



## **National Improvement Service NATIONAL AUDIT – NOVEMBER 2014 SUMMARY REPORT**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The audit objective was to provide a snapshot assessment of the standard of casework across all service areas measuring the improvement of the percentage of 'Good' work since the audit in September 2013 and the Ofsted inspection of April 2014. The aim set by the organisation for this audit was to provide a midway review of progress towards the target set as 60% of work to be assessed as 'Good' and reduce the percentage of 'Not Met' work to 14% by May 2015. These targets were set as part of the Ofsted Action Plan 2014.

This audit was carried out on case files based on reports and safeguarding letters filed between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014. A Quality Improvement Audit Tool was used on every case and graded against the agreed Threshold Document (October 2014).

### **Case Samples**

The sample of work audited came from 50% of practitioners for each service, selected randomly by the National Improvement Service (NIS) and Management Information Service (MIS) from the most recently filed work. The 50% selected was from each of the law types (public, private law work to first hearing (WTFH) and private law work after first hearing (WAFH) and also across each of the performance bands as outlined in each areas performance matrix. Only one case from any individual practitioner was audited.

### **Process of Audit**

The audit was commissioned by Christine Banim, National Service Director (NSD), and the framework agreed with Anji Owens, Assistant Director (AD) with responsibility for the National Improvement Service. The audit was led by Kate Mullinder, Senior Service Manager (SSM) for NIS, with Improvement Managers (IM) completing the audits, supported by Improvement Assistants (IA) in NIS. Benchmarking of the audited work was also completed by Kate Mullinder, in addition to independent threshold benchmarking and moderation by Marie Gittins, Head of Service for A2.

During the course of the audit, any cases that were audited as Not Met were sent back to the area Head of Service (HoS) or Assistant Director (AD) for immediate review. Only one out of the 577 cases needed further action, in terms of a referral to ensure safe arrangements were in place for non-subject children.

### **Benchmarking and Moderation**

As part of the agreed methodology, during the course of the audit the SSM for NIS benchmarked 47 cases and Marie Gittins, HoS for A2, benchmarked 26 cases. Fourteen Not Met cases were challenged by HoS/ADs, with 3 cases being re-graded to Met. The remaining 11 cases were agreed as Not Met.

Christine Banim, NSD, was asked to adjudicate on one case with the grade remaining unchanged. HoS/ADs have all been sent QA tools for them to complete their own reviews on each case.

## **2. SUMMARY FINDINGS -Statistical Overview**

### **2a) Overall audit figures** (Fig. 1)

Total number of cases reviewed in this audit	Total number of cases graded Good or above in this audit	Total number of cases graded Met in this audit	Total number of cases graded Not Met in this audit
<b>577</b>	<b>377 (65%)</b>	<b>148 (26%)</b>	<b>52 (9%)</b>

### **Analysis**

Since September 2013 there has been a 16% improvement in the number of cases assessed as Good. This is a significant improvement from the 49% Good achieved in the audit in April 2013. This figure demonstrates a further improvement from the 50% achieved during the Ofsted inspection in March 2014. The target of 60% Good to be achieved by May 2015 has been exceeded by 5%, with evidence that addresses a number of recommendations and practice improvement points within the Ofsted Action Plan. For example, recommendations 1 and 4 in respect of WTFH evidenced improvements in safeguarding; responses to service users; and consistency in presentation. Private law (WAFH) work is commencing at the point of allocation, meeting recommendation 5 and improved quality of reporting, including an evidence and research based approach showed significant progress, meeting practice improvement point 13 (Ofsted Action Plan). Child engagement and the effective use of tools to provide evidence-based assessments have also featured in the improved quality of casework (practice improvement point 14 (Ofsted Action Plan). This confirms that the improvement trajectory assessed during previous audits has been sustained, with the quality of work seen evidencing a safe and effective level of service provision.

### **2b) Law Type Breakdown** (Fig. 2)

	<b>Total Reviewed</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not Met</b>
<b>Public Law</b>	265 (46%)	181 (68%)	67 (25%)	17 (6%)
<b>Private Law (WAFH)</b>	214 (37%)	130 (61%)	56 (26%)	28 (13%)
<b>Private Law (WTFH)</b>	98 (17%)	66 (66%)	25 (27%)	7 (7%)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>52</b>

### **Analysis**

**Public Law** - In the 2013 Audit, 60% of public law was graded as Good. This has now improved by 8%. Compliance with the Public Law Outline (PLO) remains in place, with effective triage and initial planning. There is focus at the outset on achieving timely outcomes, and whilst at the start of care cases there is consistent evidence of liaison with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), Ofsted Action Plan practice improvement point 8, there remains a need to maintain this level of liaison throughout the life of cases. Reports need to remain analytical and succinct. In the last audit 11% of public law was Not Met, and this is also an improving picture with now only 6% being Not Met.

