

**Performance and Quality Committee Meeting minutes**

**Monday, 7 June 2021, 11:00 – 13:00**

**Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Present**

Paul Grant – Chair

Eileen Munro, Board member

Joanna Nicolas, Board member

Sophie Humphreys, Board member (Co-opted)

**In attendance**

Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive Officer

Jack Cordery, Interim Director of Operations (North)

Teresa Williams, Director of Strategy

Sarah Parsons, Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker

Nicola Blakebrough, Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services)

James Jackson-Ellis, Corporate Officer (Secretariat Services)

**Guests**

Spencer Hird, Assistant Director (A7) – item 8

Rachel Holmes, Assistant Director (A12) – item 8

Ben Rolfe, Head of Business Analysis – item 4.1

Saif Ullah, Senior Research and Evaluation Manager – item 6.1

**Apologies**

Stuart Moore, MOJ representative

Adam Lennon, HMCTS representative

1. **Welcome and apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Performance and Quality Committee (the Committee).

1. **Declarations of interest**

No new declarations of interest were declared.

1. **Minutes, actions, and matters arising**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 March 2021 were agreed as an accurate record. The Chair reviewed the action log and noted that the majority of actions were complete, with several items returning to this meeting or future meetings.

The Chair queried the actions associated with the Learning from Serious Incidents – Quarterly Review, specifically how the Committee in the future would understand and scrutinise what had been learned and any subsequent impact on practice. The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker explained that the new Performance and Accountability Framework would provide greater evidence of learning and the impact on practice. The Chief Executive Officer commented that more work was required to evidence the impact of learning in practice but agreed to provide the Committee with an update at the September meeting.

Action 1: The Committee will receive an update at the September meeting regarding how Cafcass evidence learning from Serious Incident Notifications, complaints, audits and feedback and the subsequent impact on practice (Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker)

* 1. **Heritage analysis**

The Director of Strategy provided an oral update to the Committee on the progress on work to carry out heritage analysis. It was noted that in March the Committee received data on the ethnicity of the children Cafcass worked with according to the five main census categories along with how Cafcass would improve the recording and compliance of diversity data recording.

The Director of Strategy stated that in September the Committee would receive the initial findings of ethnicity for adult parties and a breakdown by ethnicity of section 7 and section 16.4 reports. In December the Committee would receive a further update on public law outcome data by ethnicity. The Chief Executive Officer explained to the Committee that since the heritage analysis work had started Cafcass had received a letter from Ofsted highlighting that Cafcass had not been recording the experience of white British children and requested this be included in future heritage analysis work.

The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker highlighted to the Committee that on the Operational Spotlight Report diversity recording was a priority area for improvement. Family Court Advisors had been active in recording the diversity information of children however this fluctuated between 74% - 94% compliance across service areas. Assistant Directors and Heads of Practice continued to learn from those areas achieving 94% recorded and there is a set of actions to improve recording.

The Chair queried whether the heritage analysis had been more difficult to complete than initially thought. The Head of Business Analysis explained that it had been technically difficult, and this was because Cafcass was transitioning to a new case management system and the ways of capturing data on outcomes had changed.

Action 2: The Committee will receive an update at the September meeting regarding the ethnicity of adult family members involved in proceedings and whether the likelihood of being involved in further work (s7, r16.4 appointments) varies by ethnicity of child.

Action 3: The Committee would receive an update at the December meeting regarding public law outcome data by ethnicity.

Action 4: The Corporate Management Team would consider the mechanism for recording the experience of white British children, following the letter received from Ofsted.

* 1. **Case complexity**

The Director of Strategy provided an oral update on progress to the Committee and explained that in December the Committee would receive an update on how reflective supervision and management oversight would strengthen Cafcass' approach in more complex cases, the additional data that will be captured and whether any additional factors need to be incorporated as part of the workload weighting model.

Action 5: The Committee would receive an update at the December meeting regarding case complexity (Director of Strategy)

1. **Performance**
   1. **Performance Scorecard**

The Head of Business Analysis presented to the Committee the Performance Scorecard and highlighted that Cafcass had received 63,251 total new cases between April 2020 and March 2021 featuring 97,877 children. This equated to a – 0.3% (-190 total cases) and – 0.8% (-786 children) decrease compared to the same period in 2019/20. On average, Cafcass had received 5,271 total new cases per month in the 2020/21 financial year which featured, on average, 8,156 children. Total demand was in line with 2019/20, although overall public law was -2.6% and private law +0.6%.

The number of open children’s cases with known future work remained at record levels because of delays and backlogs caused by the pandemic and had contributed to record high Family Court Advisors caseloads. As of 1 April 2021, there had been 37,611 open active children’s cases with known future work for Cafcass, this was +25.8% (+7,720 cases) greater than 1 April 2020. Duty allocations in the work after first hearing teams were 1,607 (as at 17 May 2021). The number of duty allocated cases in the operational teams was the highest since implementing the Child Arrangements Programme in April 2014.

The overall throughput of work (cases open/cases closed) saw a significant reduction throughout the year because of the significant reduction in case closures during the pandemic. Cafcass closed 55,621 cases during 2020/21 which was 87.9% of the total new case demand.

