

CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE

Paper for the Board Meeting on 26 April 2013

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

1. This short report covers the period since the 22 March Board Meeting, which is only 4 weeks, hence its brevity.
2. Year end has gone well, with no problems in compiling the annual report and accounts. We have worked closely with DfE and the NAO on the accounts, as in previous years and these are on track for scrutiny by the Board (Annual Report) and ARAC (Annual Accounts), prior to both the Annual Report and the Accounts coming to the full Board for sign off on 21 June.
3. We achieved our best ever Ofsted result in Kent (A17), which was published on 15 April. This followed the previous best ever result in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire (A14). The attached Ofsted trendline indicates the direction of travel with inspection findings. Work is currently under way on our own judgment descriptors for use in internal audits and reviews. This is important as new-style peer reviews of local service areas are starting up soon. Our work will be shared with Ofsted in a workshop towards the end of May, aiming at us sharing a similar if not a common approach to judgment descriptors. It is of course Ofsted's final decision about which judgment descriptors they will settle on to support their new inspection methodology this year. Ours are initially quite general, so that they stand the test of time, with so many potential changes to working practices imminent. If they are too specific, they risk being that much more quickly out of date.
4. Progress on implementing the family justice reforms continues, with most activity over the last month going into the content of the revised Public Law Outline (PLO) – the public law case management process. Revised documents are being finalised in the new few weeks. We will train our staff over the summer months in the run up to implementing the pilot of the revised PLO, scheduled for 7 October. 3 of our local service areas are trialling a new case analysis template aimed at supporting the revised PLO. Our understanding is also being deepened as data from existing pilot programmes such as the tri-borough project becomes available, as well as data from the CMS system (HMCTS) on the reasons why a case is avoidably delayed. We also continue to work with Directors of Children's Services to produce additional guidance for social workers.
5. We have been monitoring the amount of extra professional time we spend supporting litigants in person in private law cases as a result of the legal aid changes which came into effect on 1 April. In the first week, staff in our Greater Manchester (A3) service spent an extra 29 hours advising LIP's. We intend to monitor the impact throughout April as a first step and share the results with DfE and MOJ.

6. Personally, I have been to team meetings or development days in Devon, Cornwall, Newcastle, Manchester, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Sussex over the last four weeks. I have been impressed by staff's continued willingness and readiness to embrace these reforms, keeping their focus on the needs of individual children.
7. Progress has also been made in identifying savings for 2014/15, even at this early stage of the 2013/14 financial year, and on progress in our anticipated transfer of sponsorship to the MOJ.
8. Change programmes within the overall Transformation Programme are also on track, and further work is going on during the next few weeks to rationalise the various planning documents for 2013/14 into a single coherent plan, along the lines requested by the Board.
9. Senior managers have welcomed and made presentations to a delegation of judges and other family justice professionals from Eastern Norway. Delegations from Lithuania, Georgia and South Australia will be visiting us during May.
10. We have successfully launched the Health & Wellbeing Plan on 1 April 2013 to our staff, with a 98% sign up. The Talent Management Strategy has also been launched, and all managers are going through a 1 day development programme to support programme implementation through strengths coaching.
11. We have launched two new HR Policies from April 2013, following constructive negotiations with our trade unions. The Management of Absence Policy, now combines 5 existing policies into one. The Expense Reimbursement Policy will better support business needs and the flexible ways in which our staff now work.

Anthony Douglas

21 April 2013