



Ministry
of Justice



HM Courts &
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Courts and
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London Family Justice Strategy

October 2025 Newsletter



From Backlogs towards Breakthrough

The October Foreword from Mr Justice MacDonald, The Presiding Family Judge for London



“The work of the London Family Justice Strategy continues apace, with the aim of reaching the goals set by the LFJS of reducing delay in public law proceedings, dealing with the backlog of private law cases, and preparing London for Pathfinder. What also continues is the admirable hard work of judges, magistrates, legal practitioners, and child welfare professionals in the capital. This hard work is beginning to produce results for the children and families in London who are embroiled in difficult and stressful litigation, and I am pleased to be able to relate in this second LFJS Bulletin signs of progress.

Using September 2024 as a baseline for the position prior to the launch of the LFJS, the headline points include London’s over 90-week public law caseload reducing by 27%, public law cases in London dealt with within 26 weeks increasing by 4%, average case duration in public law cases in London reducing by 4 weeks to 49 weeks, London’s over 100-week private law caseload reducing by 30% and the open private law case load decreasing by 7%. Of course, there remain significant challenges. The data indicates several areas of continuing and significant difficulties, which we will continue to work on.

I remain extremely grateful to you all for your continued, dedicated professionalism, without which progress under the LFJS would not be possible. Thank you.”

Welcome to the October edition of the London Strategy Newsletter

We're pleased to bring you the second edition of the London Strategy Newsletter, designed to keep Family Justice Partners informed and connected. We will continue to update you on a quarterly basis.



Key Updates

Wandsworth Court is moving!

From 3 November 2025, the cases being heard at the additional Wandsworth Court will be relocated to the Royal Courts of Justice. There will be no break in service levels.

East London Conference: Spotlight on Young People

This month's East London Conference focused on improving outcomes for young people in Family Justice. It was an inspiring event that brought together voices from across the sector. For a full recap, see the Conference Highlights page in this newsletter and a link to the website.

We would like to **thank you** for your continued dedication, hard work and support as we continue to progress the Family Justice Strategy for London.



Reflections from Tier One

The Greater London Family Panel (GLFP) has 420 justices who sit as family magistrates across our 5 hearing centres. The GLFP Chair, Nigel Orton JP, and Senior Legal Manager, Judith Francis, reflect on successes and challenges of the last few months...

- Currently we are hearing 18% of the public law case load in London and we are heartened by the support of our Presider and DFJs in supporting greater case allocation to us. That figure is higher in West London DFJ area. The current consultation on allocation criteria will, we hope, give a clearer definition of cases that justices can hear. As HHJ Sapnara said in the last newsletter, *“where cases can be heard at magistrates’ level then please continue to ensure they are allocated to the magistrates’ courts”*.
- Cases heard at magistrate level in London on average take 36 weeks to conclude (a reduction of 11 weeks since last year). This is a figure we are trying to further reduce.
- Justices across London access their FPL reading 48 hours in advance, so it would be helpful if documents are uploaded in time for that preparation. (That applies for filing statements in private law cases too.) Please note that in Final Hearings magistrates do not therefore need reading scheduled on day 1; instead the first witness needs to be called that morning.
- Anecdotally, we are seeing fewer requests to adjourn and re-timetable. When it does occur a ‘Relief from Sanction’ application is frequently filed on a C2 form. These need filing as soon as the potential delay is identified, requesting a listing. A niggle, causing avoidable delay, is waiting for DBS checks and medical information on prospective special guardians that cause an IRH/EFH adjournment.
- We are observing a greater acceptance by parties to rely on assessments undertaken in pre-proceedings and a greater pragmatism about interim processes that don’t need a challenge. However, the perennials of not identifying all potential alternative carers early still too often exists; would holding family group conferences earlier assist?
- Despite the busy professional workloads and resource issues we now sense a genuine attempt to work to achieve a conclusion for children within the statutory 26-weeks, which is a notable and welcomed improved culture.



Ambitious for Children – Reflections from Richard Morris, Assistant Director for London Public Law at Cafcass and Chair for Central Family Court LFJB

All appointed Children's Guardians (CG) are ready to ensure that they do their part in reinforcing these important messages on behalf of children.

The Family Justice Partners can expect Children's Guardians to reflect the following considerations in their work whilst undertaking their own independent enquiries at the request of the court and on behalf of children.

- Use the principles of pre-CMH meetings with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Local Authority (LA) social workers in each and every care application. Along with our LA stakeholders, explain to court what has been done in pre-PLO processes or the reason why it hasn't. Challenge the court and other parties not to repeat assessments already carried out in pre-PLO. Assist the LA with identifying connected persons early and particularly those with links abroad – jurisdiction and country borders should not be a barrier for children having lifelong care or links with their birth family.
- Ensure that communication is continued with the IRO throughout the life of the case with a clear handover letter at the point of conclusion.
- Use our Child and Assessment Planning as a tool for planning and analysis – be specific in challenge to delay. Be clear about your independent enquiries and ensure that you make your own assessment outside of that conducted by the LA.

