allocated within 2 working days of receipt.



96% of Child Impact Analysis requests were allocated within 5 working days of receipt.



88% of Child Impact Analysis Reports met their court filing date.



97% of Safeguarding reports met their court filing date.



Our Services

Goal 1:

Provide high quality, evidence based analysis and recommendations tailored to the needs and circumstances of each child and young person.

Over the past year and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have remained committed to ensuring our work is of consistently high quality.

As we moved into new ways of working in response to the pandemic, we updated our statements of expectations around how we would work with children and families. We have made our letters and information leaflets digitally accessible on our website and have published a new complaints guide. We have also published a report on Section 31 cases. Additionally, in June we published our new 5 year strategic plan, which sets the direction for the organisation until 2025 and how we intend to maintain and improve the quality of our work in this time.

At the end of June, the Ministry of Justice published their report, *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases*. Cafcass Cymru have been working closely with stakeholders and partners to consider how to respond effectively and appropriately to the findings of the report and contribute to the implementation plan developed by the Ministry of Justice in order to improve the outcomes for children and parents involved in private law cases in Wales.



Goal 2:

Consistently listen to and promote the voice of the child in everything we do.

Children are at the heart of all our work at Cafcass Cymru, and we are committed to ensuring that this is always reflected as we make improvements to our services. This year has seen us exploring more ways to engage with children which meet their individual needs better.

We have maintained a strong relationship with the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) where they have continued to play a key role in the work that we have undertaken this year.

The Board's 'Top Tips' on subjects such as communicating with children and diversity and inclusion have been incorporated into our practice development guidance and translated and published on our staff intranet. We have regularly published blogs written by members of the FJYPB which provide a better insight into topics of particular interest to our staff and colleagues had the opportunity to attend the Board's 'The Voice of the Child' webinars.

We also consulted with the FJYPB on our approach to capturing diversity and inclusion information during the life of the case and sought feedback on improving website. FJYPB members continue to play a key role within our staff recruitment process and induction programme.



Goal 3:

Provide high quality, evidence based analysis and recommendations tailored to the needs and circumstances of each child and young person.

We have continued to strive to understand the difference our service makes to children, families and young people. As well as our collaborative work with researchers referenced, we have continued with our quality assurance programme. Over the course of the year, a number of audits have been undertaken, including Section 31 applications, addenda reports and enhanced Safeguarding Enquiry Reports. Our audits provide an insight into the quality of our work and inform the steps we take to improve the quality and efficiency of the services we deliver.

Recognising that not one method of communication is always suitable for all families, children and young people, we launched a pilot seeking feedback to help shape the way in which we engage with children and young people in the future. We have also continued to undertake practice reviews throughout the year.

We continue to be grateful for all feedback we receive from our service users. This year, we worked with over of 11,000 children and their families and have received 48 compliments. We have also received 68 complaints – a decrease of over 27% from last year. These complaints were all from adults and we did not receive any complaints from children this year.



Goal 4:

Continuously improve our service by exploring new ways of working.

During 2020-2021, we had to change the way that we work as an organisation and adapt to working remotely to enable us to continue to deliver a quality service. This saw us introduce new technology for staff, alongside a number of digital services available for families across Wales.

We introduced:

- New communication tools to allow us to continue meeting and engaging with children and families across Wales, utilising Microsoft Teams, FaceTime and Attend Anywhere.
- A new telephone system to ensure that our business support colleagues are able to deal with telephone calls remotely.
- Systems to share correspondence safely and securely with families and stakeholders.
- Remote interpretation services, which assist families whose first language is not English or Welsh to engage in a language that they feel comfortable.

To ensure our staff were supported with the changes and the use of the new technology available we run Smarter Working Sessions three times a week which staff can attend for additional training or support.

As HMCTS also move towards a more digital approach this year we have worked closely to ensure that our staff have the training and support they need to be confident in accessing court hearings remotely using their Common Video Platform (CVP), alongside ongoing training as HMCTS roll out an online portal for public law cases. We are continuing to work alongside HMCTS as the roll out continues across Wales, providing ongoing training and support for colleagues.



Our Staff

Goal 5:

Promote the health and well-being of all staff, to achieve a work-life balance whilst sustaining the delivery of an efficient and effective service.

Over the last year, it became more important than ever that we take steps to protect and promote our staff's health and wellbeing.

