

**Involved local authorities:**

Cheshire West & Chester  
 Cheshire East  
 Warrington  
 Wirral  
 Halton  
 Liverpool  
 St Helen's  
 Sefton  
 Knowsley



# Cheshire & Merseyside

## DFJ Trailblazer Pilot Area

**Key intervention themes:**

- |                                   |   |  |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>System governance</b>          | ✓ | <b>Pre-proceedings practice</b>            | ✓ |
| <b>Improving data</b>             | ✓ | <b>Experience of children and families</b> | ✓ |
| <b>Multi-agency collaboration</b> | ✓ |  |   |

**Baseline information:**



**47 weeks**  
 Average Section 31 case duration

National average  
 44 weeks



**13.1**  
 Section 31 care applications per 10,000 children

National average  
 9.2

Based on Cafcass statistics for 2023-24

**Local challenges and rationale for change:**

- Reduced court capacity: The loss of additional sitting days has meant that hearings are often scheduled more than four months in the future.
- Limited expert availability and challenges around the timeliness and quality of external assessments
- Quality and timeliness of evidence: High social worker caseloads combined with a strong reliance on agency staff often lead to late submission and, in some cases, low-quality evidence going to court.

**Implemented solutions:**

<b>Independent assessment hub</b>	The DFJ area will set up an independent assessment hub staffed with experienced ParentAssess and fostering assessors who can provide high-quality assessments during care proceedings.
<b>Cross-system commitment</b>	Cross-system commitment to use the new assessment hub as a first point of call for independent expert assessments required during proceedings.
<b>Expand pool of ParentAssess practitioners</b>	Social workers in all nine LAs will receive ParentAssess training to improve the quality of LA assessments and evidence going to court and improve the experience of children and families.

