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26 October 2009

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

Dear Anthony,

**Post inspection monitoring**  
**Ofsted inspection of Cafcass Durham and Tees Valley (N2) 2009**

This letter contains the findings of the recent post inspection monitoring carried out by Ofsted. The monitoring visit assessed progress made by Cafcass in implementing recommendations arising from the inspection of Cafcass Durham and Tees Valley (N2) in March 2009. I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance you provided to Rob Hackeson HMI and me in carrying out this visit.

The inspection of Cafcass in Durham and Tees Valley was the third of five inspections to pilot the new Ofsted framework. This post inspection visit has also piloted the new approach to monitoring progress on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection.

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

- analysed the post-inspection monitoring self-assessment prepared by the service area
- looked at the public and private law duty systems in two offices; interviewed each duty manager and held an 'at desk' conversation with the duty officer focusing on assessment of risk in unallocated cases
- reviewed a sample of supervision files
- reviewed a sample of files of private law early intervention cases
- reviewed a sample of files of long term private and public law cases from two offices
- scrutinised a sample of complaints files



- explored lines of enquiry with the Head of Service and considered further evidence provided
- interviewed the Operational Director (North)
- interviewed the Quality Improvement Service Manager for N2
- fed back provisional judgements

### Outcome of the inspection

The inspection report of Cafcass Durham and Tees Valley service area (N2) 2009 was published in March 2009 and outlined seven areas for improvement. The following priority actions were identified:

Immediately:

- Ensure children and young people are safeguarded through consistent compliance with the Cafcass safeguarding policy in all cases.
- Ensure that the quality assurance work of managers is consistent through effective moderation of accurate judgements.
- Fulfil the statutory duty to cooperate in all Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

Within three months:

- Ensure that the responsibilities of service managers for supervising staff are equitably balanced.
- Ensure that the management and handling of complaints are consistent with the Cafcass complaints policy.
- 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 reports.

Within six months:

- Secure meaningful participation by children, young people and families in improving services.

The action plan submitted by the service following the inspection was judged to be satisfactory but required clearer outcome measures and achievable targets. As a result of feedback, the plan was strengthened to include these.

Having considered the range of evidence presented, Ofsted judges that satisfactory progress has been made in six of the seven areas for improvement, with one area for action remaining inadequate. Taken together, this represents **satisfactory** progress overall.



## Findings of the post inspection monitoring visit:

### **Area for improvement 1: Cafcass should ensure children and young people are safeguarded through consistent compliance with the Cafcass safeguarding policy in all cases.**

At the inspection in March 2009, inspectors found that despite some emerging strengths in the service area, the effectiveness of the service area was limited by inadequacies in its arrangements for safeguarding children. A number of serious safeguarding issues were identified during the inspection. While none indicated that a child was at immediate risk of significant harm, these examples of failure to follow Cafcass safeguarding policy gave cause for concern and evidence of how the service area had improved safeguarding arrangements were required.

#### **Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- Briefings for all staff in the service area regarding the outcome of the inspection and particularly the safeguarding concerns.
- Completed risk assessment and domestic violence training by almost all staff.
- Effective use of the performance management system Quality for Children by line managers and quality improvement staff to monitor and evaluate safeguarding practice across the workforce.

#### **Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Case files that demonstrated in almost all cases that appropriate action was being taken to safeguard children and young people. In the one case where inspectors identified a concern, this had already been identified through internal file audit and acted upon appropriately.
- Case files that showed consistent compliance with safeguarding procedures such as notifications regarding domestic violence and referrals of significant harm to the local authority.
- Evidence in case files of effective management oversight of practice which had appropriately identified and challenged any weaknesses.
- Duty arrangements and early intervention work, since July 2009, which demonstrated that the service is providing courts with clearer advice about safeguarding risks to children and young people.
- Waiting lists for unallocated work that are proactively risk assessed and prioritised.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made by Cafcass on this issue. While file auditing has improved significantly in the area, the impact is restricted because audits are predominantly undertaken at the point of closure. The service area is facing the challenge of an increased in demand that reflects the national trend. Nevertheless, it needs to ensure the focus on the allocation of long term cases remains a priority. Increased shared local intelligence has the potential to strengthen the timeliness of



advice to courts particularly in cases involving domestic violence. Cafcass and Cleveland Police are reviewing arrangements for sharing local intelligence in order to achieve this.

**Area for improvement 2: Cafcass should ensure that the quality assurance work of managers is consistent through effective moderation of accurate judgements.**

At the inspection in March 2009, inspectors found that some managers were not yet able to identify or address consistently deficits in the quality of work with children and families. At that time there was an underestimation of how far the workforce needed to improve to achieve consistency in the quality of practice.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- A plan for all appraisals to be completed by September 2009.
- Examples of supervision notes demonstrating management oversight of practice.
- File audit evidence with the outcomes recorded on the performance management system Quality for Children.

