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07 April 2011

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

Dear Mr Douglas

**Post inspection monitoring:**

**Ofsted inspection of Cafcass Cheshire and Merseyside (C7) in March 2010.**

This letter contains the findings of the recent post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted on 23-24 March 2011 by two HM Inspectors at the Cafcass office situated in Warrington. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass Cheshire and Merseyside service area in March 2010.

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 26 recently closed case files from each office including schedule 2 reports and some best practice examples
- six supervision and appraisal files
- telephone conversations with key stakeholders including senior judiciary and local authorities
- telephone conversations with local community service providers in cases involving domestic violence

Inspectors met with

- The Operational Director Central
- The Head of Service C7
- Service Managers
- The Office Manager
- Family Court Advisors

### **Outcome of the inspection in March 2010**

The inspection report for Cafcass Cheshire and Merseyside service area was published in April 2010 and identified eleven areas for improvement. Cheshire and Merseyside service area was assessed in 2010 as inadequate but with capacity to improve.

### **Findings of the post inspection monitoring visit:**

Progress on areas for improvement 1 and 4 is reported together

**Area for improvement 1** ensure that the needs of children and families in all cases on waiting lists are reviewed thoroughly and records are up to date.

**Area for improvement 4:** ensure that children, young people and families receive a timely service in public and private law cases.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that the approach to safeguarding children and young people on waiting lists was inconsistent across the service area. The level of priority on a number of cases in the backlog had not been assessed appropriately. There was significant delay in the allocation of public and private law cases. Only two thirds of private law cases were filed with courts within timescales and there was considerable variation in performance between teams.

**Outstanding** progress has been made on both of these related areas for improvement. Delay is now eradicated in the service area. Highly effective steps have been taken by Cafcass to tackle the significant backlog of cases awaiting allocation. Improvements include a restructure of service delivery and the introduction of proportionate working across the service area. A Work To First Hearing team now provides timely risk assessed safeguarding information about children and families to courts when cases are at an early stage in family proceedings. Proportionate working ensures that cases are allocated resources efficiently in relation to the assessed safeguarding needs of each case. Average filing times for private law cases are significantly improved from a previous low of 21 weeks to the fourteen weeks currently reported. All private law reports are now filed with courts by the agreed date and all cases are allocated promptly. The improvements achieved ensure that service delivery is efficient and effective and the safeguarding needs of children and young people are assessed at the earliest opportunity.

**Area for improvement 2:** ensure that performance management information is accurate and timely.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that achievement against many performance indicators was not met and effective performance management systems were underdeveloped. Managers did not make effective use of performance data and some management information was inaccurate.

**Good** progress has been made on this area for improvement. The performance by Cheshire and Merseyside service area measured by compliance with key indicators is good. Almost all the key indicators are met and all performance measures are better than national averages. Robust attention is given to the accurate recording and analysis of data to improve service delivery and take effective corrective action as necessary where performance targets are not met such as meeting court filing times.

**Area for improvement 3:** ensure that performance improvement processes, including supervision and appraisal are used consistently to achieve better outcomes for children and young people across the service area.

The inspection in March 2010 reported the quality and frequency of formal recorded supervision offered insufficient constructive challenge to staff to improve practice and performance. Supervision rates were very low and oversight of the work was not taking place in accordance with Cafcass policy requirements.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. The frequency of supervision and appraisal meets Cafcass requirements. Performance as measured by compliance with key indicators ranks the service area as a top performer nationally. Despite the fact that the rate of supervision and appraisal is now very high the range in the effectiveness of supervision and reliability of appraisal outcomes is too wide. Although oversight by managers of the work of practitioners is much improved, insufficient constructive challenge remains evident in the supervision files inspected. Continued development in supervision and appraisal is needed to ensure that recent improvements to practice and performance is sustained.

Progress on areas for improvement 5 and 8 is reported together

**Area for improvement 5:** ensure that strategic partnership working is effective across all local authorities.

**Area for improvement 8:** ensure that partnership working with local community groups is effective including support to families involved in domestic violence cases.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that strategic partnership arrangements and protocols with some local authorities needed further development to enable more effective working between agencies. Links with community groups were underdeveloped and partnership working with some key community groups had yet to be established. This included the need to make better links with Women's Aid and other providers for support to families in Domestic Violence cases.