**Private Law (WTFH)** - The biggest rise in 'Good' work has been evident in WTFH with an improvement of 26% since the 2013 audit. Fluctuations in demand have enabled timely and effective interventions, but have additionally enabled changes such as in the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP), and also technology changes such as the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS), to embed without any significant impact on productivity. Of most significant note is that in 2013, 24% of WTFH was Not Met, compared to this audit which demonstrates that only 7% was Not Met, an improvement of 17%. As outlined

above, there was consistent evidence to address recommendations 1 and 4 of the Ofsted Action Plan in terms of safeguarding, presentation of letters and early contact being made with service users.

Recording at WTFH has improved with learning identified below regarding the need to ensure that detailed logs of interviews are further improved. There is a seamless transfer from CIT to local teams enabling swift safeguarding screening and review. The national Early Intervention Manager workshops have also impacted on bringing consistency of practice and systems across the areas, for example the presentation of Safeguarding Letters no longer varies across the organisation. There remains a need to ensure that recording of decision-making for non-subject children is addressed, and also that the detail in telephone interviews is recorded in more detail, so the information on which the safeguarding analysis is based is clearer.

**Private Law** (Work After First Hearing) – As with Work To First Hearing, there has been a significant percentage increase in good work up from 44% to 61%. Whilst 13% of work was graded as Not Met, this still represents a 9% improvement since September 2013 and exceeds the organisational target of 14%. Greater use of tools has assisted in reports that demonstrate an evidenced-based assessment, an improvement point in the Ofsted Action Plan (point 13). There does need to be a more consistent use of the variety of tools, to stretch this improvement further. Case plans are routinely started at the outset of cases, and where the quality of these was assessed as Good, the report was also more likely to be Good, evidencing the correlation between effective case planning and good outcomes for children. Introduction of the Child Arrangement Programme in the months prior to the audit has started to bring an emphasis of early resolution, and assisting parents in seeking solutions and alternatives options rather than ongoing Court proceedings. This is still in its infancy, and whilst principles are starting to embed, further training in 2015 will address this further.

### **2c) Breakdown per service area** (Fig. 3)

The table below (Fig. 3) outlines the breakdown of cases in each service area. Note that A15 has been outlined as two separate areas (A15 Public Law and A15 Private Law) as this is how they are currently separated and managed.

Fig.3

Service Area	Cases Audited	Not Met	% Not Met	Good	% Good	Met	% Met
A1	25	2	8%	16	64%	7	28%
A2	25	2	8%	17	68%	6	24%
A3	29	1	3%	15	52%	13	45%
A4	24	5	21%	13	54%	6	25%
A5	29	2	7%	18	62%	9	31%
A6	17	2	12%	11	65%	4	24%
A7	46	3	7%	29	63%	14	30%
A8	30	5	17%	19	63%	6	20%
A9	56	5	9%	42	75%	9	16%
A10	20	2	10%	15	75%	3	15%
A11	52	6	12%	33	63%	13	25%
A12	32	2	6%	18	56%	12	38%
A13	17	3	18%	11	65%	3	18%
A14	48	4	8%	29	60%	15	31%
A15 Public	45	2	4%	30	67%	13	29%
A15 Private	38	5	13%	30	79%	3	8%
A16	23	0	0%	15	65%	8	35%

A17	21	1	5%	16	76%	4	19%
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## Analysis

### General

Fifteen of the 18 services areas (taking A15 Public and A15 Private separately) achieved 60% or over the target for Good, with the highest being A15 Private and A17 (76%), A10 (75%) and A9 (73%). Three other service areas achieved between 54% and 58%. In one of these areas, A4, this still represented an increase in performance of 8% since the September 2013 audit. Whilst in A3 and A12 the percentage of Good work had slightly decreased, both areas had a much reduced level of Not Met work than in previous audit. The areas achieving the largest percentage improvement in Good work since the last audit were A10 (40% improved), A6, and A13 (31% improved). Recommendation 13 of the Ofsted Action Plan identified the need to improve the percentage of good work in Work After First Hearing in A5. In this audit, 67% of the WAFH in A5 was good, as opposed to 27% in the September 2013 audit, showing that this recommendation has been met.