- In contributing to CMO – ensure that 26 weeks is the end point and plan backwards from that date. Lack of compliance by other parties must be flagged to the court immediately – it is not acceptable to wait for the next hearing to address failure in compliance.
- Use the Initial Analysis as our preferred option to set out our thinking to court at CMH or before. Do not rely on position statements.
- Only recommend experts where these are absolutely necessary for the child, and they add purpose in achieving a final order and resolve proceedings. Using an expert should now be the exception for all of us as they are the largest contributor to delay within our control.
- Seek situational supervision wherever there is a policy mandatory trigger and wherever we require some reflective thinking to plan our work. When in two minds please use two minds.
- Ensure that our Final Analysis and written report is ready for IRH. Narrow the gaps in evidence. CGs are to attend IRHs- only in exceptions will remote attendance or excusals be granted and this will be on the basis of C2 application only.
- Above all, ensure that children are well engaged, protected and kept informed of what is going on in their lives and in their proceedings throughout our involvement. Each child has a right to written information (in form of a letter) at the start, middle and end of proceedings. Our responsibilities here are clear within PD 16a of the Family Procedure Rules, including the responsibility to feed back to the child, appropriate to age and understanding, about outcomes from each hearing.

Much of the above represents our strategy in London to get back on track with the PLO, to provide each child with an outstanding service and for Justice to be delivered in a timely, fair, transparent and efficient manner.

The East London Local Family Justice Board Conference



The second East London LFJB conference was on 8 October 2025. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets hosted us at their impressive Town Hall.

The conference theme was Young People. Our DFJ, HHJ Atkinson, and Steve Reddy (DCS at LBTH), led an engaging programme, which included an address from the President. Details of the speakers and presentations can be accessed on our [website](#).



More than 300 people attended, including social workers from each of the ten London boroughs and Cafcass. We are fortunate that sponsors and exhibitors allow us to offer many complimentary tickets, thereby ensuring accessibility.



In the first panel, Mr Justice MacDonald led an informative discussion about dignified welfare decision-making for unaccompanied and trafficked minors. The second session, chaired by Matthew Jeary (ISW), explored adolescents in relationships and the need for collaborative working. Eythan Bell (Be Heard As One) challenged preconceptions about teenagers and urged practitioners to meet young people where they are.

Sophie Humphreys OBE delivered the keynote address: Breaking Cycles. Her new project, RESET, proposes pioneering services for young people at risk of DoLS. This was followed by a thought-provoking conversation between Dr Bourne, Dr Maggs and Dr Surgenor on attachment, adolescent brain development and risk.



In our final session on contextual safeguarding, Claire Fitzpatrick shared insights about preventing criminalisation of girls in care and Jahnine Davis delivered a thought-provoking speech on adultification. Tower Hamlets and Redbridge both presented and we concluded with videos of young people who spoke movingly about the positive impact of Redbridge's innovative service.

As well as education, our conference allows an opportunity for all the experts working in the system – social work professionals, lawyers, and judges – to talk to each other. Within the venue, there were stalls for local authorities to showcase projects and foster dialogue. It was great to see a range of professionals sharing ideas during the breaks and post-conference reception. This built on the theme of last year's conference – relationships – and is part of HHJ Atkinson's ongoing mission to put relationships at the heart of what we do. Relationships are central to our work – it is by working together that we can tackle delay and improve outcomes for families.

Key Data Highlights

Through the Oversight Group, which comprises senior judiciary, magistracy, Cafcass, HMCTS and reps from local authorities we are collectively looking at key performance data on a regular basis to identify where we are making progress, and to discuss, based on the data, where else we need to focus effort and attention.

- All London regions have seen a reduction in the 100-week caseloads. Against the baseline of September 24 latest data from August 25 shows that London's 100-week caseload has reduced by 27% in public law and 30% in private law.
- The percentage of open caseload at 26 weeks plus has decreased across all regions. The national average has reduced by 3% from September 24 to March 25, London has reduced by 4%
- Addendums continue to drive up case durations significantly, if multiple Section 7s are ordered case durations can near 2 years in length, and if a 16.4 is ordered this increases further.
- Across England and Wales 59% of cases in August 2025 had expert reports; for London 72% of cases had expert reports in August 2025.

Family Justice Board Priorities for 2025/26

DFJ Areas	Public Law					
	Priority 1 – Additional context metric - Care & Supervision disposal metrics within 26 weeks			Priority 2 – No Public Law cases open for over 90 weeks		
	Sept 2024	Dec 2024	Aug 2025	Sept 2024	Dec 2024	Aug 2025
London	11%	13%	15% (+4%)	92	75	67 (-27%)
Central London	13%	13%	14% (+1%)	30	23	24 (-20%)
East London	9%	11%	14% (+5%)	40	35	33 (-18%)
West London	11%	15%	15% (+4%)	22	17	10 (-55%)

DFJ Areas	Private Law					
	Priority 3 – No Cases >100 weeks			Priority 4 – Open Caseload		
	Sept 2024	Dec 2024	Aug 2025	Sept 2024	Dec 2024	Aug 2025
London	1,022	892	718 (-30%)	6,898	6,783	6,414 (-7%)
Central London	195	181	179 (-8%)	2,279	2,289	2,110 (-7%)
East London	482	403	292 (-39%)	2,268	2,199	2,084 (-8%)
West London	345	308	247 (-28%)	2,351	2,295	2,220 (-6%)

The % increase/decrease is measured against Sept 2024

The next London Strategy newsletter will be published in January 2026. We are very keen to hear from you, if you have any good practice, good news stories or if you have a particular topic that you would like us to address, then please email:

familyjusticelondonstrategy@justice.gov.uk

Thank you