National Roll-out of the Child Focused Court

In March 2026 the Government confirmed that the Child Focused Court will be expanded across the entirety of England and Wales.
The introduction of Child Focused Court marks one of the most important changes in recent years to how the courts deal with disputes regarding arrangements for children on separation and divorce. It was introduced following concerns raised about how effectively the court system protects children and families.
The model was first piloted in Dorset and North Wales in 2022 and has been gradually expanded and is now being rolled out across all courts in England and Wales. It is anticipated that it will be in all courts by the end of 2029.

What Has Changed

At its core, the Child Focused Model changes when and how information is gathered in a case. In simple terms, the system is now 'front-loaded'. The court aims to understand the case properly from the outset, rather than building the picture over time.

Under the new Model:-

- Information is gathered at the very start before any hearing rather than much later in the process;
- A Child Impact Report is prepared by CAFCASS (the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service), focusing on the child's experiences, wishes and needs and recommends how the case might be resolved:
- Cases move more quickly to a stage where key issues can be identified and decisions considered;
- Judges take a more active, problem-solving role.

Key aims of the new Model

The reforms are designed to improve both the process and the outcomes for families by:-

- Putting the child at the centre of decision-making from the start;
- Early understanding of the issues, including identifying risks early, particularly in cases involving domestic abuse;
- Stronger emphasis on safeguarding from the outset;
- Better co-ordination with agencies such as CAFCASS and local support services;
- Continuing to encourage resolution outside of court where it is safe and appropriate such as using Family Mediation;
- Reducing confrontation between parents;
- Cutting down on delays and repeated court hearings. By week 8 of the proceedings, the Court is usually ready to list a Directions Hearing. Often this results in final orders being made. In more complex cases, or for those families requiring further intervention or a fact-finding exercise to determine allegations raised directions will be given to address those matters, and it will be important that any areas of concern such as drug or alcohol testing are raised at any early stage.

For advice about family law matters please contact Heather Weavill at Alison Fielden & Co on 01285 653261.