

Children's Services

Additional Guidance for Pathfinder Family Court Orders

1. Purpose

The *Pathfinder Good Practice Guidance: Determining whether Cafcass or a Local Authority should prepare a Child Impact Report* sets out the criteria for determining whether responsibility for completing the Child Impact Report falls to Cafcass or the Local Authority.

This further guidance sets out:

- i) The contact routes for communications concerning Child Impact Reports
- ii) The mechanism by which Dorset Council will manage and complete Child Impact Reports for which it is responsible
- iii) The process to be followed where responsibility for the Child Impact Report is initially allocated to Cafcass, but it then becomes clear that responsibility should sit with Dorset Council

2. Scope

This guidance applies to all Child Impact Reports ordered by the Family Court under the Pathfinder project.

3. Completion of Preliminary Checks

The preliminary safeguarding and police records checks for all Child Impact Reports will be conducted by Cafcass, who will request relevant information from Children's Services. Children's Services must return completed checks **within five working days**, following these steps:

- 3.1 Cafcass will send enquiries relating to preliminary checks to sasteam@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk, where it will be received by Children's Services Business Support.
- 3.2 Business Support will log the request and track its progress through the following steps.
- 3.3 Business Support will check whether the child is known to Children's Services. Where they are not known, Business Support will complete the Cafcass template accordingly and return this to Cafcass.
- 3.4 Whether or not the child is known to Children's Services, Business Support will advise the Early Help Hub of the preliminary checks request, and the Early Help Hub will send information to the parents offering guidance or support in respect of parental conflict. The Early Help Hub will not send this information

where a history of domestic abuse or other risk factors indicates that it may be unsafe to do so.

- 3.5 Where the child is known to Children's Services, but their latest case closed more than one month previously, Business Support will forward the Cafcass enquiry and notify its due date to the Early Help Hub Team Manager, who will allocate it to a team member to complete and notify Business Support of the allocated team member.
- 3.6 The Early Help team member will record the enquiry as a contact on the child's record, provide the information requested to Cafcass by the due date, and notify the Team Manager and Business Support that they have done so.
- 3.7 Where the child has a case open to Children's Services, or their latest case closed less than one month previously, Business Support will send the enquiry (with notification of its due date) to the allocated worker, with a copy to their Team Manager and Service Manager.
- 3.8 In all cases where a child is known to Dorset Council Children's Services, the practitioner responsible for providing the check information will provide a summary or concise chronology of Children's Services' involvement. It is not sufficient merely to confirm that Children's Services are, or have been, involved.
- 3.9 The allocated worker will provide and return to Cafcass the requested information, sending a copy to their Team and Service Managers, and to Business Support.
- 3.10 Business Support will assist the timely return of preliminary enquiries through the following actions:
 - a. If Business Support has not been notified that the check has been completed and returned to Cafcass by the morning of Day 3 they will send a reminder to the allocated worker and Team Manager, advising that the next day is the deadline. The email will carry the subject line: REMINDER CAFCASS RESPONSE – Day 3
 - b. If by the end of Day 4 Business Support has not received notification of completion and return, they will send an alert to the Service Manager copied to the Head of Locality with the subject line FINAL REMINDER – CAFCASS DAY 4. This will advise that the team must send a response by the following day; it should be copied to the Team Manager and the allocated worker.
 - c. If by the morning of Day 6 Business Support has not received notification of completion and return, they will email the Head of Locality, copied to the Service Manager asking who will be completing the response as we have missed the deadline. Subject line DEADLINE MISSED - CAFCASS

- d. If Business Support have not received notification of completion and return by Day 7, they will escalate to Head of Quality Assurance – Subject line CAFCASS NON-COMPLIANCE.
- e. At any point when a response is returned, Business Support will update the tracker to show the item as completed, with the date it was returned.