**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Accurate local managers' assessments of practice detailed on case files.
- Effective feedback of specific issues from file audits to practitioners from the Quality Improvement Service Manager.
- Effective moderation of audit activity by service managers and quality improvement managers.
- Completed appraisals of all staff not absent long term from work.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made by Cafcass on this issue. Nonetheless, evidence of supervision notes on case files remains inconsistent, and in many cases file notes remain handwritten. Files with typed notes were generally more effective, persuasive and accessible.

**Area for improvement 3: Cafcass should fulfil its statutory duty to cooperate in all Local Safeguarding Children Boards in the area.**

At the time of the inspection in March 2009, inspectors found inconsistency in attendance at Local Safeguarding Children Boards and identified a need to improve the effectiveness of representation on all such boards.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- Documentation showing that staff who represent Cafcass on Local Safeguarding Children Boards had been made aware of their responsibilities, including meeting a target of 100% attendance.



- Documentation that demonstrated that all meetings are scheduled in electronic diaries, attendance is monitored and substitutes arranged where attendance is not possible.

**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Confirmation of improved attendance at all Local Safeguarding Children Boards.
- Evidence of strong contribution to some boards by Cafcass representatives.
- Dissemination of learning from a recent serious case review involving Cafcass.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made by Cafcass on this issue. Arrangements could be strengthened further through ensuring greater consistency of contribution to all Local Safeguarding Children Boards. For example, some Local Safeguarding Children Boards were briefed on the outcome of the inspection in March, while others were not.

**Area for improvement 4: Cafcass should ensure that the responsibilities of service managers for supervising staff are equitably balanced.**

At the time of the inspection in March 2009, inspectors found that the service area had not yet ensured an equitable balance of supervisory responsibility across its management team.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- Reshaped team structures since the inspection.

**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Confirmation of an equitable spread of managerial responsibility across the service manager group. However due to changes in management roles and the relative inexperience of some new managers, this remains work in progress.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made by Cafcass on this issue.

**Area for improvement 5: Cafcass should ensure that the management and handling of complaints are consistent with the Cafcass complaints policy.**

At the time of the inspection, inspectors found that the service area had weaknesses in complaints handling.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- Completion of complaints policy training by service managers.
- A revision of the complaints policy and procedure and an audit of local compliance.
- Evidence of complaints being proactively addressed by the Head of Service with service managers through regular supervision.



**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Complaints files showed that complaints were being handled appropriately.
- Some evidence of managers making reference to case file notes to substantiate the facts in cases where these were disputed.
- Letters sent to complainants that treated them with dignity and respect.

**Satisfactory** progress has been made by Cafcass on this issue. Arrangements could be strengthened further through improving the timeliness of response in some cases and a greater consistency of case recording to assist responses to complaints.

**Area for improvement 6: Cafcass should 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 reports.**

At the time of the original inspection, inspectors found that the service area was not able to demonstrate consistent effectiveness in improving Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- Plans to implement the new Cafcass assessment framework from October 2009 which will address Every Child Matters outcomes at the outset of assessments.
- Collated data on Every Child Matters outcomes at the closure of cases.
- Plans to ensure that practice seminars and workshops on Every Child Matters outcomes are followed up in supervision and individual coaching.

**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- With only a few exceptions, case files showed insufficient and inconsistent evidence of Every Child Matters outcomes being a component part of case planning and assessment of children and young people.
- Case files showed inconsistent recording of data about Every Child Matters outcomes at the closure of cases and no evidence of this information being aggregated to inform practice development.

**Inadequate** progress has been made by Cafcass to address this issue.

**Area for improvement 7: Cafcass should secure meaningful participation by children, young people and families in improving services.**

At the time of the inspection, inspectors found that both local and national initiatives were very new, and not yet demonstrating any impact on service delivery.

**Evidence of progress provided by Cafcass included:**

- A focus group of service users planned for September 2009.



- A young inspectors' visit to assess the N2 public office areas reported in August 2009.
- Welcome packs being sent to all users at the outset of their case.
- Further plans for monthly telephone surveys and a user participation board to be established by March 2010.

**Evidence gathered during the post inspection monitoring visit included:**

- Challenging feedback to the service area from the focus group of service users.
- Response from the service area to feedback from the young inspectors' visit of the changes made.
- Evidence of further engagement with both adult and child users through a postal survey.

**Satisfactory** progress had been made by Cafcass on this issue. Arrangements would be strengthened further by maintaining the momentum this early work has achieved to reach a position where service users are actively contributing to service design and delivery.

The letter to report on this post inspection monitoring visit will be published on the Ofsted website by 26 October 2009 and sent to the Sponsorship Unit in the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

Yours sincerely



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Principal Officer (Inspection of Cafcass)

cc:

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