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20 May 2010

Anthony Douglas
Chief Executive
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Dear Anthony,

**Post inspection monitoring
Ofsted inspection of Cafcass service area North Yorkshire and Humberside
service area (N4) 2009**

This letter contains the findings of post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted on 27 and 28 April 2010 at the Cafcass office in Hull. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass North Yorkshire and Humberside service area in July 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 post-inspection monitoring self-assessment prepared by the service area
- a range of documents provided by the service area
- a sample of recently closed case files from each office
- a sample of files for complaints received since July 2009
- a sample of supervision files
- a sample of appraisal files
- the duty arrangements in the Hull office

Inspectors met with

- the Head of Service N4
- a Quality Improvement Service Manager for Cafcass North together with a service manager from N4
- five Family Court Advisors from the local offices



Outcome of the inspection

The inspection report for Cafcass North Yorkshire and Humberside service area was published in August 2009. It identified nine areas for improvement. The service area introduced an action plan to implement the improvements.

Findings of the post inspection monitoring visit:

- Area for improvement 1: Take action immediately to ensure that the quality of all case planning, assessment, intervention, reporting and direct work with children reaches at least minimum standards consistently across the service area.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that case records did not meet Cafcass standards and did not provide an adequate account of the work done. There was little management oversight or quality improvement of cases and assessments lacked consistency. In one team risk assessments were not completed in many cases.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. With some important exceptions the majority of cases in the sample are judged satisfactory or better by inspectors and some of the most recent work is good. Most files provide an adequate account of the work undertaken with case plans and assessments completed appropriately and records up to date. Some cases showed evidence of good direct work with children and families.

However, while steps taken are beginning to show positive impact, further and more robust action is needed to ensure that improved work with children and families is sustained. There remains a lack of recorded management oversight in most cases and risk assessment is not undertaken consistently and effectively. Closer attention is needed to ensure consistency in safeguarding. In two cases the action taken to ensure children were safeguarded was not recorded adequately and in one the required notification was not made to the local authority.

- **Area for improvement 2:** Take action immediately to ensure staff at all levels, including senior managers; demonstrate consistently their accountability to the organisation.

The inspection in July 2009 followed very recent changes in senior and middle management and reported that previous leadership failed to identify and put right deficits in the service area. Several key national strategies had not been implemented including the Accountability Review and the performance management system Quality 4 Children (Q4C). Lines of accountability were not clear and managers did not have a clear picture of performance. There was evidence of a significant lack of compliance with organisational requirements.



Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Following the inspection, senior managers took immediate action through briefings and performance management processes to ensure that all staff understood their accountability to the organisation. Better use is made of Q4C including compliance with Cafcass policies and the assessment of professional behaviour. The Cafcass Accountability Review has been implemented across the service area. New working practices have been introduced recently which provide a clearer, more consistent and accountable approach to the work. These include the implementation of the President's Interim Guidance across all courts in North Yorkshire and Humberside service area and the introduction of an Early Intervention Service. The changes are designed to ensure that effective and timely safeguarding information is provided to courts and children and families receive a good quality of service consistently across North Yorkshire and Humberside.

- **Area for improvement 3:** Take action immediately to ensure that duty systems promote, and are effective in responding to, the needs of service users in the interim, while cases are awaiting allocation.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that although duty systems assessed risks and prioritised cases appropriately, some cases on waiting lists had significant risk factors and the area did not respond to those needs.

Inadequate progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Following the inspection a common system of risk assessment and prioritisation of cases awaiting allocation was introduced across the service area. Data show good rates of allocation and for cases awaiting allocation standard letters have been introduced informing service users and their legal representatives about the duty systems operating across the service area.

However, in nine months, insufficient significant progress has been made in this important area for improvement. Inspectors found that the operation of the duty system in Hull and Humber is ineffective and the key performance data for allocation lack clarity.

Where cases cannot be allocated immediately to a Cafcass practitioner they are allocated to the duty system. In line with the area for improvement, senior managers in the service area have an expectation that cases allocated to duty are reviewed fortnightly and effective action taken as necessary.

During the monitoring visit inspectors found that the arrangements to review unallocated cases held on duty are not sufficiently robust to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded. The most recent overall review of cases was conducted on 28 February 2010. Although data show good rates of allocation, current arrangements mean that allocation to duty in Hull and Humber is little more than a paper exercise because duty cases are not reviewed effectively. The system



lacks clarity about the respective responsibilities of service managers and practitioners to monitor duty cases. It was only as a result of inspectors during the monitoring visit drawing attention to the deficits in the duty system that the service area took immediate action to review the cases held on duty and amend radically the current arrangements. As a result of that review one case held on duty required immediate allocation to ensure that children were safeguarded.

Poor progress in this area and lack of oversight by senior managers are a significant deficit in the service area.