4. The Court orders Dorset Council to complete the Child Impact Report

- 4.1 Where the Court orders Dorset Council to complete the Child Impact Report, it will send its order to childrensadvicandduty@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk, together with the report template. This will include the 'checks only' CIR completed by Cafcass.
- 4.2 Where the child has a case open to Children's Social Care, Children's Advice and Duty (ChAD) will send the order and the report template to the allocated worker, copied to their Team Manager. ChAD will also send the allocated worker a link to the Ministry of Justice [Dorset LA Pathfinder Form](#), for the worker to submit once they have completed their report.
- 4.3 Where the child does not have a case open to Children's Social Care, ChAD will record the report as a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contact and allocate a Child and Family Assessment workflow to the relevant locality team. ChAD will also send the link for the Ministry of Justice [Dorset LA Pathfinder Form](#) to the allocating Team Manager to forward to the worker once allocated. The worker should submit the form once they have completed their report.
- 4.4 Children's Services officers should complete their report on the report template received from the Courts, as this includes the results of the preliminary checks. Where Cafcass has commented on the checks in Part One of the report, this will need to be overwritten with the evaluation of the Children's Services practitioner completing the Part One report. The Cafcass logos on the report should be replaced with the Dorset Council logo. No other template should be used.
- 4.5 The allocated worker completing the Child Impact Report must return the completed report to Pathfinder.filing.dorset@justice.gov.uk within 30 calendar days of the order's date of issue. The report must be signed off by their Team Manager prior to filing. When filing their report, the allocated worker should copy in their Team Manager and the ChAD Co-ordinators at chadco-ordinators@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. The allocated worker must also ensure that they complete and submit the Ministry of Justice [Dorset LA Pathfinder Form](#) when they file their report.

- 4.6 It is the responsibility of the allocated worker's Team Manager to ensure that a report is completed and filed within the 30 day time limit.
- 4.7 Legal Services should be contacted only where the allocated worker needs legal advice in respect of the completion of the report. Legal Services is not responsible for the approval or filing of Child Impact Reports.
- 5. The Court initially orders Cafcass to complete the Child Impact Report, but subsequently identifies that the report is the responsibility of Dorset Council**

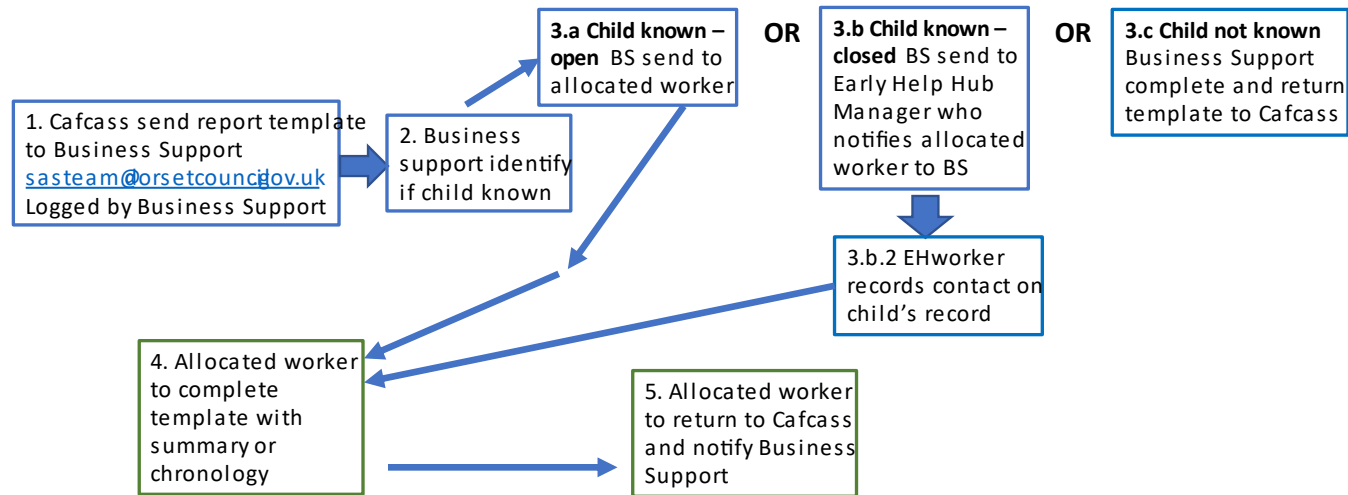
It may occur from time to time that the Court initially orders Cafcass to complete the Child Impact Report, but subsequently orders Dorset Council to do so. In these instances, it will issue a revised order, and Dorset Council will still have 30 calendar days in which to file its report, as set out in Section 4.

6. Dispute resolution

Should a dispute arise between Dorset Council and Cafcass concerning responsibility for completion of a Child Impact Report or relating to any other matter contained in this guidance, both parties will use the Dispute procedure set out in the *Pathfinder Good Practice Guidance* to resolve matters.

Flowcharts summarising information in this procedure

Child Impact Reports – process for completing preliminary checks only



Child Impact Report – process for completing Part One Report

