

Hampshire & IOW Pathfinder News

Go Live Date:

Tuesday 6th January
2026

Welcome to this first edition of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight newsletter.

Introduction from HHJ Barlow

The Children Act 1989 is a remarkably successful piece of legislation. Largely drafted by Baroness Hale, she describes it as one of her proudest achievements. It revolutionised the way cases concerning children were dealt with by the Courts. The sections concerning private law work well for children and are simple of understand.

What has not been a success, particularly after the changes in eligibility for Legal Aid, is the length of time that private law cases take to work through courts. Parties get caught up in issues that sometimes seem a long way away from the needs and wishes of the children whose welfare is the Court's paramount concern.

In Bournemouth just across the estuary in Dorset, a new way of tackling these cases – Pathfinder – was piloted. It turned the way courts deal with these cases on its head. The opening document in the case is now a child impact report reporting on that topic – the impact the parental dispute is having on the child and the best way to tackle it. It has been a huge success and with the support and enthusiasm of the President of the Family Division and considerable commitment in terms of funding it is being rolled out nationally. The fact it has come to Hampshire and IoW is a credit to us all – court staff, local authorities and CAFCASS.

To make it work we have to clear our existing cases and learn to do things in a different way. It will be hard work but training and information and support is on hand. I look forward to working with everyone to improve outcomes for the children of separated parents in the region. It is what we are all here to do.

Pre-Pathfinder - the importance of reducing the number of open cases

Feedback from the other areas that have piloted Pathfinder has been that it is more difficult for everyone involved if there are significant numbers of pre-pathfinder legacy cases and pathfinder cases open. Everyone has to work to two ways of dealing with Private Law cases. There is therefore a push to reduce the number of open cases that we have now and any that are issued before go live on 6th January 2026. All agencies are actively involved in reviewing and reducing the number of open cases.

LIG Contacts

Helen Sewell & Alex Thomas

Local Implementation Team

HHJ Barlow

Designated Family Judge

DJ Samuel & DJ Goodall

Lead Pathfinder Judiciary

Alan Guest, Gentian Dyer

CAFCASS (Local)

Danielle Dunbar, Laura Falconer, Anna Rexon

CAFCASS (National)

Hema Sheno, Dan Clark

Southampton CC

Nicola Instance, Nicola Cooper

Hampshire CC

Sarah Carvalho, Mat Drake

IOW Council

Ciara Morgan

Portsmouth CC

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HIOW OPCC

Anna Munday, Sarah Milne, Tania Baxman, Angie Foot

HMCTS Operations

Hannah Penfold, Jasna Wall

HMCTS Legal

Sara Chalk, Rebecca Caws

Bar

Rebecca Hawkins, Anastasia Said

Solicitors

TBC

Hampshire Police



What is Pathfinder?

Pathfinder aims to improve the court experience and outcomes for children and families involved in private law proceedings. The model does this in a number of ways—by centring the voice of the child; by bringing all agencies involved in family justice together in a problem solving approach to resolution; and an enhanced array of support for those who have experienced domestic abuse is provided.

Pathfinder is a key change in culture for all involved. The Harm Panel made a series of recommendations in 2020 following a call for evidence from those in the Family Court. The Harm Panel recommended reform of the Child Arrangements Programme and Pathfinder was designed collaboratively by all family justice stakeholders. So far Pathfinder has been piloted in Dorset, Wales, Birmingham and West Yorkshire. The change of culture involves everyone working together collaboratively. This change of culture will be key both in the preparation for Pathfinder phase and after go live.

Key Changes to the Child Arrangements Programme

Child Impact Report - Instead of a safeguarding letter, FHDRA and Section 7 reports, a CIR is prepared. The voice of the child is heard, Domestic Abuse Services support is triggered alongside meeting with parties and facilitating a multi agency approach in enhancing the risk assessment and use of the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence) Risk Identification

Case Progression Officers—help the parties engage and understand the proceedings and ensure the process is effective

Gatekeeping & Decision hearings—instead of multiple hearings and FHDRAs

Problem Solving Approach—agencies working together to resolve issues and a reduction in the adversarial nature of family court

Multi agency collaboration—additional support for victims of domestic abuse

IDVAs (Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser)—greater use of local domestic abuse support services and IDVAs meaning victims have a less negative court experience

Reduced delay and repeat applications—through the multi agency and problem solving approach to resolution, more sustainable orders are made in a shorter timescale

The Pathfinder Local Implementation Manager & Deputy

A Local Implementation Manager (LIM) and Deputy have been appointed to be the key point of contact between all agencies and the MOJ who are funding the rollout of Pathfinder in HIOW. The LIM and Deputy will ensure that all agencies deliver on Pathfinder including:

