



CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE

Paper for the Board Meeting on Friday 28 October 2016

Child Outcomes Report

KEY POINTS

- This paper provides a brief overview of the work that has been undertaken within Cafcass on child outcomes over the last few years, culminating in the development of the revised Quality Assurance and Impact framework in 2016.
- An 'outcome' in the context of the work undertaken by Cafcass can best be considered as 'the difference made to a child's life'.
- The Quality Assurance and Impact framework was introduced earlier this year extending the previous framework from a compliance based system to one which demonstrates how quality can be evidenced in respect of the journey and outcomes of the child. The Child Outcomes pilot sought to collect systematically triangulated information about the impact Cafcass has in private law family court proceedings.
- The proposed future focus is on further embedding, refining and developing the Quality Assurance and Impact model to ensure that we measure things that matter around quality assurance and the impact that our involvement has upon children and young people in the short time frame that we work with them.

1. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

This paper provides a brief overview of the work that has been undertaken within Cafcass on child outcomes over the last few years, culminating in the development of the revised Quality Assurance and Impact framework (QAI) in 2016. This framework is able to digitally capture outcomes and added value. It is submitted that this framework represents exemplary practice in the children's social care sector. According to our current knowledge base of the sector, no local authority or combination of local authorities, such as triborough in London, have developed models that are any more advanced than the Cafcass model. Local authorities have quality assurance frameworks which are utilised to test the quality of social work practice. Local authorities are also subject to the collection and monitoring of key performance datasets much of which is process and timescale- rather than outcome- driven.

We know that the right court order for a child has a lasting and significant effect upon child outcomes. This has been demonstrated from the research literature in this area.

This paper is presented to the Cafcass Board at a time of unprecedented and unrelenting demand in the family justice system which has been ongoing for a significant period of time. For example, year to date (April to July 2016) public law care application demand is at a record high with 4,959 applications received, a 20.4% increase on the same period in 2015. The level of demand is such that Cafcass is currently in discussion with the President of the Family Division about pressures and remit.

2. SUMMARY OF WORK TO DATE

All of the papers that have been to the Cafcass Board or relevant committees have been reviewed. The first was at the November 2012 Quality Committee meeting where a paper was presented looking at the possible development of a public and private law outcomes framework for the Family Justice Board. The paper also contained wider references to research in relation to aspects of public confidence in the Family Justice system. In 2013, John Goldup undertook some work for Cafcass looking at the development of a child outcomes framework. The report was a detailed and theoretical study and agreement was made for exploration of some of the ideas through a research study in a range of service areas, alongside some further exploration in to the concept of Outcomes based accountability originating from the work of Mark Friedman from the USA.

In April 2015, the Quality Committee received a further paper on child outcomes which evidenced progress in relation to a refresh of the existing Cafcass Quality Assurance framework to a strengths based model measuring both compliance and outcomes and impact. The paper also proposed, building upon the concepts in John Goldup's paper, piloting practitioners identifying the impact of their work at case closure, a questionnaire for service users at the end of proceedings, and feedback from the Judiciary at the end of proceedings. These pilots have now been undertaken and a full report is appended to this report at appendix one. The paper also suggested a visit to Essex County Council to consider work that they were undertaking with the Public Office in to the use of ethnographic studies to better understand service user experience and outcomes. A subsequent visit did take place which, whilst useful, did not lead to any tangible return.

In May 2016, a joint meeting of the Performance and Quality Committees received an overview presentation by Anji Owens Assistant Director and Steve Hunt Assistant Director on outcomes and added value. The presentation (attached as appendix two) gave an overview of the new Quality Assurance and Impact Framework launched in 2016, and also provided the survey methodology around impact and outcomes in private law cases in pilots underway in Kent (A17), Essex (part of A14), and Newcastle (A1). Emily Woodman, Case Manager Tri-Borough Care Proceedings Project, also gave a presentation on measuring outcomes on the Tri-borough Care Proceedings project.

