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01 December 2010

Anthony Douglas
Chief Executive
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Dear Mr Douglas

Post inspection monitoring

Ofsted inspection of Cafcass Greater London service area (S3) in the week commencing 7 December 2009.

This letter contains the findings of the recent post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted on 22-25 November 2010 at the Cafcass offices situated in Archway, Croydon and in the Principal Registry of the Family Division in Holborn. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass Greater London service area in December 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 over 40 documents provided by the service area
- a sample of 56 recently closed case files from each office
- a sample of 16 files for complaints received since December 2009
- the duty system in the three offices

Inspectors met with

- The Designated Family Judge for London
- The Deputy Operational Director South
- Heads of Service S3
- Quality Improvement Service Managers S3
- Service Managers in each office
- Family Court Advisors in each office
- Family Support Workers in one office

Outcome of the inspection

The inspection report for Cafcass Greater London service area was published in January 2010 and identified twelve 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 immediately that the safeguarding policy meets statutory guidance fully and practice complies with Cafcass requirements in all cases.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the quality of safeguarding practice was very inconsistent, ranging from inadequate to outstanding, including safeguarding issues in domestic violence cases. Of the cases inspected, too many showed that risk assessment tools were not used effectively or were not completed at all. The Cafcass safeguarding policy did not cover adequately all aspects of the specialist work undertaken by the High Court Team, specifically in child abduction cases.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. With a few exceptions the majority of cases in the sample are judged satisfactory by inspectors. The safeguarding work recorded in case files demonstrates appropriate risk assessment and referral to other agencies including to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). The Cafcass safeguarding policy now includes the specialist work undertaken by the High Court Team. The updated safeguarding policy is now implemented effectively across the service area.

However, continued action is needed to ensure that the recently improved work to safeguard children and young people is sustained. In one office visited, Inspectors identified two cases with significant deficits in safeguarding practice where children were left at potential risk of harm. Once alerted by Inspectors, senior managers in Cafcass Greater London service area took immediate and effective steps to ensure that the necessary protective action to safeguard those children was taken.

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

The inspection in December 2009 reported that service area data, particularly information about children and families who use the Cafcass service, was not reliable and was misleading. Consequently, the information provided in the service area could not be relied on by managers as a basis from which to make effective decisions to meet the needs of children and young people.

Satisfactory progress has been made by Cafcass on this area for improvement. Effective revised systems and processes are now in place. The changes include the accurate recording of case allocation alongside weekly audits by managers of the duty systems in each office. These improvements ensure that most performance management information is now accurate and timely.

However, some aspects of the electronic case management system such as the recording of case closures remain inefficient. Managers are aware of this and plans are in hand to ensure that the necessary improvement is achieved.

Area for improvement 3: ensure immediately that performance improvement tools are used consistently to achieve better outcomes for children and young people across the service area.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that The Quality for Children (Q4C) performance management system had the potential to provide robust information to drive service improvement but data about the quality of practice was not captured or used consistently. Too often shortfalls in practice were only identified retrospectively, thus failing to have the required impact on practice or on outcomes for children and young people.

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

Senior managers have taken effective steps to ensure that in most cases the quality of practice is now improved. Immediately after the Ofsted inspection in December 2009 managers implemented the London Intervention Programme, a thorough internal inspection system, which was followed up by an internal audit in May 2010. This involved the audit of one case for each of the 130 practitioners in the Cafcass Greater London service area, and resulted in a robust Quality Improvement plan. These actions had a positive impact on improving practice in most offices and only five practitioners are currently subject to risk action plans where their work requires close monitoring by managers.

Continued action is needed to sustain these practice improvements. While progress is satisfactory in the offices assessed by the service area as in need of a Quality Improvement plan, some safeguarding practice was judged as inadequate in an office that was assessed by Cafcass as good.

Area for improvement 4: ensure immediately that recommendations for repeat reports in private law cases are always appropriate to the assessed needs of the case.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that some inefficient working methods in the service area contributed to delay. These included the recommendations by some practitioners for addenda reports in the same proceedings.

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

Improvements have been made by managers to eliminate most of the inefficient practices in private law work including repeat reporting to court in the same proceedings. Good liaison by the service area with the London judiciary ensures the implementation of the President of the Family Division's Private Law Programme (PPLP) in most courts. The PPLP streamlines the practice in private proceedings to ensure that effective work is undertaken by Cafcass that is proportionate to the assessed needs of the case.

Area for improvement 5: within three months ensure that case plans and recommendations to the court are shared with children and families appropriately and in a timely manner.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that case plans and recommendations to the court were not routinely shared with children and families.

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

With a few exceptions, most case files demonstrate consistent engagement by practitioners with children and young people to ascertain their wishes and feelings. They are informed appropriately about assessments made about their circumstances, the recommendations made by Cafcass and the decisions reached by court outcomes.

Area for improvement 6: within three months ensure that strategic partnership working is effective across all courts.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the understanding between the service area and the judiciary about the management of individual cases was at times unclear. This added to the challenge faced by Cafcass to manage its finite resources and, at the same time to meet the requirements of the court and not encroach on matters of judicial independence.