- Liaising with and steering rollout on behalf of MOJ and all agencies.
- Ensuring all local partners are prepared for delivery by arranging training events, facilitating communication and supporting relationships, ensuring that essential protocols are in place and all agencies are ready
- Project Managing Pathfinder to ensure that the Practice Direction and core model are followed
- Establish and organise a Local Implementation Group (and sub-groups) which steer delivery, identify and escalate risks and issues to decision makers
- Engagement by establishing effective local relationships to implement Pathfinder
- Supporting the Provision of the commissioning of DA services



Dates for your Diary

Wednesdays— Fortnightly LIG

26th November (Portsmouth) & 3rd December (Southampton) — Partnership Events

TBC—Launch Event

6th January—Go Live

Want to get in touch?



Please contact the person named for your organisation, alternatively:

PathfinderSW@justice.gov.uk



LIM & Deputy

The Local Implementation Manager is Helen Sewell and the Deputy is Alex Thomas. Both Helen and Alex work for HMCTS, Helen most recently as Family Legal Team Manager across Hampshire, Wiltshire & Isle of Wight and Alex as part for the SW Change Team working across Civil, Family and Tribunals. Whilst they both work for HMCTS, their roles cross all agencies involved in the roll out of Pathfinder, ensuring that everyone works together to deliver a successful model of HIOW.

The Pathfinder Local Implementation Group

The LIG met for the first time on 9th July 2025 and involved representatives from the Judiciary, HMCTS, CAF/CASS, all four Local Authorities, Solicitors, Bar and HIOW OPCC. Initial membership has been reviewed, Terms of Reference considered and sub-groups identified, The LIG will meet fortnightly and additional members will be invited including the DA provider when commissioned. Sub groups will consider training needs, protocols for CIR reports and the reduction of live cases

Preparing for Pathfinder: District Judge Samuel

District Judge Rachael Goodall and I are currently coordinating a process of review hearings for all private law cases in the cluster (Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight, Winchester, Basingstoke and Aldershot). All cases are being listed for a short hearing to consider whether final decisions can be made at that review hearing – whatever timetable might previously have been put in place.

This is being done because we are required to attempt to reduce (what are described as) legacy cases. But also because it benefits the parties, and more importantly, the children if earlier decisions can be made – provided the right decision is made.

We recognise that listing cases, sometimes at relatively short notice, places a burden on the parties' representatives and the parties themselves but the benefits of resolving matters at an earlier stage justifies that burden.

Cases are being listed at a number of the courts in the cluster and are being heard by full district judges, deputy district judges and recorders.

Funding has been made available so that there are extra sitting days for the review hearing lists and for early final hearings.

In our experience, making it clear to parties that we will be looking at whether final orders can be made at a review hearing, has meant that parties come to court with the mind-set of trying to do just that – particularly if they have representatives. In all cases we have found that with judicial encouragement and indications it has been able to make final decisions.

If final orders cannot be made at review hearings, then thought is given to whether an earlier final hearing can be listed or whether a further review hearing should be listed at which it would be possible to make final orders.

In our experience it has been possible in many cases to make final orders at review hearings. If that does not happen, it is often possible to narrow the issues and find a way to reach a final decision sooner than was originally intended.

The response from parents has generally been very positive and many are greatly relieved and pleased that a decision has been made to bring the court proceedings to an end.

The review hearings will continue for the rest of the year and possibly into the new year depending on available resources and the number of legacy cases that remain at the start of 2026.

If anyone has any questions or comments about the process please feel free to contact DJ Goodall or me.

DJ Samuel





Useful Links

Harm Report—[Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases](#)

Press Release—[Pioneering approach in family courts to support domestic abuse victims better -](#)

Pathfinder Update—[Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases](#)

[Annex: Integrated Domestic Abuse Courts](#)

[PRACTICE DIRECTION 36Z – PILOT SCHEME: PRIVATE LAW REFORM: INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH](#)

– Justice UK

[The private law pathfinder transforming domestic abuse victims' experiences of a previously 'brutal' system - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

[Children and young people's experiences of participation in private proceedings in the family courts | GOV.WALES](#)

[Domestic Abuse Commissioner calls for wide reaching reforms to ensure safety of children in the Family Courts and accelerate government plans - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)

Coming up in future HIOW Pathfinder News

- Training
- Preparation that Cafcass, Local Authorities, Solicitors and Bar and doing
- Updating on DA Commissioning and IDVA provision
- Update on outstanding cases
- Preparation for Pathfinder

If there is a topic you would like the newsletter to cover please get in touch: Pathfinder-SW@justice.gov.uk