Eleven areas ranged from 0% up to 10% Not Met, with A16 having no cases at all graded Not Met. Four areas ranged from 11% to below the anticipated 14% target, with only three areas having Not Met percentages above this target. Only one area (A4) exceeded the previous September 2013 figure of 19%, though this was slightly reduced from the previous audit and, as outlined above, the area's Good work had also increased.

### **3. CHILDREN BEING SEEN**

The following table (Fig. 4) outlines the evidence of children being seen from the Public Law and Private Law WAFH cases.

Fig. 4

	Num ber of cases	EIT Cases	Private/ Public	Children Seen	% Seen (excl. EIT)	Children Not Seen	% Not Seen (excl. EIT)	Not seen - With No Reason	Unclear if seen or not seen
A1	25	6	19	15	79%	4	21%	1	0
A2	25	7	18	14	78%	3	17%	0	1
A3	29	5	24	19	79%	4	17%	0	1
A4	24	5	19	14	74%	4	21%	3	1
A5	29	4	25	20	80%	5	20%	1	0
A6	17	7	10	9	90%	1	10%	0	0
A7	46	8	38	35	92%	3	8%	1	0
A8	30	5	25	20	80%	4	16%	1	1
A9	56	9	47	40	85%	6	13%	2	1
A10	20	4	16	14	88%	2	13%	0	0
A11	52	9	43	42	98%	1	2%	0	0
A12	32	5	27	25	93%	2	7%	0	0
A13	17	5	12	12	100%	0	0%	0	0
A14	48	11	37	34	92%	3	8%	2	0
A15 PUBLIC	45	0	45	40	89%	2	4%	2	3
A15 PRIVATE	38	0	38	28	74%	10	26%	1	0
A16	23	4	19	18	95%	1	5%	0	0

<b>A17</b>	21	4	17	15	88%	2	12%	1	0
<b>Overall</b>	<b>577</b>	98	479	414	86%	57	12%	15	8

### Analysis

The above outlines that, of the private and public law cases audited, a total 86% of children were seen, 12% were not seen, and there were 2% (eight cases) where the recording on the file was unclear as to whether the child had been seen or not. This is the same ratio of children not seen as reported in the 2013 Children Being Seen Audit (February 2013). However, of the 57 cases where children were not seen in this audit, there were 42 cases where there was a clear professional judgement about not seeing the child. This is 9% of the sample compared to 4.9% in 2013. Whilst this may appear an increased figure, the professional judgements given were clear, often relating to the age of the child, and the auditors felt the professional judgement recorded to be valid. Conversely, in early 2013, the percentage of children who were not seen and where there was not a suitable recording to justify this was 7%. In this audit, this figure reduced to 3%, indicating that recording of professional judgements not to see children has improved. The 8 cases where this was unclear should be noted, and this does still identify the need to improve this element of recording and decision-making still further.

## **4. AGENCY STAFF**

Fig. 5 below, outlines the overall grades for staff audited and then a breakdown of agency staff grades:-

Fig. 5

	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Good</b>	366	66%	7	35%
<b>Met</b>	144	26%	7	35%
<b>Not Met</b>	47	8%	6	30%
<b>Total</b>	557		20	

### Analysis

Whilst only a small percentage of agency staff were audited, almost a third (30%) were graded as Not Met. 35% were graded as Good which is considerably lower than the rate of Good work seen in employed staff (66%). This gives an indication that the standard of practice amongst employed Cafcass staff is much higher than the standards of agency staff.

## **5. KEY THEMES (Strengths, Learning and Recommendations)**

### **5a) Strengths**

#### **CIT/EIT:**

- ✓ CIT transfers are happening on time, with clear recording of CIT actions
- ✓ EIT shows a consistency of approach across the organisation

#### **Private Law:**

- ✓ Case Plans are being started in a timely manner and most updated, reviewed.

- ✓ Management oversight seen in case planning
- ✓ Reports in private law were well written, succinct and outline the voice of the child
- ✓ More examples of child-centred practice/child engagement seen in this audit
- ✓ Where effective case plans were evidenced, these were child-centred
- ✓ Better use of tools to inform an evidence based assessment

### **Public Law:**

- ✓ Good understanding of the revised PLO with effective planning at the start to minimise delay
- ✓ New templates are embedded across all public law
- ✓ Majority of public law reports address the various permanency options in detail

### **General – across all Casework**

- ✓ Work across all law types has a clear focus on safeguarding
- ✓ Improved evidence of diversity in respect of children. Most reports considered vulnerabilities associated with age and witnessing DV.
- ✓ Practitioners were using research and EIP tools in service user engagement. Evidence was seen of the letter to the judge being used effectively with children
- ✓ Improved evidence of SM/EP (Enhanced Practitioner) reviewing cases at the outset of intervention

### **5b) Key Learning and Recommendations**

In establishing the learning, auditors applied agreed thresholds to assess the grade of each case. This section defines the key areas of learning that would bring about further improvements in work. The accumulation of issues and degree of improvement required determined the final grade in each case in this audit. The main focus for further improvement resulting from this audit can be summarised into three key areas. HoS/ADs have, in addition, been provided with detailed overviews of each case as well as a review of the learning points that are evident to their own area. This will form the basis of their improvement plan set out in the Area business plan.