The Interim Director of Operations (North) highlighted that caseloads for Service Managers and Practice Supervisors remained high (circa 22 cases). It continued to be a concern with regard to their ability to provide effective management oversight and while this was being addressed, it was not likely to change in the short term until the backlog had been cleared through the courts.

Board member Joanna Nicolas commented that that the number of children seen was positive, but queried the increased frustration from families, noting there had been an overall increase in the volume of feedback for both adults and children. Within adult and child feedback there has been a rise in compliments, while within children’s feedback there had been a small rise in complaints. The Head of Business Analysis confirmed that the complaints had been received from families who had experienced a greater delay and explained that families were more likely to direct complaints to Cafcass than the family court.

Action 6: The Committee would receive an update at the next meeting regarding Service Manager and Practice Supervisor capacity and caseloads.

Action 7: The Committee would receive a report on management oversight and supervision.

* 1. **Operational Spotlight Report**

The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker explained to the Committee the process for scrutiny and monitoring of the Operational Spotlight Report and presented the May report. Each month the Spotlight Report would provide data and analysis relating to the current set of identified practice and performance issues that required attention by the Operational Management Team. The report had been further strengthened to include the Directors of Operations commentary and actions required.

The Chief Executive Officer highlighted that when the Committee next received the Operational Spotlight Report the focus would have shifted from target driven conversations to a greater focus on the quality and improvement of practice. The issues on the report would be less static and in future include the Cafcass National Improvement Plan actions.

* 1. **Child Engagement**

The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker reported to the Committee that in line with current compliance the national child engagement recording (as at 24 May 2021) was 96.4% with children being ‘seen in person’ increasing to 53.6%.

1. **Learning**
   1. **Learning from Serious Incidents – Quarterly Review**

The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker presented to the Committee the Serious Incident Bulletin for January to March 2021. The bulletin was used primarily as a communication tool to teams to communicate key learning and good practice from Serious Incidents however it was acknowledged that the bulletin did not act as a mechanism for the Committee to scrutinise learning and impact.

Board member Joanna Nicolas commented that under engaging fathers and curiosity, it was unclear what was meant by “features in repeated safeguarding”. Board member Joanna Nicolas queried how/whether Cafcass learns from national reviews. The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker confirmed that a report would be presented to the Corporate Management Team regarding multi-agency reviews in July and agreed to bring a report to the Committee in September.

Action 8: The Committee would receive a report at the September meeting regarding Cafcass' involvement in national and multi-agency reviews and the learning derived from these (Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker)

Action 9: The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker would clarify with Board member Joanna Nicolas what was meant by “features in repeated safeguarding” under engaging fathers and curiosity in the Serious Incident Bulletin

* 1. **Early Intervention Team Audit Report**

The Chief Executive Officer noted that the Early Intervention Team Audit Report will be brought back to the Committee at a later date once further scrutiny had been undertaken by CMT and the report will include an update to the Committee on the Early Intervention Team’s next steps.

Action 10: The Chief Executive Officer would discuss the Early Intervention Team Audit Report in a Corporate Management Team meeting to assign a lead owner of the audit actions/recommendations

Action 11: The Committee would receive the Early Intervention Team Audit Report and an accompanying cover report on the Early Intervention Team next steps, following the wider discussions taking place in Cafcass (Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker)

1. **Annual Reports**
   1. **Research Programme Annual Report**

The Senior Research and Evaluation Manager presented to the Committee the Research Programme Annual Report and highlighted that a new Research Advisory Committee had been established in July 2020 to provide technical scrutiny of research applications received to inform Cafcass’ decisions about research approvals and offering intelligence on emerging research issues.

Cafcass had completed two six monthly transfers of updated anonymised case management data to the SAIL Databank over the last year. Cafcass will be working towards linking case management data with the Ministry of Justice’s family court cases data and NHS Digital health data via the SAIL Databank later this year.

Cafcass continued to develop a close working relationship with the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and provided peer review and social work advice on several high-profile publications based on secondary analysis of Cafcass data over recent months. Researchers who are given approval to access data or interview Cafcass staff for research purposes were expected to submit a practice-friendly summary of their findings and to host a webinar to engage our practitioners in the implications for practice.

Board member Sophie Humphreys queried the membership of the Research Advisory Committee. The Senior Research and Evaluation Manager confirmed the membership and noted the Committee was chaired by the Director of Strategy. Board member Eileen Munro was Board sponsor and the committee had representation from the Family Justice Young People’s Board.

The Committee thanked the Senior Research and Evaluation Manager for his report and welcomed the high quality of research that helped Cafcass to better understand the needs of the children and families it works with.

1. **Demand and Prioritisation**

The Interim Director of Operations (North) presented to the Committee an update on demand and highlighted that the levels of demand on Cafcass as an organisation and on its social workers are a clear and present danger to our capacity to provide children and families with high-quality support. The pressures arise from an increase in Private Law work and the backlog created during the pandemic resulting from the delays in court disposals. Cafcass remained fully committed to reducing the caseloads of Family Court Advisors, freeing Service Managers to oversee practice and freeing Practice Supervisors to support practice and practice improvements. Demand reduction continued to be a key element of Cafcass’ strategy to reduce pressures on practitioners and further improve the quality and impact of practice. Cafcass was working at a national and local level to reduce demand.

