

Building C  
Cumberland Place  
Park Row  
Nottingham  
NG1 6HJ

Telephone: 0300 123 1231  
Fax: 0300 123 3159  
Minicom: 0161 618 8524  
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Anthony Douglas  
Chief Executive  
Cafcass  
6th Floor  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London, SW1P 3BT

Our Reference SC065883

Dear Mr Douglas

### **Post Inspection Monitoring**

#### **Ofsted inspection of Cafcass Lancashire and Cumbria service area (N3) in the week commencing 24 January 2011**

This letter contains the findings of the recent post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted on 26 and 27 January 2011 at the Cafcass offices situated in Blackburn and Lancaster. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass Lancashire and Cumbria service area in November 2009.

I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance you provided to inspectors in carrying out this visit. As a part of the post inspection monitoring process, inspectors assessed:

- the action plan that was generated from the recommendations of the inspection in December 2009
- the performance data for the area
- a range of over 20 documents provided by the service area
- the use of the data collection system
- a sample of 20 recently closed case files
- a sample of four complaints received since September 2010

Inspectors met with

- Executive Head of Service and Interim Head of Service of N3
  - Service Managers for the area
  - Family Court Advisors in Lancaster and Blackburn
- and had a telephone conversation with a representative of Lancashire County Council

Inspectors were unable to speak with a member of the judiciary.

## Outcome of the inspection

The inspection report for Cafcass Lancashire and Cumbria Service Area was published in December 2009 and identified seven areas for improvement.

## Findings of the post inspection monitoring visit:

The inspection in December 2009 reported that in order to improve the quality of provision and services for children and young people in Cafcass, the service area should take the following action:

- **Area for improvement 1:** Ensure identified risks of harm to children and young people are effectively assessed and minimised by timely allocation of cases.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the waiting times for families to receive a service was too long and insufficient consideration had been given to managing delays. Filing times for private law cases was too slow and the performance of the area was well below the both the national and regional averages.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made in this area for improvement.

While progress towards this area for improvement has been slow, a new senior management team and the appointment of additional specialist managers in October 2010 have resulted in significant improvements. An early intervention team has been established to offer an early screening service that identifies any risk and safeguarding issues to the court, to ensure that Cafcass resources are targeted appropriately. Additional Family Court Advisors (FCAs) funded through 'Cash for Change', also aid prompt allocation of work and the more timely completion of cases. Training has also been undertaken by FCAs in applying the proportionate working model. This is translated into more focused methods of work with families. As a result of these initiatives there is an improving trend of performance both in time taken to allocate cases and in meeting the filing times set by the court. These compare well with both national and regional performance. For example, in December 2010, almost all court reports were submitted by the agreed filing dates, compared with less than half in August 2010.

However, the lack of formal working agreements between Cafcass and the courts result in filing times for court reports that are still significantly longer than those specified the President's interim guidance.

- **Area for improvement 2:** Ensure that performance and quality assurance processes are implemented effectively and consistently to improve the quality of service.

The inspection in December 2009 noted that a culture of performance management and quality assurance was not sufficiently embedded in the service area to evaluate the quality and improve services effectively. Quality of performance data was poor and the national performance tool, Quality for Children (Q4C), was not consistently used across the service area. Management oversight was not sufficiently evident on case files and the system of performance management of staff was not sufficiently rigorous. Little evidence was available to show that the results of audits of performance had resulted in improvements.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Following a review of data collection systems in the area, performance data is now more robust and has made a direct impact on improving service delivery. For example, additional capacity for allocation of cases has been established through the closure of cases in a timely manner. Performance against key indicators is now consistent with, or better than, regional and national data for most targets and there is a clear trend of improvement. Performance tools, including Q4C, are used effectively and deficits in performance are managed well. Benchmarking is undertaken within the management group to ensure that quality assurance standards are consistent. Management oversight is clearly visible on the large majority of files read by inspectors.

