

Cafcass Plus Scheme - Nottinghamshire

This chapter was added in January 2017.

The Process

Target Group

Parents of all unborn babies known to Children's Social Care, where there have been previous children removed from the care of parents; proceedings have been previously issued; where either parent has a conviction for offences against a child.

The motivation of families, particularly mothers, is believed to be at an optimum during the course of pregnancy. The more work which can be undertaken at this early stage has the potential to maximise the prospect of success.

Please note if the parent has a learning disability or learning/mental health difficulties which would mean they do not have the capacity to give consent they cannot be referred to Cafcass Plus.

Point Of Identification For Inclusion

The MASH will refer pre-birth children in the target group direct to the Court Team.

It is accepted this needs to be undertaken early within the gestation process. Liaison will take place with midwives / health to request referrals be made in these cases as close to 12 weeks gestation as possible. The Court Team can only undertake the assessment if there is the potential to do an assessment and hold the LPM by week 20 in pregnancy. To meet this timescale referrals to the court team can only be made until week 16 of the pregnancy.

The Court Team will commence assessment work aiming to be in a position to arrange a Legal Planning meeting at around 20 weeks gestation should the assessment conclude the baby will be at risk of/likelihood of significant harm. At the Legal Planning meeting a decision will be made if the family should be given the opportunity for inclusion on the scheme this would be within a PLO pre proceeding process. Consent will be sought from parents for a referral to be made to Cafcass Plus, who will appoint a Family Court Advisor (become Children's guardian at point care proceedings are issued). Ideally consent will be given after the parents have had the opportunity for legal advice which is available under the PLO process.

If the assessment concludes there has been a reduction in level of risk the matter would not progress to a Legal Planning meeting and consideration will be given to

the case transferring to the District Child Protection Team. This would also happen if the outcome of the pre proceeding process was not to issue Care Proceedings. The future involvement of children's social care at this stage will depend on the assessed risk.

The Pre Proceedings Meeting

The Pre Proceedings meeting is one convened by the Local Authority. The setting of agendas and minute taking should remain the responsibility of the Local Authority. It is important good minutes are taken at these meeting in order to provide clear evidence should the matter go before the court. In addition to this, having clear evidence of the role played by the Family Court Advisor and the contribution made to the meeting serves to further highlight their independence.

Role of the Family Court Advisor

Once a decision is made to proceed with a Pre Proceeding Meeting the Local Authority will notify the Cafcass Service Manager who in turn will identify a Family Court Advisor to undertake the initial stages of the work.

The Family Court Advisor will contact the allocated social worker and discuss the background. The Social Worker will ensure that the Family Court Advisor has electronic copies of all necessary paper work. This may include all assessment undertaken by the Local Authority, Case Conference Minutes, the report provided to the Legal Planning meeting and any written information provided by other agencies. When this information has been read, the Family Court Advisor may request any additional information that they consider is required. Arrangements will then be made by the Family Court Advisor to meet with the family, prior to the Pre Proceedings Meeting. If and when the project extends to other client groups then seeing the children will become a part of the work to be completed by the Family Court Advisor at this stage.

The purpose of the meeting will be for the Family Court Advisor to make an initial assessment in preparation for attendance at the Pre Proceedings Meeting.

In order to maximise the prospects of a positive impact from the Family Court Advisor's role there will need to be a minimum of two weeks between notification to Cafcass and the Pre Proceedings Meeting.

The Family Court Advisor will be expected to contribute to the Pre Proceedings Meeting. Areas in which the Family Court Advisor should consider include the following:-

- Analysis of the assessments undertaken to date and whether these are appropriate ;
- Consideration of any further assessments which might be needed to make final decisions;

- Assessment of safeguarding issues and whether plans adequately protect;
- Whether agreements between Children's Services and parents are adequately addressing the issues, including ensuring that the expectations on families are not unrealistic;
- Whether the safeguarding concerns are such that an immediate application should be made to the court.

Following the attendance at the Pre Proceedings Meeting the Family Court Advisor will ensure there is a brief report to the Local Authority and the family setting out their views. This will inevitably form part of the evidence within proceedings.

Once the Family Court Advisor has completed the Pre Proceedings Report, which focuses on the above areas), their role is at an end. However, should the matter go before the court, it is expected the same Family Court Advisor would be allocated as the Children's Guardian. This has worked well within Lincolnshire and ensures that the Children's Guardian has a "head start" in terms of assisting the Court.