

Embargoed Release: Friday 15th February 2008 at 0001hrs

Press Release

CAFCASS ACCEPTS OFSTED EAST MIDLANDS RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROMISES IMPROVEMENT

Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children's interests in the family courts, accepts the recommendations outlined in the Ofsted inspection of Cafcass' East Midlands region and is committed to continuing to develop and improve its practice.

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass Chief Executive says, "As the Ofsted report makes clear, we are already implementing a new structure to bring about a radical shift in the quality of our work. We are determined to implement Ofsted's recommendations quickly. The children and families we work with rightly expect and deserve the highest quality services.

As Chief Executive of Cafcass I take responsibility for the criticisms in the report – and I take responsibility for ensuring that Cafcass improves to deliver the best social work practice possible. Our work is not easy but we have the resources, the desire and the capacity to effect real change.

We will continue to work with Ofsted to make sure the East Midlands region improves the quality and consistency of its work. During the period of Ofsted's fieldwork, Cafcass was already in the process of developing new structures and systems to drive through improvements in practice.

It is because we have a realistic understanding of our strengths and our weaknesses – and have an existing improvement plan in place that has been subject to widespread consultation and ownership - that we believe we have the capacity to implement effective and lasting improvements. We also have a new grant that will fund this improvement programme. Fundamental change does take time to deliver, and there are no quick fixes. Nevertheless, we recognise how urgent it is for us to demonstrate significant and sustained improvement in specific areas of our practice.

Cafcass has created new posts so that frontline managers can focus more management time on supervising and supporting their practitioners to deliver high quality assessments, case management and planning. We will also be increasing the number of frontline practice supervisors so that advice is on hand for practitioners to discuss complex cases at all times. Just as service users have a right to a good service, so staff have a right to the support needed to provide that good service.

We will be conducting a Safeguarding audit of all our recent cases to ensure the highest standards have been followed.

There are many strengths in the East Midlands, including the prompt allocation of cases and good management of resources, and indeed there is much excellent practice across Cafcass nationally. Our KPIs are improving nationally and our policies are robust and among the best available.

I want every area to match the quality and consistency found in our best teams. Our direction of travel is the right one and I am determined to drive up practice standards through partnership with our practitioners, managers and external partners."

To speak to Anthony Douglas contact Takki Sulaiman on 07778 419218 in the first instance.

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Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was formed as a new service for England and Wales on 1 April 2001 as part of the Government's commitment to supporting families and children. It brought together the services previously provided by the Family Court Welfare Service, the Guardian ad Litem Services and the Children's divisions of the Official Solicitor's Office.
- Cafcass has a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people are put first in family proceedings, that their voices are heard, the decisions made about them by courts are in their best interests and that they and their families are supported throughout the process. We operate within the law set by Parliament and under the rules and directions of the family courts
- Cafcass' role is to work with Children and Families in the family courts. The following list provides some examples of the types of cases we work with:-
 - Adoption (public law)
 - Care Orders (public law)
 - Emergency Protection Orders (public law)
 - Residency and contact following divorce and separation (private law)
- Cafcass is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is a non-departmental public body.
- For the year 2006-2007 CAF/CASS promoted the interests of 80,536 children. This does not factor in the work we do with children and their families in dispute resolution and our support of contact centres. We estimate the total number of children we work with a year is 100,000.
- Cafcass recently established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.
- The Cafcass improvement programme has delivered the following in 2007:-
 - the establishment of a new Head of Safeguarding post dedicated to making sure children are protected from harm and continue to be at the centre of what we do;
 - running over 500 practitioner training courses in 2007 to enable better analysis, case planning and management;
 - a new leadership development programme including the better use of supervision to support practice improvement;
 - establishment of a new feedback system so that we more rapidly learn the lessons from what children and families tell us;
 - the upgrade of our IT systems including our Case Management System to support better record keeping and performance management;
 - the creation of three national areas (North, South and Central England) with Operational Directors, supported by 27 Heads of Service, to drive improvements in management and practice in their area; and
 - improved performance indicators as reported to Parliament including speedier allocations and increased time spent on dispute resolution work with families.
- Cafcass' new National Standards are available for download at our new website www.cafcass.gov.uk

For further information:

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