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

Effective liaison by the service area with the judiciary has resulted in the implementation of the PPLP, Public Law Outline and the President's interim guidance in most London courts. Each of those initiatives clarifies the work required in each case and improves efficient use of Cafcass resources at a time of growth in demand for its services. In particular the quality of agreements reached with courts in London enables the introduction of proportionate working, early intervention and case

management teams through a local protocol issued by the senior judiciary for the effective management and efficient allocation of public law work.

Area for improvement 7: within three months ensure that the management of complaints is consistent, timely and complies with the Cafcass complaints policy.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the service area was slow to respond to complaints. Quality assurance of complaints responses was insufficient and resulted in an unacceptable variation in the quality of response letters. The service area did not have a robust system for the secure retention of complaint records. The analysis of complaints was not systematic and only a few learning points from complaints were disseminated to staff in the area.

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

The revised and improved Cafcass national complaints policy was implemented effectively across the Greater London service area when it was introduced in July 2010. Improvements have been made in the quality of responses by Cafcass to service users. The majority of the complaint files inspected were satisfactory and one was good. Letters demonstrated sensitive responses to service user concerns including where complaints were and were not upheld by Cafcass. Improvements have been achieved through good training and better administration with the appointment of a dedicated member of the business support team.

However, just over half of complaints made by service users are dealt with promptly by the service area and continued action is needed to ensure that all responses to complaints are sufficiently timely.

Area for improvement 8: within three months ensure that the service area's equality impact assessments are implemented effectively.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the required actions from completed equality impact assessments had yet to be fully implemented by the service area.

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

Following the inspection in December 2009 senior managers revised radically the Equality Impact Assessment for London making significant improvements to the changes specified in order to meet the needs of service users. Each office now has an improved plan which reflects local need more accurately and sets timescales that are now more achievable.

However, while some progress has been made, the revised Equality Impact Assessments are still at an early stage and the full impact of the improvements are still to be realised.

Area for improvement 9: within six months ensure that the workforce is deployed with sufficient flexibility to meet fluctuating demand.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the workforce was not deployed with sufficient flexibility to meet fluctuating demand for services.

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

The reconfigured deployment of staff into early intervention teams in each office enables the service area to deal more effectively with demand and tackle some of the delay remaining in London. Importantly, the improved early intervention arrangements ensure the timely provision of safeguarding information to courts at an early stage in private law proceedings and assist Cafcass in its duty to meet the requirements of the Public Law Outline.

Although progress is evident in cases that only need short term work, some delay remains in most offices where a more detailed assessment is required.

Area for improvement 10: within six months 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 December 2009 reported that while appropriate consideration was given to ensuring that children stay safe, other outcomes did not feature consistently in the work with children and young people. In some cases seen by inspectors, family court advisers demonstrated an appropriate understanding of the health and emotional needs of children and young people, but the impact of family breakdown on educational attainment and the effect of separation on economic well-being was not addressed sufficiently.

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

While appropriate consideration is still given in most cases to health needs and ensuring that children stay safe, where the needs of the case requires a more holistic assessment, attention to other outcomes including educational attainment and economic well-being do not feature consistently.

Area for improvement 11: within six months ensure that participation by children, young people and families in improving services is meaningful.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that the service area acknowledged that user views had not had any significant impact on improvements to service delivery.

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

Some effective steps have been taken to use the views of children and young people to improve service delivery. The service area commissioned Cafcass young inspectors to report on the quality of service in each office, including spot checks through 'mystery shopper' techniques. The challenges raised by the Cafcass young inspectors' reports led to the effective implementation of action plans for improvements in each office. Members of the Cafcass young peoples' board continue to be involved appropriately in the recruitment of practitioners in the service area.

However the data reported by Cafcass about user satisfaction is not statistically significant. This is because of the very low number of children (less than 2%) who respond to the Hear Now system that is used by Cafcass to gain user views. The low number of responses means that conclusions based on that data are not reliable.

Area for improvement 12: within six months ensure that service provision meets the equality and diversity needs of the children and families in each case.

The inspection in December 2009 reported that monitoring of information about the ethnicity and diversity of service users was significantly below the target set nationally. Too few reports included an assessment of users' needs in relation to religion, culture or ethnicity. The majority of reports did not refer to relevant issues in respect of the lifestyles or disabilities of children, young people and their families.

The Ofsted survey found that the level of dissatisfaction expressed by service users from a minority ethnic background about the lack of attention to equality and diversity issues were twice the national average. Minority ethnic service users were disproportionately represented within the complaints system.

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

While some case files and reports to court demonstrate improved attention to diversity issues, these are not made relevant in the majority of assessments or in recommendations to court. Although some good diversity training has been implemented this is yet to show sufficient impact to improve practice.

However, the service area commissioned an analysis by the Cafcass National Complaints Department which made important recommendations about improving service delivery to minority ethnic service users that the service area will implement.

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

Yours sincerely



Stephen Hunt

Her Majesty's Inspector

cc:

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