



**Cafcass Cymru**

**Domestic Abuse Improvement  
and Cultural Change**

**Update Statement: July 2024**





## Cafcass Cymru Domestic Abuse Improvement and Cultural Change Update Statement: July 2024

The purpose of this statement is to provide an update around Cafcass Cymru's continued and unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and their families who are survivor/victims of domestic abuse, through domestic abuse proficient and trauma informed social work practice.

Cafcass Cymru provides expert child-focused advice and support that safeguards children and makes sure their voices are heard in family courts across Wales so that decisions are made in their best interests. Domestic abuse features in a significant amount of all aspects of our work and we recognise the need for further improvement in this area. Through our case closure process, Cafcass Cymru is able to report that in the last three consecutive years, domestic abuse has been a feature for 71% of children where a s31 public law application was made.

In terms of private family law proceedings, those which involve applications for Child Arrangements, Ministry of Justice (MOJ)'s 'Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases' [Harm Panel Report published in June 2020](#) and its linked Literature Review points to domestic abuse being present in between 49% and 62% of private law cases, according to different academic studies. Later in 2024 Cafcass Cymru will introduce a case closure process which will allow us to report on the prevalence of domestic abuse more accurately for those we work with within the Pathfinder areas.

Cafcass Cymru sees and recognises how commonplace and pervasive domestic abuse is, particularly in the context of family justice and the impact on children, as shown in the findings of MoJ's '*Harm Panel*' report. Cafcass Cymru welcomed the publication of the report which shone a light on the changes needed in the family justice system to better safeguard and protect adults and children who have survived and/or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Since the publication of this report, Cafcass Cymru has embarked on a programme of cultural change, which focusses on social work practice in working with victim-survivors, aiming to improve their experience of our service, whilst identifying and addressing perpetrator behaviour and the impact on children and non-perpetrating adults.

Whilst Cafcass Cymru has made significant progress around the commitment it made following the publication of the '*Harm Panel*' report, there is more to do to ensure our intervention and the services we provide are domestic abuse proficient.

Cafcass Cymru will continue to interface and engage with the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) policy agendas at Wales and UK level. We will seize every opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to listening to those with lived experience and drive cultural change. We do this through feedback, compliments, and complaints, which has always been an avenue to ensure Cafcass Cymru is held accountable and a crucial component for practice change and development.

Through our Welsh Women's Aid secondee and National Domestic Abuse Advisor, Cafcass Cymru will engage the survivors panel, within the terms of reference, to seek feedback and perspectives on our revised domestic abuse guidance and supporting documents.

Continued work with Ministry of Justice (MoJ) around family justice reform, focussing on perpetrator intervention, family justice domestic abuse champions and implementation of the '*Pathfinder*' approach in Wales.

To achieve the progress made to date, Cafcass Cymru has:

*Secured a secondment arrangement with Welsh Women's Aid for a 'Change Manager – Harm Panel Report' which has been in place since early 2021.*

This is resulting in improved join up between Cafcass Cymru and the specialist domestic abuse sector and holding Cafcass Cymru to account. The role supports Cafcass Cymru in ensuring internal guidance and publications are domestic abuse informed and supporting the embedding of cultural change into the organisation's everyday practices.

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*Secured two national MoJ funded pilots one in North Wales from February 2022 and in South-East Wales from April 2024 (run in parallel with Birmingham and Dorset) – The Investigative Domestic Abuse Court pilots, more commonly known as '*Pathfinder*' has five primary aims, which focus on safety and risk management of the most vulnerable within family justice. Pivotal to the '*Pathfinder*' approach is early engagement of domestic abuse services. With Cafcass Cymru referring to IDVA services through a bespoke '*Pathfinder*' mechanism, ensuring victim-survivors have access to early support and the court is advised of risk and impact. A landmark system wide approach to better managing domestic abuse within family proceedings, which Cafcass Cymru welcomes and fully endorses.*

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*Formed part of the panel to recruit IDVA services following applications as part of '*Pathfinder*' funding bids.*

*Continued to be present and visible across the Welsh Government VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026 Blueprint cross sector workstreams.*

This includes perpetrator intervention and the children and young people's workstreams and involves close working with the Survivor Voice Scrutiny & Involvement Panel and the National Domestic Abuse Advisors.

