



CAFCASS S1 OFSTED REPORT: SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE GOOD BASIS FOR PROGRESS IN 2009

Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children’s interests in the family courts, is delivering a satisfactory service in its S1 service area according to a pilot inspection conducted by Ofsted inspectors.

The report covers the service delivered in the local authority areas of Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire (Cafcass area S1) and judges the overall effectiveness of the service as ‘satisfactory’. Senior managers are ‘providing clear leadership which is strong and effective’ and the area’s capacity for further improvement is also described as satisfactory – acknowledging the impact to date of Cafcass’ practice improvement programme.

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass Chief Executive comments, “This report rightly recognises the drive to improve frontline service delivery in our S1 service area. The positive comments in the report regarding our focus on safeguarding, the quality of report writing and good partnership working reflect the hard work of our staff over many months to provide a boost to the quality of our frontline practice.

There is still a challenge to meet demand from the amount of court proceedings, mainly in private law (divorce proceedings) and recently there has been an increase in the amount of care proceedings being taken by local authorities to protect children at risk of harm, which also places pressure on Cafcass.”

Cafcass has received a significant increase in the budget settlement for 2008-11 and this is enabling the organisation to invest in improving service delivery. Since April 1st 2008 Cafcass has:

- Split the ten former regions into 21 Service Areas, each led up by a Head of Service, bringing management closer to the front line, sitting within three operational areas (North, Central and South).
- Taken action to improve the ratio of service managers to practitioners to give more supervisory time to staff and the quality of work on individual cases.
- Introduced a new performance and assessment framework for staff at all levels;
- Created the new post of Enhanced Practitioner (practice supervisor).
- Improved our system of screening and risk assessment for cases that are delayed.
- Brought in additional staff to reduce delays in private law.

Operational Director for the South, Vince Clark, adds, “The nature of social work means that it is vital that frontline staff have access to managers to discuss and review casework – along with the appropriate tools and training to aid their professional development. Our focus on good case planning and recording will continue over the coming months. The outcome of this inspection demonstrates that we are on the right track and our own

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quality improvement process will help us achieve better outcomes for children and families.”

The Ofsted report tracks the progress of our practice improvement programme and highlights the national Family Group Conferencing project as ‘providing excellent early intervention and resolution work with children and families in a significant number of private law cases....This indicates excellent safe work delivering good outcomes for children’.

We are determined to continue driving up practice standards by working with others to develop more robust models of assessment. Over the last nine months we have also implemented further changes in Cafcass, which will help to deliver high standards:

- The establishment of a dedicated Head of Safeguarding post dedicated to making sure children are protected from harm and continue to be at the centre of what we do.
- 500 practitioner training courses were run in 2007 and in 2008/09 we have increased our training budget by 70% and introduced Individual Learning Accounts to help every practitioner improve case planning, recording and assessment;
- 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.
- A specialist Service Manager in each Head of Service area (21 in total) to support quality and improvement.
- A new national Equality and Diversity Advisor.
- Six additional customer service managers (with a further three in 2009), to enable the organisation to understand and learn from service users’ perspectives through feedback, complaints, focus groups etc.

Anthony Douglas concludes, “Our practice improvement programme was designed to overhaul the quality of all our work but the initial focus was to drive up performance in private law casework, especially safeguarding standards, as identified in previous inspections. To a large degree this is now being achieved – as identified in the report – the goal now is to ensure that the programme continues and that we strive for consistently high quality service delivery across the country. The children and families we work with rightly expect and deserve the highest quality services. The evidence from our improvement programme to date shows that we are well on the way to achieving this.”

For further information contact Takki Sulaiman on 07778 419218 in the first instance.

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Notes to editors follows.../

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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 operates 21 service areas across England. The S1 service area covers the local authority areas of Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire;
- This pilot report is the first of a new type of inspection report from Ofsted that is more closely modelled on outcomes for our service users;
- 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 Cafcass 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.
- In 2006 Cafcass established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.
- Cafcass is engaged in a major improvement programme, which is intended to improve quality and consistency of frontline practice during 2008 - 2009.
- Cafcass' 2007-08 annual report and other publications can be downloaded from our website www.cafcass.gov.uk

For further information:

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