Finally, in July 2016, Mary Macleod and Helen Watson visited Leeds City Council, one of the DfE partners in practice, to consider their improvement journey, and specifically the work they had undertaken using the Outcomes based accountabilities (OBA) framework. Leeds City Council have not developed a child outcomes framework as such, but have used OBA to good effect as an approach in their strategic planning processes.

3. DEFINITIONS OF OUTCOMES

An 'outcome' in the context of the work undertaken by Cafcass can best be considered as 'the difference made to a child's life'. There are some inherent challenges in this. For example, Cafcass is involved with a child in a time limited context. The long term outcome of our work with the child or their involvement with the family justice system is unlikely to be known for many years; did the Care Order or Adoption Order or Special Guardianship Order or orders made or not made for contact or residence ultimately support the child to form secure attachments and to achieve their true potential?

We know that independent evaluative research studies sometimes come nearer to measuring outcomes, but even they struggle with attribution given the number of different variables that may need to be taken in to account (e.g. the child's friendship network). One extremely timely and relevant example of a research study is the final report undertaken by the Centre for

Research on Children and Families, School of Social Work, University of East Anglia in to Outcomes for children of shorter court decision making processes- a follow up study of the Tri-Borough Care proceedings pilot (October 2016). This study aimed to investigate the impact of the 26 week target for care proceedings on the outcomes for children after proceedings. There was a quantitative element to the research (looking at the child's post proceedings placement history, and record of ongoing social care involvement), alongside more qualitative elements asking for the views of parents and carers and children and young people on the child's level of current wellbeing and experience of the court process, and interviews with social workers on the longer term impact of focus on quicker proceedings and changes in the post court process.

There were encouraging findings from the study; the focus on timeliness of care proceedings did not mean that more children were left waiting for a permanent placement at the end of proceedings; the focus on timeliness did not lead to extra delay after the proceedings; the incidence of 'serious problem indicators' declined for children in the pilot cohort evidencing that quicker decision making does not lead to less stable placements and interviews with practitioners demonstrated their widespread support for the new way of working. It is notable that the most frequent placement (60%) was for children to live with their parents indicating that a shorter time line for care proceedings did not result in more children living away from their families. In summary, this study shows the importance of tracking what happens to children before, during and after care proceedings.

4. WHAT WE MEASURE AND WHAT WE REPORT

Prior to the development of the Quality Assurance and Impact framework below, the focus on performance indicators and performance measures were largely input and output based. For example, we have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around public care cases allocated to Children's Guardian at month end (target 97%); average working days to allocate the Guardian to a care case (less than 3 days); private law cases allocated to the Family Court Adviser (FCA) at month end (target 97%); and private law section 7 reports filed by agreed date (target 97%). All of these KPIs were exceeded in the performance year to end of March 2016. The Family Justice Board also have in place a number of key performance measures (KPMs) which, although Cafcass is not directly measured by these, cross reference with Cafcass' performance monitoring. For example, there are KPMs in place around timeliness: average duration of section 31 or supervision cases; percentage of section 31 cases which are completed within 26 weeks; average number of hearings per new section 31 or supervision order case; timeliness of progression of section 8 case; and a range of KPMs around the take up and initial effectiveness of family mediation. We also provide a public law application heat map and demand forecast.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPACT FRAMEWORK AND DASHBOARD

This new strengths based framework was introduced earlier this year extending the previous framework from a compliance based system to one viewing quality in a different way, and how quality can be evidenced in respect of the journey for the child, the impact of Cafcass involvement, how each individual child's voice is heard and the quality of the outcome for that child. This framework also evidences outstanding practice through formally recognising outstanding in the grade structure. Workshops have been held around the country to benchmark what outstanding practice looks like, to embed the shift in focus and to ensure consistency in practice. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to this new framework both from managers and from practitioners. Below are some extracts from the QAI tools which were graded 'Outstanding' and demonstrate the impact of Cafcass involvement, and the quality of the outcome for that child.

