

Embargoed Release: 0800 Tuesday 19th January 2010

CARE APPLICATIONS CONTINUE AT RECORD LEVELS

Cafcass, the organisation that represents children's interests in the family courts, today releases the figures for care applications seen by Cafcass for the period October to December 2009.

Compared to quarter 3 last year (2008-9), care demand is up 20.9% (378 cases). This suggests that the rate of increase is stabilizing at the new higher level following the publicity surrounding the court case into the death of Baby Peter in November 2008. However, November 2009 saw 753 care applications – this was the third highest monthly figure since Cafcass records began in 2005.

Care demand in the nine months April to December 2009 is 46.1% higher than the same period in 2008, 37.6% higher than the same period in 2007, 25.9% higher than the same period in 2006 and 31.2% higher than the same period in 2005.

Anthony Douglas, CBE, Cafcass' Chief Executive commented, "It is now universally acknowledged that the record increases in care demand have placed massive pressure on all agencies working in the child protection system. Initially we struggled to manage this sudden rise in our total caseload but, as a result of the Presidents Interim Guidance and our revised Operating Priorities, we have managed to reduce our unallocated care case numbers from 986 cases at the end of August to 497 cases as at 11th January 2010.

We have achieved this through sheer hard work and, in a number of areas, new duty advice schemes."

In order to find out what sort of cases were being submitted to court as part of this rise in applications Cafcass has conducted a small scale study. This project focused on cases from within ten selected Cafcass service areas where care applications were made in the three weeks after 11th November 2008, following the initial publicity surrounding the trial of those responsible for Baby Peter's death. The research found that in the vast majority (98%) of cases referred to in survey responses, Cafcass staff believed that the cases allocated to them were either appropriately timed, or should have been brought to court by the local authority earlier than they were. A substantial proportion of the increase in cases could be attributed to Local Authorities re-evaluating their involvement with families where they were already providing a service, as indicated by an older average age and longer average length of involvement with children's services among children in the survey cohort. Of those cases brought before the courts, the majority of cases featured chronic neglect as the primary factor, with 68% of the children in these cases who were subject to an existing Child Protection Plan being registered under the category of neglect.

The study concluded that although the increase in care applications could be attributed to the 'Baby Peter effect', local authorities had taken the appropriate action in making these applications.

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Commenting on the findings, Anthony Douglas said, "This research is good news for children because it demonstrates that more children are now being safeguarded who would otherwise be at risk of neglect or harm. It also puts to bed the myth that children may have unnecessarily been subject to state intervention."

Please see the enclosed table and graph for more detailed analysis.

The research reviewing post Baby Peter s31 levels is available here.

Full details on Cafcass care case allocations can be found here.

For further information 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 operates 21 service areas across England.
- 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 2008-2009 Cafcass promoted the interests of 79,000 children in new cases. This does not factor in the work we do with children and their families in dispute resolution, our support of contact centres or ongoing cases across financial years.
- 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 2009 - 2011.
- Cafcass' new operating priorities were launched internally on August 10th 2009
- Cafcass' 2008-09 annual report was published on July 16th 2009. All publications can be downloaded from our website <http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/publications.aspx>

For further information:

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Cafcass care demand statistics FINAL Q3 2009-10

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