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10 February 2010

Anthony Douglas
Chief Executive
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Dear Anthony,

**Post inspection monitoring
Ofsted inspection of Cafcass service area Far South West (S7) 2009**

This letter contains the findings of the recent post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted on 1 and 2 February 2010 at the Cafcass office in Exeter. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass Far South West in June 2009. I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance you provided to Carolyn Adcock HM Inspector and me in carrying out this visit.

As a part of the post inspection monitoring process, inspectors assessed:

- the post-inspection monitoring self-assessment prepared by the service area
- a sample of recently completed reports for courts from across S7
- a sample of recently closed case files from each office
- a sample of files for complaints made since June 2009

Inspectors also met with

- the Operational Director (South)
- the Head of Service S7 and Head of Service Quality Improvement (South)
- the Quality Improvement Service Manager for Far South West together with two service managers from S7
- four Family Court Advisors



Outcome of the inspection

The inspection report of Cafcass Far South West service area 2009 was published in June 2009 and identified seven areas for improvement.

The action plan for improvement submitted by the service following the inspection was judged to be satisfactory.

Findings of the post inspection monitoring visit:

- **Area for improvement 1:** Take action immediately to ensure effective management of all aspects of the recent increase in delay across the service area.

The inspection in June 2009 reported that while the majority of public law cases were allocated in a timely manner there were significant delays in service delivery to children and families involved in private law proceedings.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. The service area has taken effective action to tackle the key features that contribute to delay. Steps taken include good liaison with courts and effective implementation of the interim guidance by the President of the Family Division to better manage backlogs. More effective intervention by managers to ensure efficient working to safeguard children has increased capacity and productivity across the service area. At the time of the post inspection visit there was no evidence of avoidable delay and cases awaiting allocation were covered by an extensive duty process in all offices. While the service area has taken effective steps to tackle delay which appear to be sustainable for the future, further action is needed to reduce the time between allocating work in private law and filing reports with the court.

- **Area for improvement 2:** Take action immediately to ensure that the quality assurance work in the service area is timely and consistent.

The inspection in June 2009 reported on the contrast between the better and more consistent achievements of the national improvement team in improving practice in the service area with that provided through local arrangements. There had been some inconsistency in the judgements made by the local quality improvement team, and the quality assurance of some court reports.



Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. The requirements of the Cafcass performance improvement tool, (Quality for Children) are now fully met and there is greater consistency in the judgements about practice made by local managers. This has been achieved through better performance management of service managers by the Head of Service, such as the establishment of agreed benchmarks to assess the quality of practice and the application of consistent processes to evaluate and improve court reports. Internal inspections have been completed in each office and appropriate action plans to improve the work of individual practitioners is now in place.

- **Area for improvement 3:** Within three months ensure that the quality of all case planning, assessment, intervention, direct work with children, court reporting and recommendations reaches at least minimum standards consistently across the service area.

The inspection in June 2009 judged case planning, assessment, intervention, direct work with children and reporting to court as inadequate. The quality of assessments was highly variable and recommendations to court were often unclear or unsupported by evidence.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. While the quality of some work remains variable, most reports were judged satisfactory or better and the views of children and young people are clearly represented in case plans, assessments and recommendations to court. The needs of children and young people are receiving an increased focus by Cafcass practitioners and management oversight of service delivery is evident in case files. Further improvements can be made through more consistent use of the high quality Cafcass Needs Wishes and Feelings tools and a better understanding of the use of the Common Assessment Framework with Local Authorities to enhance safeguarding of children and young people.

- **Area for improvement 4:** Within three months ensure case plans and recommendations to court are shared with children and families appropriately.

The inspection in June 2009 reported that case plans and recommendations to courts were not shared consistently with Cafcass service users.

Inadequate progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. While the service area had made some good progress in including children in assessments, overall improvement has been too slow and sharing decision making with service users is not yet routine. Better progress has been achieved in the way in which reports completed in Work to First Hearing at court are shared with adults.



Although an improved national casework system which includes the requirement to share case plans with children and families has been operational since December 2009 this has yet to show impact across the service area.

- **Area for improvement 5:** Within three months ensure that the management and handling of complaints is consistent with the Cafcass complaints policy.

The inspection in June 2009 reported that the number of complaints received in the service area was markedly higher than the national average and that the response to complaints by some managers was inadequate.

Inadequate progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Although the service area had planned to appoint a manager to deal with complaints this has not proved to be possible because of budget constraints. While there has been good improvement in reducing the time taken to acknowledge receipt of a complaint, the service area is not meeting the national performance indicator for dealing with complaints. The most recent data shows that only 26% of complaints are dealt with by the service area in 20 working days. The target is 65%. Although this response is poor the average performance across Cafcass South (30%) and the National average (34%) are little better. While some complaints were timely and well considered these were the exception rather than the norm. However, the service area demonstrates a more open approach to complaints with an increase in the number that are upheld or partially upheld. Further action is needed to improve timeliness and to disseminate any learning from complaints.

- **Area for improvement 6:** Within six months ensure that the impact of family disruption on all aspects of the Every Child Matters outcomes for children is considered fully when planning assessments and is demonstrated within reports and recommendations to court.

The inspection in June 2009 reported that while the service area focused adequately on the Cafcass contribution to the Staying Safe outcome it was not contributing effectively in other outcomes.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Reports to court have a much greater focus on the needs of children and the effects of family disruption on their safety and emotional health. Although some cases demonstrated good attention to the effect of family disruption on children's achievement, consideration of economic well being was largely absent. The service area has begun to introduce a model of case planning and assessment that incorporates attention to all aspects of the Every Child Matters outcomes. Recent reports to court and case files demonstrate increased participation by children and young people in assessments and their contribution to decision making in matters that affect their wellbeing.



- **Area for improvement 7:** Within six months secure meaningful participation by children, young people and families in improving services.

The inspection in June 2009 reported that there was little evidence that the experience of children, young people and families was used to influence development of the service locally.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement.

Although the numbers attending were low, the service area held two very effective consultation meetings separately with adults and young people. The consultation with young people was conducted by a Family Support Worker from the service area with the National Cafcass Children's Rights Director and the Children's Rights Consultant Hear4U/CafcassYoung Inspectors. Messages from the small group of young people demonstrated that the majority were overall dissatisfied with their experience of Cafcass. They felt ill informed about Cafcass and were unaware of the good facilities available to provide feedback to Cafcass. Similarly, few were aware of the excellent provision of peer support available to younger users of the Cafcass service. By sending out case plans and court reports directly to service users the service area has already taken steps to address two significant issues raised by adults. Further meetings are scheduled in the near future.

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

Yours sincerely



Steve Hunt HM Inspector

cc:

Annabel Burns, DCSF
Elizabeth Kay, DCSF
Vince Clark, Cafcass
Peter Mitchell, Cafcass