However, the quality assurance of reports prepared for court, particularly Schedule 2 letters (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000), is not sufficiently rigorous. Many contain significant typographical and grammatical errors which undermine the authority of the report. Although a system of audits has recently been undertaken and action plans are in place to address shortcomings, it is too early to see an outcome of these.

- **Area for improvement 3:** Ensure that the sharing of case plans and recommendations to court with children and families is appropriate and timely.

The inspection of December 2009 found that assessments were not always shared with children and young people and their families.

Progress in this area for development is **satisfactory**

FCAs are aware of the importance of sharing assessments with children and young people and their families and this is recorded on case files. Quality assurance processes monitor that this work is undertaken. In almost all the long term cases seen by inspectors, evidence was available to corroborate this.

However, there is a significant shortfall in the involvement of families who are subject to Schedule 2 letters (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) (The majority of these letters seen by inspectors had discussion with just one or neither party, prior to submission to the court.

- **Area for improvement 4:** Ensure that complaints are responded to within required time scales and that lessons learned lead to improvements in service delivery.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that responses to complaints took too long and the learning from complaints was not used effectively to improve the quality of service.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Initial progress to implement this area for improvement was slow. However, since the regionalisation of the complaints process in April 2010, timeliness in responding to complaints has improved on a month by month basis from 31 days in September 2010 to 12 days in December 2010. This is better than the national and regional performance averages, but the area has yet to meet the national performance target of 10 days for initial responses to complaints. Learning is cascaded to staff through briefings and team meetings. This learning impacts on practice. For example, families now receive letters when their cases are closed to ensure that there is a clear understanding when the contact with the service has ended.

- **Area for improvement 5:** Ensure that staffing resources are deployed appropriately to meet changes in demand for services.

The inspection of December 2009 found that there was insufficient flexibility in capacity within the workforce to effectively meet the rising demands for the Cafcass service.

The response of the service to this area for improvement is **good**.

Services within the area have been significantly re-configured since the inspection. This has resulted in a more effective management area. Offices in Cumbria are no longer managed within the N3 service area. Two smaller offices have been closed with staff transferred to the main offices in Lancaster and Blackburn. The subsequent re-structuring of the service into an early intervention and long term teams results in more flexibility in meeting changes in local demand. Improvements achieved by short term funding provided through the 'Cash for Change' funding will be underpinned by the establishment of five permanent FCAs in the next financial year

- **Area for improvement 6:** Ensure that consultation with service users is systematic and includes all vulnerable groups of children and young people.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that there was no systematic approach to user engagement across the service area.

**Inadequate** progress has been made in this area for improvement

Senior managers recognise that resources have been focused on improving other areas of performance rather than improving stakeholder consultation. However, there is recognition that systematic consultation is needed to ensure that Cafcass offers a responsive service to children, young people and their families.

- **Area for improvement 7:** Implement fully the action plans arising from the equality impact assessments.

The inspection of December 2009 reported that progress in embedding equality and diversity issues into practice were too slow and the equality impact assessments (EIA) for the area had not been implemented.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made in this area for improvement

Since the inspection, the most significant concern regarding the lack of accessible offices for disabled staff or service users has been addressed. Both offices have now been closed and access arrangements in other offices are good. Progress in implementing other areas of the EIA has been slow. Staff have received a briefing about the EIA and understand its impact on their practice. Equality and diversity training to embed this understanding will be completed by the end of January 2011. Some specialist training has been commissioned to meet specific issues for example, some FCAs are receiving training on forced marriage protection orders.

However, the EIA has not been reviewed since the re-configuration of the area and no consideration has been made of the impact that this may have on the needs of the remaining area.

Having considered the range of evidence presented, Ofsted judges that satisfactory progress has been made in five of the seven areas for improvement, good progress in one and inadequate progress in one. Taken together, this represents **satisfactory** progress overall.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen McKeown".

Karen McKeown  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc:  
Annabel Burns, DfE  
Kate Lyons, DfE