



CHILDREN AND FAMILY COURT ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE

Paper for the Board Meeting on March 2013

Cafcass Strategic Plan 'Closer to Children' 2013-15

1. AIM AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This paper sets out the minor amendments to the draft strategic plan following feedback and seeks agreement on the final version of the plan. The revised plan is attached for original sign off in its two versions: the fuller version and the Plan on a Page version.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION FOR THE BOARD

- 2.1 To approve the proposed changes to the draft plan as set out in this paper.

3. SHORT SUMMARY

- 3.1 Responses were received following direct contact with stakeholders and the invitation to comment issued via the Cafcass website and Twitter. Amendments to the plan in response to the feedback are set out below for the consideration of the Board. However there is nothing in the feedback to suggest that anything but minor amendments are required.

Staff responding sought for the plan to reflect the continued importance of business support, for greater emphasis on communicating the role of Cafcass to service users, and making connections with key agencies within the Family Justice System. As anticipated, detailed feedback regarding improvements to processes and tools for working were also received from staff and these proposals are being considered.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) suggested we draw out our learning from complaints and compliments in improving service delivery. This indicates that we could be more transparent in our approach to practice and service improvement, given that this already takes place. Work underway on seeking service user feedback systematically will also strengthen this area.

Some responses were from long-standing critics of Cafcass. Whilst largely negative, their comments reinforce the importance of transparent performance, and suggest that including further detail on how we actually work (specifically in relation to our analysis of any parental coaching or manipulation) may go some way to dispelling the misperception that we are biased against fathers. More constructive responses from members of the public also reinforced the plan setting out Cafcass' recognition that, where it is safe, children generally benefit from having a relationship with both parents following separation. This is in line with government thinking, policy and forthcoming legislation.

As many Heads of Service, because of time pressures and priorities, were unable to have a discussion with stakeholders during the consultation period about the draft plan, these discussions will still be held over the coming months. In many respects this will be more fruitful than commenting on the general direction of travel, which is broadly supported, allowing input into the specific areas of our work that individual agencies have a clear interest in.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The plan had already benefitted from internal review by CMT, a staff reference group and the Cafcass Board on a number of occasions during its formulation prior to releasing the final draft for the purposes of consultation. The Chief Executive had also discussed and debated priorities with most of our local teams over the last 6 months and themes from these sessions were incorporated into the draft Plan. Various external requirements, such as those arising from Ofsted inspections, were also fed in.

5. KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR THE BOARD TO CONSIDER

- 5.1 To accept the following changes to the Strategic Plan 'Closer to Children' 13-15:
- Including further reference to plans for our practice models, specifically how we analyse parental manipulation and coaching in private law cases.
 - Reflecting the importance of non-practice roles in delivering greater efficiencies.
 - More systematically embedding learning and improvement from service user feedback.
- 5.2 To agree that detail behind the plan will continue to be developed with a view to being incorporated into national and local business plans, initially for 2013/14 and for the Board to be kept up to date and consulted about any emerging strategic issues during the delivery of these plans.

6. BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

- 6.1 The plan sets out our key strategic objectives to further improve the service we provide to the children we work with. Cafcass' commitment to supporting every child referred to us by the family courts is firmly set out in the plan.

7. FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The plan emphasises the continuing need for Cafcass to strive for greater efficiency. One of the five priorities is becoming even more resilient by handling higher volumes of work whilst making further savings in our budget.

8. RISK ANALYSIS

- 8.1 The inability to discuss the plan with stakeholders during the consultation period will be mitigated by discussion regarding detailed business plans, following on from the strategic objectives set out by the plan.

9. DIVERSITY ANALYSIS

- 9.1 Enhancing our understanding of diversity is set out as one of the five key priorities of this plan. We have issued our draft Equality and Diversity strategy during the period. The consultation period closed on 15th March 2013, and HR is finalising the strategy following consideration of feedback.

The plan was available via the Cafcass website, thus providing options altering size, font colour, for those needing further support in order to access.

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