



Protocol for the use of Cafcass offices during the COVID-19 pandemic v1 (060720)

Introduction

Following government advice to protect against the spread of COVID-19 Cafcass made the decision to close all its offices on 20 March 2020. Since then almost all work with children, families and the family courts has been conducted remotely. Cafcass has been largely successful in transforming the organisation into one which is able to fulfil its functions remotely (including remote court hearings and high-quality interventions with children and families). However, we need to move towards seeing more children and families in person. In order to do this, we have made the decision to reopen our offices on a priority basis for the safe seeing of children and families. At this time it is not for general business as usual activities. This position will be reviewed on a regular basis.

This document provides an outline of the safety measures we have put in place in line with government guides to make office spaces COVID-secure. A guide will be produced for each office, which will clearly set out the changes made to make the office environment a safe place from which to work and meet with children and families.

This protocol supports the [attendance at court](#) and [visiting children and families](#) protocols.

Reasons for using a Cafcass office

We are opening offices for meeting with children and families not for general business as usual activities. The selection process has been a collaborative effort, working alongside our Assistant Directors who have prioritised the key locations for their service areas. When making the decision to reopen an office we have carefully considered:

1. The offices that would be the priority to open to support children and families providing a safe working environment to do so.
2. If the office can be made COVID-secure in accordance with all government requirements to reflect the changing guidance.

Taking the above into consideration the suitable priority offices will reopen under the following circumstances:

- Offices will be opened between 10:00 and 16:00, Monday to Friday
- Rooms will be available for online pre-booking between 10:30 and 15:30.
- The offices will be staffed by two people to assist with the arrival and departure procedures for the safety of visiting families and Cafcass staff. These will principally be Business Services staff but not exclusively. This will be managed locally through the Service manager and Business Services Manager.
- This will be reviewed for each office after a fortnight.

To support this reopening the following additional measures will be put in place:

1. The local teams will be provided with a simple room booking system to ensure that current social distancing measures are maintained. A review mechanism will also be linked to the room booking process which will identify office usage.
2. There will be a new simple signing in and out online tool for local staff to use to ensure that we manage visitors and staff using the office effectively.

Criteria for using Cafcass offices during the recovery period

Assistant Directors have identified which offices are required to reopen to fulfil the needs of children and families in their Service Areas.

The Cafcass Estates and Health and Safety Team alongside the local Business Services Manager (BSM) will carry out initial desktop assessments of these offices to review whether they can be made COVID-secure. Initial assessments will operate on a RAG system as outlined below.

- These will consider the principles for providing COVID-19 safe offices as outlined in HM Government's publication "[Working safely during COVID-19 in offices and contact centres](#)" and
- will also consider other factors such as:
 - availability of staff to support the safe use of the office;
 - lone worker risks;
 - landlord and host department requirements (for example if it is a closed or partially closed building); and
 - the ability to introduce a suitable and effective cleaning regime.

Assessments and actions

1. Desktop evaluation

The COVID-secure principles as detailed in [Appendix 1](#) will form part of the assessment using information and knowledge of the offices within the Cafcass estate, designating Green, Amber or Red status.

2. Physical Assessment

Those offices prioritised by Assistant Directors for in person work with children and families will be ranked into assessment priority order based on the desktop RAG rating.

Green workspaces will be visited first, followed by Amber and, only if there is a compelling need, those identified as Red.

Further details on the assessment process and a link to a completed assessment are included within [Appendix 2](#).