Example - Review of report to court

'A well written/analysed report which highlights that for the majority of the children's lives they have been under high levels of stress due to on-going proceedings and Mr B's lack of insight into how his behaviour has and continues to impact on the children. At this stage in the proceedings there is no possibility of the father being able to develop a positive relationship with the children and the court agree that no further applications should be made until he can evidence that he has changed significantly via a 12 months therapeutic treatment programme. FCA has made a significant impact on these children's lives.'

Example - Review of case file

'The file evidences real added value for this family and specifically the children by the work Rosie (the FCA) has undertaken. The children have re-established their contact with the mother and also been empowered to process their fears around their mother's mental health difficulties. A sensitive and thoughtful piece of work.'

Examples - Impact of telephone call at EIT stage (observation of practice)

'Lisa (FCA) was able to provide clear advice about protecting the child from domestic violence and also promoting his emotional and identity needs. The advice was focused upon the child's needs which included safety. The advice given to the parent about the child's emotional and identity needs was well received and may be influential in allowing for his needs to continue to be met. Non subject child's safety was also considered.'

A snapshot of the QAI dashboard is appended at appendix three.

6. CHILD OUTCOMES PILOT PROJECT 2016

This pilot was undertaken in three areas to collect systematically triangulated information about the impact Cafcass has in private law family court proceedings. The pilot sought to understand the views of children and young people about the impact we have on child outcomes in periods of transition in their lives. The methodology of the pilot was testing out one of the key questions in the Mark Friedman Outcomes based accountability model; is anyone better off as a result of Cafcass assessment and intervention- what difference did we make? The pilots aimed for a sample size of ten cases in each of the three areas. This equated to a potential response from 60 adult service users and at least 30 children and young people, with up to 30 judicial responses and views from FCAs. In summary, almost a third of the adults responded to the survey; children and young people responded in about half of the cases responded to by their parents; FCAs responded in all the cases where we had received a reply from adults; 20 per cent of the Judiciary responded in one area. No case included a survey return from all three so fully triangulated information was not possible on this occasion. The survey return included responses from 14 adults, six children, and two Judges. Six adults and two children and young people took part in a follow up telephone call, with two adults sending e mail responses.

The full evaluation report of the pilot was presented to the Operational Management Team (OMT) in October and is attached at appendix one. A number of key themes emerged from the pilot study as follows; all the children and young people stated that they were helped by Cafcass and their views were less directly influenced than their parents by the court decision. Most of the children agreed that issues in their family had improved following the ending of the court case. FCAs can readily identify the impact made by Cafcass in private law proceedings, and stated that through Cafcass sharing the wishes and feelings of the child, the fixed views

of parents could shift. The survey monkey methodology worked well and timing of the survey is important in Judicial and parental response.

A number of recommendations were made including the adaptation of the national survey to incorporate the views of children and young people; building the process in to the Area Quality Review framework, timing issues in relation to sending surveys out either just before or shortly after the court hearing; asking the Judiciary to complete the survey in court as proceedings end and ceasing to offer a follow up call as few responded to this.

7. FUTURE FOCUS

This report highlights significant progress in developing the Quality Assurance and Impact framework and the reporting of impact and outcomes in the associated dashboard. It is suggested that the future focus should be on further embedding, refining and developing this model to ensure that we measure things that matter around quality assurance and the impact that our involvement has upon children and young people in the short time frame that we work with them. We can enhance this process by also building in the views of children and young people in to an annual survey as recommended in the Child Outcomes pilot study.

Board members may wish to discuss some further questions as follows:

1. Do Board members agree that the Quality Assurance and Impact framework and dashboard and the annual survey are the main mechanisms for the measurement of impact and outcomes?
2. Would Board members like to see any further developments to the framework?
3. Would the Performance Committee like to receive additional datasets as they are developing?

Helen Watson, Director of Strategy