**Good** progress has been made on both of these related areas for improvement. Representatives of Local Authorities and community groups spoken to by inspectors confirm that effective links are now established to ensure practice and strategic relationships are sound. Representation by Cafcass is good in key partnership working such as local safeguarding children boards and multi agency risk assessment conferences. These improved arrangements support effective partnership working to safeguard children and young people. The inspection in March 2010 reported that the quality of engagement with the judiciary was highly valued. Senior judiciary told inspectors that relationships remain strong and the senior management of the service area is highly effective.

**Area for improvement 6:** ensure that case plans and recommendations to court are shared with children and families appropriately and in a timely manner.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that plans and recommendations about children and families were not shared routinely with them by the Cafcass service area.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. Case files demonstrate that reports and recommendations to court are shared with most parties to proceedings prior to the hearing in the family court. A more rigorous approach is needed to ensure that families are involved consistently in case planning.

**Area for improvement 7:** ensure that the service area's equality impact assessments are implemented effectively

The inspection in March 2010 reported that equality impact assessments were recently completed and consequently had not had time to show impact.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. The Equality Impact Assessment for the service area is now revised appropriately to meet better the specific needs of service users. Although all staff have attended good training in equality and diversity issues this is yet to have sustained impact. Work inspected shows the understanding by staff about the relevance of diversity is too variable. The quality of practice remains too wide with examples seen by inspectors ranging from good to poor. An internal audit identifies appropriately the areas for improving practice in service provision to meet the diverse range of need across Cheshire and Merseyside.

**Area for improvement 9:** ensure that all Cafcass provision to support children and young people is used consistently.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that the new assessment framework introduced by Cafcass National Office was not implemented in the service area.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. Work inspected demonstrates improved use of the high quality Cafcass tools for assessment to communicate effectively with children and young people. Appropriate training is delivered and local workshops provided to improve practice in

communication with young people alongside more consistent assessment of their needs. In most cases inspected staff demonstrate a good level of skill in working with children and young people. This includes appropriate respect for their expressed needs and effective steps taken to enable their wishes and feelings to be made known to families and courts. However in some cases children were inappropriately not seen alone or their needs were overlooked because the practitioner decided they were too young to be involved in their case. More work is needed in the service area to ensure further progress is made and a more consistent approach is applied to the needs of children and young people.

**Area for improvement 10:** ensure that participation by children, young people and families in improving services is meaningful.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that no established local systems for involving and engaging service users were in place. Overall the national strategy and resources available for user engagement were not integrated into practice at service area level.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. Some systems are now established to involve service users. These include arrangements to collect and respond to service user feedback such as the 'you said, we did' information made available to children and young people and a 'mystery shopper' exercise completed by the Cafcass children's rights service. The area is implementing a strategy to improve engagement with service users alongside developments at a national level. The HearNow system for feedback from children and young people provided nationally across Cafcass is no longer available. Although this was a very innovative system the take up was too low to be sustained and alternative arrangements are now planned by Cafcass National office. The Cheshire and Merseyside service area is involved in this development and has further plans to link with Children in Care Councils locally to raise the voice of service users in future service development.

**Area for improvement 11:** ensure that the impact of family disruption is considered fully against all the Every Child Matters outcomes for children when planning assessments, reporting and making recommendations to the court.

The inspection in March 2010 reported that the service area does not routinely incorporate consideration of all Every Child Matters outcomes into assessments, reports or recommendations.

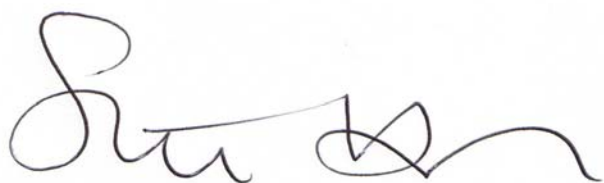
**Satisfactory** progress has been made on this area for improvement. In all but one case inspected the safety and well being of children is assessed effectively and appropriate action taken to improve outcomes for young service users.

Having considered the range of evidence presented, Ofsted judges that good progress has been made in three of the eleven areas for improvement and satisfactory progress in six. However outstanding progress has been made and improvement sustained in the core area of tackling delay. The level of progress made

in those two areas for improvement has very high impact. It improves relationships with key stakeholders in courts and local authorities and ensures timely and appropriate service delivery to children and families.

Taken together, this represents **good** progress overall.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Hunt', written in a cursive style.

Stephen Hunt

Her Majesty's Inspector

cc:

Annabel Burns, DfE

Kate Lyons, DfE

Christine Banim Operations Director Cafcass Central

Colette Dutton Head of Service C7