

Welfare reports

Sometimes the Court needs more detailed information about a child's welfare after the first hearing. In those cases, JFCAS will be asked to write a report that looks at the child's needs in more detail.

The JFCAS officer will decide what information they need for the report based on what the court has asked them to look at, and what they feel are the important aspects of the case. It will always be based around a detailed analysis of the impact on the child/ren of the issues within the family.

They will talk to the carers, and the children (depending on their age and understanding) about their wishes and feelings and what they would like to happen.

In assessing the case the JFCAS officer will:

- usually talk to children alone – this will generally be at a neutral venue, such as the JFCAS office
- spend time with all parties to proceedings and listen to any concerns they might have
- often do a visit to your home, depending on the circumstances of the case
- potentially speak to other people such as family members, teachers, social workers and health workers.

The JFCAS officer will not ask children to make a decision or to choose between the parents/carers.

Having made these enquiries the JFCAS officer will write a report advising the court on what they think should happen. It will be sent to the Court, who will send it out to the parties in the case (via their lawyers if they have some). In most cases the parties will be able to see the report before the court hearing.

If you are not happy with the welfare report

If you are unhappy about the report, it is important that you let the court know about your concerns. This ensures the judge is able to consider your concerns when making their decision.

If you think there are any factual inaccuracies, for example incorrect names or dates of birth, you should notify the JFCAS officer who wrote the report or their manager.

What will the court decide?

The court will make the final decision about what should happen to your children after reading the JFCAS officer's report and listening to what you and other people in the case have said.

The court will:

- pay particular attention to your children's wishes and feelings – but may not always do what your children want
- make its decision based on what it thinks is best for the children
- set its decision out in a 'court order' which you must follow

If you are not happy with the court's decision, you must raise this at court – you cannot make a complaint to JFCAS about the court's decision.

During this process the JFCAS officer will be able to answer any questions you may have about your case, although they cannot provide legal advice.