



NAO: CAFCASS COULD NOT HAVE PREDICTED POST BABY PETER SURGE IN CARE CASES

A report published by the National Audit Office (NAO) today has found that Cafcass could not have been expected to recognise earlier that the increase in care cases following the tragic Baby Peter case would be sustained.

The report goes on to say that the increase in care cases following the autumn of 2008 was 'unprecedented' and that Cafcass has improved its capacity to manage this increased caseload. In 2009-10 Cafcass received over 30% more care cases¹ than in the previous year.

Commenting on the report, Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive said, "The NAO has recognised the steps that we have taken to improve our ability to provide a service to so many more children than ever before. In June 2010 11,243 care cases were allocated to a Cafcass Children's Guardian – that's 2,496 more care cases than in July last year and a 28.5% increase in our allocated care case workload. This is a terrific achievement given the pressure that we, and all organisations in the family justice system, are under."

He went on to say, "As the report rightly states, all organisations working in the family justice system are interdependent and it is crucial that we continue to work together in facing the challenges ahead. The implementation of the President's Interim Guidance and our own new operating priorities and ways of working have been critical in helping us to provide a service to many more children. I am hopeful that these collaborative working relationships with the courts and our other partners continue."

The report also found that the changes we are currently implementing should allow us to respond to future fluctuations in demand for our services. These include a transformation programme for 2010-11, designed to help us continue to improve our service and ensure that we are better placed to manage any future fluctuations in demand.

Anthony Douglas said, "Our work on the transformation programme this year will help us to tackle the ongoing challenges facing us. We'll be developing and improving the way in which we work with the rising numbers of children and families referred to us and ensuring that we have the right support in place to assist our Family Court Advisers who work with them."

For further information please contact:

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¹ Cafcass received 8,684 care cases in 2009-10, in comparison to 6,473 in 2008-09, an increase of 33.7%.

Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was formed as a new service for England and Wales on 1st 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 Education and is a non-departmental public body.
- 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 2010-11.
- Cafcass' 2009-10 Annual Report and Accounts was published on 26th July 2010. All publications can be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/publications.aspx>

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