We have undertaken two wellbeing surveys, designed to better understand how staff were feeling and adapting to the changes, both work related and personal, which came as a result of COVID-19 and identify what more we could be doing to support them. From these we formed wellbeing reports, which have informed our approach moving forwards.

Regular wellbeing sessions have been organised and information and resources about mental health and wellbeing have been communicated to staff through newsletters, team meetings and their managers. We also worked with Cafcass England to deliver bespoke wellbeing training to our colleagues and to promote and share best practices and strategies around staying healthy while working from home.

COVID-19 has necessitated using technology more than ever and Cafcass Cymru and the Welsh Government have ensured that staff have the equipment they need to work from home. We have implemented new telephony solutions and are continuously exploring new software and applications which may help us work flexibly.



Goal 6:

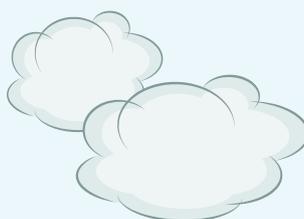
Invest in continuous learning, helping to inspire and motivate staff to develop in their roles.

An important element in supporting our staff is ensuring they have access to the right resources and learning opportunities.

In response to the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic, we adapted our approach to how we delivered training and learning opportunities to successfully deliver the majority of planned training events virtually, with those that we were unable to hold being postponed until 2021.

To ensure that our colleagues had access to relevant research and resources, we published research articles and signposted resources in our staff newsletters covering a range of topics such as domestic abuse and the needs of young disabled people.

We maintain strong links with universities, and while student placements for final year Social Work postgraduates this year were unfortunately disrupted by COVID-19, we have begun looking into how we may reinstate these in the coming year, to ensure we continue to invest in the professional development of social work students.

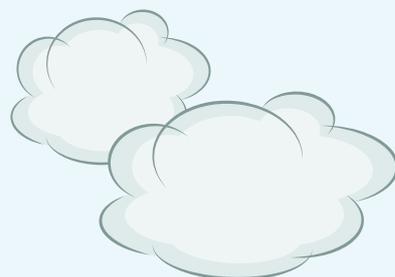


Goal 7:

Recruit, retain and invest in a highly skilled, motivated and diverse workforce.

Over the past year, in addition to the audits and learning and development detailed previously, we have continued to work to strengthen our Quality Assurance, Learning and Improvement framework to ensure that, as an organisation, we achieve the goals of our new strategic plan over the next five years.

Despite the pandemic, we have continued to recruit to our vacancies during the course of the year and in reflection of the increased workload we have also recruited additional temporary staff to ensure we have the capacity to respond to new cases.



Our Stakeholders

Goal 8:

Enhance and strengthen our relationships with stakeholders.

Ensuring that we maintain strong relationships with our stakeholders is very important to us and the work that we do. The challenges presented during the year have allowed Cafcass Cymru the opportunity to develop stronger working relationships as we collectively responded to daily changes.

We continue to work closely with HMCTS and colleagues to make improvements to the initial stages of private law cases in the family courts. In April 2020 we made improvements to streamline our Safeguarding Enquires Reports. Throughout the year we have continued to consult and collaborate, setting the foundations for two pilots that will take place in 2021, which will look at a new approach to scheduling First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment hearings.

We have maintained strong and close relationships with our Welsh Government colleagues across Health and Social Services and Child and Families Division as well as the Children's Commissioner's Office. In response to the pandemic, and the decisive action we needed to take, we have strengthened our operational working relationship with MOJ, HMCTS, Senior Judiciary and Cafcass England. We are also pleased to have welcomed new members to our Advisory Committee to strengthen the voice of the child and ensure they remain central to all that we do.

We have continued to strengthen our work with the Family Justice Board, Family Justice Council, Family Justice Network and local Family Justice Boards as we have made significant contributions to the reform and recovery of the Family Justice system.



