

Press Release

CAFCASS SOUTH EAST: IMPROVEMENT IN PRIVATE LAW WORK SINCE LATE 2007 INSPECTION

Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children's interests in the family courts, has taken rapid action to implement the recommendations outlined in the Ofsted inspection of Cafcass' South East region – which took place in November and December 2007.

Even before the inspection, plans were in hand to improve our private law practice, including the allocation of additional resources, especially on training and higher levels of supervision and management of front line work.

An additional action plan, covering South East specific issues, was put in place straight after the inspection, and was accepted positively by Ofsted who recognised Cafcass' commitment to bringing about rapid improvement.

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass Chief Executive explains, "Our public law work is good and the problems in our private law practice are being urgently addressed – I can already guarantee significant improvements."

Steps we have taken include the recruitment of five new practice supervisors to support staff in cases; we have entered into an innovative contract with Children's Charity Coram to provide specialist practice advice to staff; we have improved the ratio of frontline managers to practitioners to help deliver high quality assessments, case management and planning; we have improved our system of screening and risk assessment for cases that are delayed; we have brought in temporary support to reduce delays and we are ensuring that regular supervision takes place to quality assure reports and support our workforce.

The increase in frontline practice supervisors will mean more support and advice is on hand for practitioners to discuss complex cases or to reflect on the analysis in their reports.

The South East has many strengths including some good practice in public law, good management of resources, and a good complaints service from which we are learning lessons. Our KPIs are improving nationally and our policies are robust and among the best available.

We are determined to continue driving up practice standards.

The children and families we work with rightly expect and deserve the highest quality services. I believe the evidence from our improvement programme to date shows that we are well on the way to achieving this."

Embargoed Release: Thursday 22nd May 2008 at 0001hrs

Nationally Cafcass has implemented the following changes which will also support improvement in the South East:-

- 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;
- 500 practitioner training courses were run in 2007 and in 2008 we have increased our training budget by 70% and introduced Individual Learning Accounts to help every practitioner improvement 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;
- 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.

We are also working with Ofsted to develop new measures and standards for our private law work to improve the quality and consistency of our work.

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.

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- Cafcass' new National Standards are available for download at our new website www.cafcass.gov.uk
- The chart below shows how we are reducing delays in allocating cases in Kent:-

For further information:

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