- **Area for improvement 4:** Take action immediately to ensure that management arrangements for homeworkers are effective and consistent with the Cafcass expectations of office-based staff.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that the service had not appreciated the complexities and challenges involved in managing the high numbers of staff who were not office-based.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Senior managers have taken effective steps to ensure that practitioners who work from home are better integrated into the organisational requirements of the service area. Many homeworkers have chosen to work in the Early Intervention Service which provides better opportunities for integration, improved team working and more effective management oversight. Further action is needed to ensure that IT provision for homeworkers is effective and meets the needs of staff who do not have immediate access to colleagues.

- **Area for improvement 5:** Take action immediately to ensure that performance improvement strategies use a range of change management techniques to achieve outcomes that support cultural change, as well as improvement of individual performance and compliance of staff.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that although robust Human Resources action had been taken to ensure compliance, other techniques to improve practice such as coaching were not used consistently, partly because of vacancies and capacity in the Quality Improvement Team in the North.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Managers have taken a range of measures to improve communication and consultation with staff with a view to effect cultural change and create a team approach across the service area. Practice improvement and action plans have been used effectively to raise standards and Human Resource processes have been implemented appropriately to support staff across a range of employment and performance issues. At the time of the monitoring visit only one member of staff



remained subject to an action plan to improve performance. The rate of appraisals completed shows satisfactory performance and most appraisals inspected were also satisfactory. While supervision rates for managers are good, only half of the practitioners receive regular supervision.

- **Area for improvement 6:** Within three months ensure that case plans and recommendations to court are shared with children and families appropriately.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that there was little effective focus on service users in the service area. Case plans and assessments were not shared routinely with children and families.

Inadequate progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement and this is acknowledged in the service area self assessment. Although the revised case plans and the introduction of the assessment framework will provide an opportunity to make some progress in this area, neither of these national initiatives have been implemented in North Yorkshire and Humberside.

- **Area for improvement 7:** Within three months ensure that the management and handling of complaints is consistent with the Cafcass complaints policy.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that too many complaints were dealt with poorly at the first stage of local contact with complainants. It was often not possible to trace what steps had been taken in response to a complaint or to determine the outcome.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. The service area performance for timely response to complaints is very poor. The most recent data show that only 20% of complaints are dealt with by the service area in 20 working days. The target is 65%. However improvements have been made in the quality of complaints handling. All the complaint files inspected were satisfactory or better and two were good. A dedicated manager focuses on complaints handling and key lessons from complaints are identified and disseminated effectively across the service area. Improvements have been achieved through good training and better quality assurance of responses to service users.

- **Area for improvement 8:** Within six months ensure that the impact of family disruption on all aspects of the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for children is considered fully when planning assessments and is demonstrated in reports and recommendations to court.



The inspection in July 2009 reported that where ECM outcomes are considered they did not reflect the child's whole life prospects which are envisaged by the ECM outcomes framework.

Inadequate progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement and this is acknowledged in the service area self assessment. Managers took a strategic decision to give priority attention to other areas of improvement. The service area should ensure that this area is implemented effectively.

- **Area for improvement 9:** Within six months secure meaningful participation by children, young people and families in improving services.

The inspection in July 2009 reported that there was very little effective focus on service users in this service area.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. In September 2010 the service area held consultation meetings with a small group of young people and a small group of adult service users. The consultation with the young people was conducted by the National Cafcass Children's Rights Team. In addition the service area invited service users to comment on their experience of Cafcass through a questionnaire. Key messages from the children and young people emphasised the need to be listened to and that neither they nor the adults knew about the Cafcass feedback system 'HearNow' or the peer mentoring system 'Hear4U'. The rate of use of Hear Now has improved from a low 38% in public law cases to a much improved rate of almost 80% in both public and private law proceedings. The service area should continue to take steps to ensure that these excellent facilities are accessed by more children and families. The service area responded well to service user feedback about facilities in the Hull office and access to the office in York. The inspections by Cafcass Young Inspectors assessed the offices in Grimsby, Hull and Scunthorpe as satisfactory overall and the service area has responded positively to recommendations made in those reports. Open days were held in the South Humberside to enable closer links with local communities. The service area acknowledges that, although it made a good start with the focus groups in September 2009, greater priority attention is needed to ensure that service user participation has an impact on improving service delivery.

Having considered the range of evidence presented, Ofsted judges that although satisfactory progress has been made in six of the nine areas for improvement, overall the service area has made **inadequate** progress. This is because of the serious deficits found by inspectors in the duty arrangements in Hull. In the 9 months since Ofsted reported, little positive change had been implemented in that important area of improvement until managers took action during the monitoring visit.



Yours sincerely

Steve Hunt
HM Inspector

cc:

Annabel Burns, DCSF

Elizabeth Kay, DCSF

Darren Shaw, Cafcass

Sharon Tappin, Cafcass