#### **Case Recording**

- All activity to be effectively recorded, with a clear trail of decision-making and management oversight
- Ensure that there is a triangulation of information from logs to case plans and reports
- Referrals to the Local Authority need to be clear and explicit about concerns and also all of the children involved (subject and non-subject).

#### **Case Planning**

- Case plans should be a clear analytical summary of issues, tasks and actions
- Plans should outline reflective practice, considering the impact of information and how assessments are to be conducted, including plans to engage the child and service users
- Reviews of case plans by Service Managers (SM) and Enhanced Practitioners (EP) need to be evidenced and show the impact on how the review is enhancing the quality of planning
- Planning in public law needs to account for liaison with the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) throughout the life of cases.

#### **Reporting**

- Reports should be free from typographical and grammar errors

- Workflow systems should be used by Managers to ensure that reports are approved prior to filing (including addressing the issue above)
- Reports should be succinct, child-centred and evidence-based with a clear distinction between fact and opinion
- Position statements are being widely used, and the endorsement of these is not always evidenced in recording. A thematic audit of this, along with the logging of these on ECMS, is recommended during 2015.

## **6. OFSTED ACTION PLAN – REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Evidence in this audit was used to assess the following recommendations:-

Rec 1 - *Improve the minority of safeguarding letters which are not yet fit for purpose* – This has been met

Rec 2 - *Eliminate poor grammar and typographical errors* – Whilst the percentages of Good and Met work have improved, there is continued work to do to ensure all filed work is free from errors. This has been met with the level of improvement but a continued focus will improve further.

Rec 4 - *Improve effectiveness of efforts to contact parties or where sufficient efforts have been made these should be better recorded* – This has been met

Rec 5 - *Ensure that in all private law casework work begins as early as possible once a family court adviser has been allocated* – This has been met

Rec 8 (Practice Improvement Point) - *Improve the consistency of Children’s Guardians practice in liaising before, during, and at the end of proceedings with local authority Independent Reviewing Officers* – Evidence showed early liaison in cases, but work is still required to maintain links throughout the life of cases. This recommendation therefore remains ongoing and will need to be further tested in a thematic audit sometime late in 2015.

Rec 13 - *Improve the % Good in Private Law, WAFH, in A5* – This has been met

Rec 14 (Practice Improvement Point) - *Improve further the analysis in the report to the court and ensure that all relevant information gathered is pulled through into the report and based on research* – Greater use of tools, especially for child engagement, and use of research was seen so this improvement is met. However, this should remain a target and evidenced in a thematic audit sometime in mid-2015.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This audit has assessed recent work of 50% of the practice staff across all areas of Cafcass. 65% of this work has been graded as Good, which shows a significant improvement and exceeds the targets set for May 2015. Not only does this show an improved picture since the last national audit in September 2013, but also displays that there has been further improvement since Ofsted inspected the organisation in March 2014 and the establishment of the Ofsted Action Plan. The significance of this is that not only has the organisation sustained the positive position seen previously, staff have continued to further improve practice and stretch performance to an even higher standard. Alongside this is the significant reduction in Not Met work which is down by 11%. This evidences the determination of staff across Cafcass to ensure that the standards of intervention with all children are high and that their welfare is at the centre of all work completed.

Benchmarking and moderation of this audit has been open and transparent, and has ensured a consistent approach to adopting the agreed threshold for quality of practice across the country.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

The audit scheduled for May 2015 will now not go ahead because the target set for May has been met and exceeded. Instead we will carry out three thematic audits during 2015 that focus on the further improvements required.

The three thematic audits will be on the following:-

- To evidence the extent of the improvement in the joint working/liaison between the IRO and the Guardian during the life of Cafcass involvement in proceedings.
- To evidence the guardian's involvement and agreement to any position statement filed in proceedings either written or verbally.
- To evidence in Private Law Work After First Hearing the improvement in analysis of assessment and increased use of research and tools.

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