The Interim Director of Operations (North) highlighted that prioritisation was the only way Cafcass could reconcile the increased demand and slower rate of court disposals with a commitment to reduce caseloads to a safer level. The activation of prioritisation was now subject to a more robust process through a series of Challenge Meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to review the data on demand pressures and the impact of that pressure. The final decision to activate prioritisation is made at the Cafcass COVID-19 Programme Board.

Additional funding had been secured from the Ministry of Justice to support the creation of an Allocation Hub in each region. The Hub would hold unallocated cases for up to 20 weeks until they can be allocated safely and would have dedicated staff to oversee the cases; undertaking dynamic risk assessment and communicating with courts, children and families. Four Challenge Meetings had been held in May and the COVID-19 Programme Board had decided to activate prioritisation in one of those areas.

1. **Practice Presentation**

The Assistant Directors presented to the Committee a Practice Presentation on the Regional Performance Board process and the National Improvement Plan. The Assistant Director for A6, A7 and A8 (the South West up to Thames Valley) explained to the Committee the purpose of the Regional Performance Board was to hold the Assistant Directors and local management teams to account for the delivery of their Regional Improvement Plans, to scrutinise the quality of the Regional Improvement Plans and review regional performance data. The Regional Performance Board was an opportunity for Assistant Directors to benefit from the scrutiny of Directors, peers and the Family Justice Young People’s Board.

Before the Regional Performance Board takes place, the National Improvement Service undertake a Practice Quality Audit, children and families who have experience of Cafcass’ service are asked for their views and the Family Justice Young People’s Board visit the regional offices to assess the quality of environment for children. Practice and Business Services colleagues are provided with a questionnaire to complete, key partners are also contacted and the Regional Improvement Plans are established and reviewed by the Assistant Director.

During the Regional Performance Board focus groups involving Family Court Advisors, Practice Supervisors, Service Managers, Heads of Practice and the Assistant Director as well as members of the Corporate Management Team are held. Family Court Advisors and Service Managers share practice examples focussing on the impact of practice on children and families and questions are put to the Assistant Director about the practice, performance and outcomes in the region. Practice quality highlights are discussed, and a summary of external partner feedback is shared. Following the Regional Performance Board, a final report is written, and shared, and good practice and performance is highlighted and shared with the Operational Management Team. If needed the Regional Improvement Plan is revised to include learning identified.

The Assistant Director for A12 and A13 (Birmingham and West Midlands) explained the improvement planning framework/cycle and highlighted that the National Improvement Plan encompassed two parts which focused on improving social work practice and leadership. Regional Improvement Plans followed the format, focusing on regional and area priorities. The planning cycle was held between April – March, rolling over each year and plotting progress each quarter on the difference the improvements are making.

The Assistant Director highlighted that there were two national developments for each service area to take forward. The introduction of the new Practice Framework (Together) and the implementation of the revised domestic abuse pathway. Regional focus on these national developments include engaging with children so that assessments and recommendations are shared with children and families.

The Auditing schedule before and after the Regional Performance Board acts a learning opportunity to identify the strengths and improvements. A quarterly reporting template for the Assistant Director and Heads of Practice is completed and shared with the region which then feeds into the Performance Board framework. A practice and leadership review with the Directors of Operations will be held every six months (opposite six months to the Performance Boards).

The Chair thanked the Assistant Directors for their presentation and invited questions and feedback:

* Board member Eileen Munro queried if Cafcass was using the right audit tool and if it was adequate and had been validated. The Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker confirmed it was a Cafcass designed tool and would welcome further input from Eileen.
* The Chair queried what had been most valuable in the Performance Board process. The Assistant Director (A7) commented about the sharpness of the planning process, combined with the opportunity for transparent scrutiny and oversight. The Assistant Director (A12) commented that the Performance Board provided a greater focus on the child and family perspective, in comparison to the previous Area Quality Reviews.
* The Director of Strategy commented that it had been useful for Corporate Management Team colleagues to attend the Regional Performance Boards. One of the benefits was understanding how good practice could be applied to other areas.
* The Chief Executive Officer commented that senior leaders on a daily basis must consider how much time is devoted to managing demand and the amount of time spent on improvement. The Performance Board acted a driver for making a difference for children and families.

1. **Any other Business and Forward Planner**

No other business was raised.

* 1. **Proposal for Corporate Service Presentations**

The Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services) presented to the Committee a proposal to reintroduce the Corporate Services Presentations to allow the Committee to scrutinise the quality assurance mechanisms in place for Corporate functions.

The Corporate Manager (Secretariat Services) highlighted that Corporate Services Presentations had been phased out when the Performance and Quality Committees were combined with more focus given to practice presentations.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposal and looked forward to receiving a Corporate Services Presentation at the September 2021 meeting.

Action 12: The Committee will receive the first Corporate Services Presentation at the September 2021 meeting.

**ACTION SUMMARY**

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