

Ofsted consults on new approach to Cafcass inspections

Ofsted is seeking views on proposals for a more effective and proportionate approach to inspecting the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass).

Launched today, the [consultation](#) seeks a range of views from those working with children and families in the family courts.

If implemented, the new approach will align Cafcass inspections with Ofsted's other inspections of children's social care. It will maintain a high bar, while introducing more proportionate inspection in response to Cafcass's continued good performance.

The proposed new framework will create a 'whole-system' approach of shorter inspections, with more regular contact in-between. More frequent engagement will help Ofsted to build a better picture of Cafcass's practice.

The proposals in today's consultation include:

- a 3-yearly national judgement inspection
- focused visits between judgement inspections, or inclusion in joint targeted area inspections
- annual sharing of a self-evaluation of frontline practice in both public and private law
- an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted and the Cafcass chief executive and senior leadership team

Three-yearly inspection of the national organisation will continue, but in light of Cafcass's history of positive inspection outcomes, the inspection will be shorter than it is currently. If Cafcass's performance drops below the level of good, Ofsted will have the flexibility to extend the inspection.

At the 3-yearly inspection, Ofsted proposes to make judgements on the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass's private law and public law practice, and on the impact that its leaders have on practice with children and families.

While individual service areas (Cafcass's operational units) will no longer receive a graded judgement, inspectors will feed back to each area on its key strengths and areas for improvement at the end of each visit.

The consultation will close on 11 November and the proposed new framework will take effect from February 2021.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Regulation and Social Care said:

Cafcass has a hugely important role in providing expert social work advice to the family court. I urge anyone working with children and families in the family justice system to give us their views on these proposals.

The family courts can be a frightening and confusing experience, so good-quality, thoughtful work with children and families is vital. Our proposals retain all the rigour of previous inspections but will be more proportionate, with a greater focus on organisational culture and direct work with children and families.

[UK space sector survey – Size and Health 2020](#)

News story

The ‘Size and Health of the UK space industry’ survey – the primary source of evidence used to track growth in the sector – opens today.



Credit: ‘United Kingdom by Proba-V’ (decolourised). ESA/Belspo – by VITO, CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO

In 2020, the survey will be carried out by [know.space](#) on behalf of the UK Space Agency, and is now open to responses from space sector organisations across the UK.

[The results from the 2018](#) survey demonstrated significant growth in income, exports and employment, and indirect benefits of satellite services to other industrial sectors worth £300 billion of UK GDP.

In response to the challenges facing the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 survey represents a ‘light touch’ update of this long-running series. All information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence,

and only aggregate anonymised information will be published.

If you have any queries about the survey please contact Greg Sadlier at know.space (greg@know.space) or Alex Leudar at the UK Space Agency (alex.leudar@ukspaceagency.gov.uk).

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[Nationally important wildflower grasslands get increased protection](#)

Two nationally rare flower-rich grasslands have gained national protection in recognition of their national importance for wildlife, Natural England has announced today (14 October).

Dallow Downs & Winsdon Hill (DD&WH), a chalk grassland on the western outskirts of Luton, and Cowslip Meadow, a flower-rich meadow located in a residential area to the north of Luton, have gained national status as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Over 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s with flower-rich grassland now only covering a mere 1% of the UK's land area. Today's move will see around 48 hectares of land receive strong legal protection on account of the rich array of wildflower-rich grassland and rare plant interest, including the nationally rare great pignut plant which has a stronghold on these sites.

The sites also have an array of woodland which is home to warblers and plants such as dog's mercury and yellow archangel during the spring, and wetlands hosting species such as slow worm, water vole, and southern marsh orchid. The chalk grasslands hold a rich assemblage of invertebrates including the marbled white butterfly, which can be seen feeding on the abundant knapweed and scabious flowers in mid-summer. Cowslip Meadow hosts a number of water bodies, scrub and grassland which provide an oasis for a range of birdlife, and DD&WH offers a perfect viewpoint to see red kites flying high over the town.

Aidan Lonergan, Natural England's Area Manager for West Anglia, said:

These designations are a huge step forward to secure the protection of these nationally important wildflower meadows which host an array of rare and wonderful wildlife.

These grasslands are right on Luton's doorstep and we know the value of having nature close to home has been vital for so many of

us during this challenging year. Today's move will offer long term protection for these important sites, so local communities can continue to connect with this special habitat and its amazing wildlife as we build back greener from the pandemic.

Natural England worked closely with partners including Luton Borough Council and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire to gather the evidence needed to confirm the designations.

Councillor Paul Castleman portfolio holder responsible for heritage and conservation, said:

We are really delighted that Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill and Cowslip Meadow is proposed to have national status as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – the first to achieve this status locally for many years. We have seen over the last few months how people have really come to enjoy nature and the outdoors and having these hidden gems in the west and north of the town nationally recognised is great news. It's also important because these areas have such rich wildlife and biodiversity.