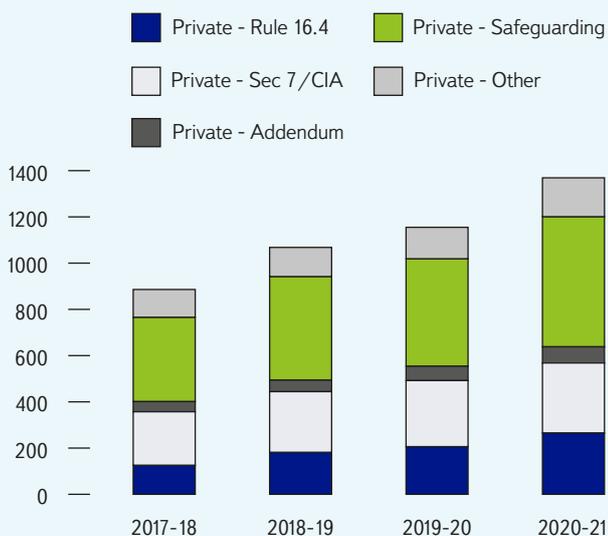
Goal 9:

Continue to improve our systems for capturing, reporting and analysing information.

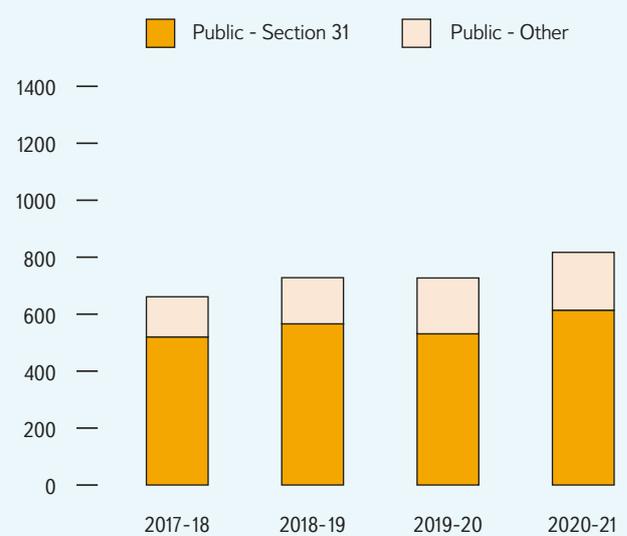
Over the past year, we have continued to develop our data strategy and our case management system (IRIS). This has included developing our system to capture significantly more detailed information on outcomes in Public Law cases.

Our case management system allows us to effectively allocate and manage our work on a daily basis. Some examples of this can be found below, outlining the increase in average monthly caseload over the last four years:

Average monthly private caseload per fiscal year



Average monthly public caseload per fiscal year



Goal 10:

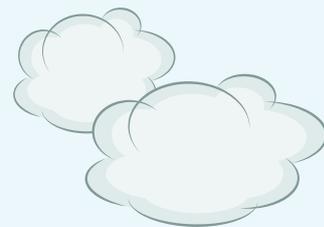
Play a leading role by appropriately sharing our information and intelligence with stakeholders to support improvements in the family justice system and social care.

Cafcass Cymru is committed to contributing and responding to research. We have maintained and built on our relationship with key partners, including the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and Swansea University SAIL databank.

This year, our staff responded to the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory's surveys about the impact of remote working for family courts, children and families.

We have in turn been able to use the findings of this research when considering our response to remote working and ensuring its effectiveness.

Anonymised Cafcass Cymru data was also used by the Family Justice Observatory in the creation of their report, *Uncovering private family law: Who's coming to court in Wales?* This has been helpful to Cafcass Cymru in improving our understanding of our service users and the links between deprivation and applications made to family court.



A look to the future

Our Service

Over the next year, significant work will be taking place around both the reform and recovery of the Family Justice system. Within Cafcass Cymru, this will include working to implement the recommendations set out in the President's Public Law Working Group (PuLWG)'s Report and Private Law Working Group (PrLWG)'s Report. We will also work with stakeholders to respond to the recommendations of the Harm Report and deliver the Ministry of Justice's Pathfinder Pilot in North Wales that will test out proposals to reform Private Law.

Our Staff

COVID-19 has presented many challenges, however we are also conscious that we may be able to take learning from our response and the new ways of working we have developed this year. As we look forwards, we will be engaging with our staff to look at the lessons we can take from the last year and use these to shape and inform our future operating model and way of working.

Our Stakeholders

We will continue to build on the strong relationships with our stakeholders. We will be exploring how we can best engage with our stakeholders and service users and make use of virtual platforms in the future in order to work collaboratively and efficiently to deliver the best outcomes for children.