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*Been present and involved in MoJ family justice workstreams, relevant to domestic abuse* – review of the presumption of parental involvement, perpetrator provision, family justice domestic champions.

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*Cafcass Cymru secured introductory training from the internationally recognised 'Safe & Together Institute',* who provided organisation wide introductory training to all Cafcass Cymru social workers. This approach to training our staff has been endorsed by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office and the CEO of Welsh Women's Aid.

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*Supporting a research project of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, in response to the recommendation of the 'Harm Panel',* the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner was tasked with setting up a family court reporting and reviewing mechanism (FCRRM). The Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims' Commissioner commissioned the design of a pilot of the FCRRM.

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*Cafcass Cymru supports the Family Justice Council's (FJC) Sub-Group in respect of domestic abuse.*

## Safe & Together Institute – Further Information:

In March 2024, the Safe & Together Institute provided Core Safe & Together (S&T) Training, over four days, to 34 Cafcass Cymru staff, representing the five operational areas. The overall aim of the model is:

To address domestic abuse-destructive practices by providing a set of principles and components that can guide domestic abuse-informed practice. These include:

1. Keeping the child safe and together with the non-offending parent, where safe to do so.
2. Partnering (meaning understanding the strengths and identifying positives in protective parenting) with the non-offending parent as the default position; and
3. Intervening with the perpetrator to reduce risk and harm to the child.

To test out the impact and effectiveness of the training, Cafcass Cymru welcomed two Welsh Women's Aid practitioner colleagues on the training, which was also attended by Cafcass Cymru's Welsh Women's Aid secondee.

The evaluation of the training was successful, in that our practitioners and colleagues from the specialist sector felt that the model helped change the conversation about how practitioners work with families impacted by domestic abuse perpetrators' behaviours. Supported by an internationally recognised suite of tools and interventions designed to help child welfare professionals become domestic abuse informed. Our staff felt that the evidence-based practice can help improve competencies and cross-system collaboration.

Cafcass Cymru is seeing the positive impact on the practice of those who have received the core training from S&T Institute. We see this perpetrator focussed language in court reports, which clearly identifies the behaviour of the perpetrator and advises the court of the impact on the child and non-perpetrating parent. Feedback from Cafcass Cymru S&T trained practitioners who have used the approach is that the model supports risk assessment and the clear impact of perpetrating behaviours, meaning court reports and recommendations are clearer and more robust.

Externally, use of the model is being recognised, with recent positive judicial feedback on Cafcass Cymru's intervention with a child and non-perpetrating parent, through the S&T model. The court benefitted from clear language which identified perpetrator patterns of abuse, including the continued use of the court system to perpetuate control over the child and mother. The model and language used in the report clearly led to a safe outcome for the child and met the overall objectives around providing a better experience of our service to those who are most vulnerable.

Internally, there is sufficient evidence even at this early stage to demonstrate the positive impact this training has had. My analysis is that the S&T model meets the organisation's training needs in relation to improving domestic abuse related practice and will achieve a standardised approach across the whole organisation as to how domestic abuse is responded to and written about in our work.

The approach provides a common language and set of standardised tools, firmly focussing on the behaviour of the perpetrator and the strengths of the non-perpetrating parent, with clear focus on the impact on the child.

By early summer 2025 Cafcass Cymru will have provided Core Model training by the Safe & Together Institute to all of its social work practitioner colleagues.

Cafcass Cymru Chief Executive, along with the Deputy Chief Executive are invested in having a consistent and high quality approach to how domestic abuse and perpetrator behaviour is managed and reported by Cafcass Cymru. A financial commitment has been made for this to happen.

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**Beth Altman**

**Strategic Lead for Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding**

**July 2024**