This step is a real tribute to the work of our teams in managing the sites and the job done by volunteers and following our work carried out with Natural England and Wildlife Trust, these areas can now be protected and managed for all to enjoy. We also welcome the approach of Natural England in seeking the views of local residents as part of the process.

Laura Downton, Wildlife Trust BCN's Bedfordshire Living Landscape Manager said:

We are really pleased that these two fantastic wildlife sites are now designated as SSSI: it is a privilege to know that we were able to help this process by undertaking the first surveys showing both sites to be of SSSI quality.

Well done Natural England and Luton Borough Council for making this happen.

Last month, [a Natural England survey revealed](#) that almost nine in ten adults in England during lockdown reported that protection of the environment is important to them, and today's move will help ensure that local communities in Luton continue to benefit from these wildlife-rich greenspaces long-term.

The government has laid out its ambition in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) for a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife, and has also [recently committed to protecting 30% of the UK's land by 2030](#) which will result in over 4,000 sq km of new land in

England being designated.

There are over 4,100 SSSIs in England, covering around 8% of the country's land area. More than 70% of these sites (by area) are internationally important for their wildlife and also designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are also SSSIs as are many Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites. SSSIs include some of the most spectacular and beautiful habitats: wetlands teeming with wading birds, winding chalk rivers, flower-rich meadows, windswept shingle beaches and remote upland peat bogs, as well as much-loved woodlands, meadows, heathlands and wetlands close to where people live in our towns, cities and villages.

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. It is Natural England's responsibility to notify an area as a SSSI when it believes the wildlife or geology is of special interest.

Natural England will gather views on the notification of these sites over the next 4 months.

[COVID-19: Update to Contact Centre opening hours](#)

News story

Due to COVID-19 precautions, DBS Contact Centre hours have temporarily changed.



The opening hours for the DBS Contact Centre have temporarily changed, as detailed below, in response to coronavirus-related measures:

Previous opening hours	Opening hours as of 14 October 2020
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm	Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
Saturday, 10am to 5pm	Saturday, Closed

You may also experience some delays or longer waiting times. Our peak times are between 9am to 10am and 4pm to 5pm, and you will likely experience more significant delays during these periods.

Services across GOV.UK remain unaffected.

You can track your application online:

- Online tracking for basic DBS checks, [here](#)
- Online tracking for standard and enhanced DBS checks, [here](#)

If you have a general enquiry, you can still contact DBS via:

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[Captain Sir Tom Moore presented with first Veterans' Railcard](#)

Military veterans of every generation will soon benefit from cut-price rail travel, thanks to a UK Government initiative.

UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps today [13 October] presented Captain Sir Tom Moore with the very first Veterans' Railcard.

Aimed at supporting veterans after their service, the new railcard will provide up to a third off all peak and off-peak fares, as well as discounted travel for adult companions and children. It forms part of the UK Government's commitment to make this country the best place to be a veteran, helping repay the debt we all owe to those who have served.

At his home in Bedfordshire Captain Sir Tom Moore, who served in World War II and won the nation's heart with his incredible fundraising efforts, was presented with the very first card.

The card pays tribute to the Royal Navy, RAF and Army, using the colours featured on the veterans' flag. An estimated 830,000 veterans, who are not eligible for existing railcards, will now be able to get up to a third off rail travel from 5 November 2020.

The new card will be on sale at an introductory price of just £21 until 31 March 2021.

Grant Shapps, UK Transport Secretary, said:

We have an eternal debt of honour to those who have served our country, and this railcard is part of marking our gratitude. For veterans looking to re-enter the world of work and connect with friends and family, it will cut the cost of travel to open up new opportunities.

I am also delighted to present Sir Captain Tom Moore with the very first railcard. Through his service and his inspirational fundraising, he has shown the selflessness and indomitable spirit of all those who have served

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Funded by the UK Government, the new Veterans' Railcard will help open up opportunities for our former service personnel.

The UK's military make huge sacrifices to keep our country safe. It is only right that we continue to show how much we value their efforts once they leave the armed forces.

This new railcard will help veterans with employment and retraining, and strengthen links to friends and family. It is part of us repaying our huge debt to all those who have served for our country. I am very proud of this UK Government initiative.

Captain Sir Tom Moore, Captain Tom Foundation, said:

This is a wonderful occasion to accept the first veterans' rail card.

It is a rare opportunity to show thanks and gratitude to veterans and this rail card is a necessary recognition and investment in veterans, giving them the ability to re-connect and combat loneliness, something that we promote and support at The Captain Tom Foundation.