Children to get swifter justice as new family court approach expands nationally

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The newly named Child Focused Courts will be rolled out across England and Wales, following a particularly successful pilot which saw cases in the family court resolved seven and a half months quicker.

- Successful new court model that puts children at centre of proceedings to be rolled out nationwide
- Child Focused Courts proven to resolve cases quicker - sparing children months of trauma
- Part of the Government’s Plan for Change to protect children and deliver fairer and faster justice

Thousands more children will receive swifter justice and be better protected from further trauma under plans to roll out a new, successful family court model nationwide.

Today (Tuesday 17 March), the Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed that Child Focused Courts – formerly known as Pathfinder Courts – will be expanded across the entirety of England and Wales.

The move follows a highly successful trial period in several areas which saw family court backlogs halve and cases resolved up to seven and a half months faster – sparing brave children weeks of torment.

Too many families are often locked into lengthy, adversarial court proceedings with vulnerable children left to bear the brunt of prolonged family disputes. To counter that, the new courts will identify any risks to the children’s welfare more quickly – for example, when they’re experiencing domestic abuse - while streamlining court processes to reduce delays.

The model will also bolster coordination between the family court and agencies, such as local authorities and the police, particularly when dealing with allegations of domestic abuse and other harms. This should reduce the number of returning cases, protecting children and families from further trauma.

The decision to extend the rollout of Child Focused Courts is a key pillar of the Plan for Change to protect children and clamp down on the scourge of domestic abuse. This will help halve violence against women and girls in a decade, tackle the backlog to repair the justice system after years of neglect, and deliver swifter and fair justice for all victims.

Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary David Lammy said:

> Court backlogs are not just numbers on a page. When it comes to the family courts, they represent victims waiting, families in limbo and children and domestic abuse victims left to linger in harm’s way.
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> That is why the national rollout of the Child Focused Courts matters so much. It will protect, support and hear the voices of children, helping family courts make safe and fair decisions without delay.

> It also shows that, through innovative reforms, we can make our courts work better, tackle delays and bring down the backlog so more victims and families get the swift justice they deserve.

Child Focused Courts currently operate in 10 of 43 court areas in England and Wales, including all of Wales, Birmingham, the West Midlands, Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and West Yorkshire.

Backed by £17m in Government funding for the next financial year, the model will initially be rolled out across Northumbria and North Durham, Cleveland and South Durham, Lancashire, Cumbria, York and North Yorkshire, Cheshire and Merseyside, Northamptonshire, and Coventry and Warwickshire. It will then expand across the rest of England and Wales over the upcoming financial years.

Justice Minister Baroness Levitt KC said:

> No child should have to live with fear, uncertainty or the shadow of conflict hanging over their everyday life. Behind every case is a young person who needs reassurance, protection and the chance to simply be a child.
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> By rolling out Child Focused Courts nationally, we can help spare more children the pain of drawn-out proceedings, deliver swifter justice for families while making sure support comes earlier when it is needed most.
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> This is about giving children and their families safety, stability and the best possible foundation for a healthy future.

The national rollout of Child Focused Courts is part of a package of measures to deliver swifter justice for children and families. This includes improving GOV.UK content to help parents going through divorce find accurate, accessible and trustworthy information to help them reach agreement on child arrangements more easily outside the court.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Dame Nicole Jacobs, said:

> For too long, children and adult victims have been advocating for a family justice system that truly understands domestic abuse, listens to their concerns, and prioritises their safety.
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> I’m thrilled that the government has heard their calls and taken decisive action to rollout Child Focused Courts nationally. This approach has shown that when we put children first, victims feel more supported and re-traumatisation is reduced. It is important that these outcomes are at the heart of every case concerning domestic abuse.
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> The Family Court should be a place of support and protection, and I’m pleased that we are now a step closer to making this a reality.

The move follows a series of key changes designed to protect both child and adult victims from violence and abuse.

These include the Courts and Tribunal Bill, through which the Government will repeal the presumption of parental involvement from the Children Act 1989, moving away from the idea of the 'rights' of parents and instead focusing squarely on children's safety.

The Government will also remove parental responsibility from people who have been convicted of a serious sexual offence against any child, and where a child is born of rape. In addition, children will receive swifter justice thanks to a new and improved Victims Code, which will include the very first child-friendly version of the Code, making sure children are better supported to get help and understand their rights as a victim of crime.

This Government is also investing over £1 billion as part of its mission to fight violence against women and girls, with £550 million for victims' services, including yearly funding increases, and another £499 million for safe housing for victims of abuse over next 3 years.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/children-to-get-swifter-justice-as-new-family-court-approach-expands-nationally