



Draft

Cafcass Quality Committee Minutes

Friday 1 December 2017, 14.00 - 16.00

21 Bloomsbury Street, Bentham Room and Charles Dickens Room

Present

Fay Selvan, Chair of Quality Committee
Paul Grant, Cafcass Board Member (via video conference)
Caroline Corby, Cafcass Board Member (via teleconference)
Stuart Smith, Cafcass Board Member (via video conference)
Deep Sagar, Cafcass Board Member
Joanna Nicolas, Cafcass Board Member
Professor Simon Hackett, Academic Adviser (via video conference)

In Attendance

Anthony Douglas, Cafcass Chief Executive
Christine Banim, National Service Director (via video conference)
Anji Owens, Assistant Director (via video conference)
Stuart Moore, Private Law Policy Lead (Legislation) & Cafcass Policy Sponsor, Ministry of Justice
Joanna Furlong, Senior Policy Adviser, Private Family Law: Children and Vulnerable Witnesses, Litigants in Person Support Strategy
Alex Kemp, Head of Practice, National Improvement Service (NIS)
Katherine Gledhill, Children's Guardian & Practice Supervisor
Grace Egbewole-Adereti, Cafcass Board and Corporate Support Assistant (Minutes)
Nicola Blakebrough, Corporate Strategist

Apologies

None

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Joanna Furlong, Senior Policy Adviser for Private Family Law at the Ministry of Justice, who was attending as part of her induction. No apologies were received.

2. Draft Minutes from the Quality Committee meeting on 15 September 2017

The minutes of the Quality Committee Meeting on 15 September 2017 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Action Log / Matters Arising

The Committee reviewed the Action log. All actions were noted as having been completed or in progress.

There were no matters arising.

4. Domestic Abuse Audit - update on progress of recommendations

The Head of Practice (NIS) provided an update on progress of the recommendations arising from the Domestic Abuse Audit.

The Committee was informed that the Domestic Abuse Pathway had been rolled out to Practice Supervisors following the audit and that Cafcass evidence tools were being widely used among Family Court Advisers (FCAs). The Committee was reassured that continuous efforts were being made to ensure that all FCAs were utilising the tools and that not doing so when it was appropriate to do so would be highlighted as a performance issue to the FCA concerned.

The strongest test of practice has been the Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs). Ofsted determined a positive outcome in 14 of the 18 cases they assessed and tools including the domestic abuse risk indicator matrix were identified as adding value and an evidence base to our recommendations.

The Chief Executive noted that tools have been instrumental in improving practice, contributing positively to the strength of cases and promoting Cafcass' external profile. The Ofsted Director of Social Care recently commended our assessment work in domestic abuse and Sarah Parsons won a Silver Award for raising the profile of social work at the Social Worker of the Year awards in November 2017.

The Committee praised Cafcass for promoting effective tools to address and reduce cases of domestic abuse and noted that though there is extensive research carried out in this area, attention can at times be pointed away from the perpetrator. The Head of Practice (NIS) suggested that this was due to under-reporting of incidents of domestic abuse. While multi-agency working remains an issue, Cafcass has developed perpetrator programmes designed to reduce future incidences of domestic abuse. The Committee highlighted the lack of initiatives designed to reduce the occurrence of domestic abuse by female perpetrators though research was growing in this area.

The Committee were informed that the Domestic Abuse Pathway was being used by 30-40 local authorities and suggested that Cafcass could collaborate with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to introduce the pathway as a recommended framework nationally.

Action 1: The Chief Executive would investigate collaborating with ADCS to introduce the Domestic Abuse Pathway as recommended Framework.

5. Recurrent Care Proceedings (Lancaster research) - practice issues for Cafcass

The Chief Executive presented his report on Recurrent Care Proceedings to the Committee. The report highlights the findings from collaborative research carried out by Lancaster University into the prevalence of recurrent care proceedings, which account for 1 in 4 new care applications in England.

The report further highlights that 40% of cases were related to women experiencing domestic abuse, while another 40% of cases had an inter-generational element. Programmes such as Cafcass Plus and the Pause Project are available to better identify permanence options for children and provide mothers with opportunities to break the cycle.

The Committee examined 2 case studies provided by the Practice Supervisor. One case study involved a 21-year-old care leaver who was in her fourth set of proceedings who had all her previous children removed and was resistant to the help offered. The second case study involved a 22-year-old care leaver who was in proceedings with her second child. The Pause

Project was commended for its work in providing targeted support to at risk parents, though it was noted that there is more to be done in intervening to help young mothers at the right time. It was also noted that in some cases, young mothers preferred to act a support system for one another instead of relying on funded services.

The Committee discussed what more could be done to disrupt recurrent care cases, e.g. whether it's possible to identify the risks of potential recurrent cases the first time a service user is known to us or at the end of the case and engage with other agencies to sign post the service user to available support. The Committee also suggested that more research is done on how we can assess motivation of parents to change. The National Service Director would discuss ideas with the Operational Management Team. The National Service Director assured the Committee that learning from cases is disseminated as part of the Learning and Development Programme.

Action 2: The National Service Director would discuss what more could be done to disrupt recurrent care cases with the Operational Management team.

6. Serious Incident Notifications and Submissions to Serious Case Reviews

The Head of Practice (NIS) presented the report into Serious Incident Notifications and Submissions to Serious Case reviews. In the period reported Cafcass received 6 notifications of child deaths where maltreatment was known or suspected. Of these the children were known to Cafcass in four cases, however only one case was open to Cafcass at the time of the serious incident.

The Committee queried why Cafcass had opposed an application from the local authority to remove a 15-year-old child, who was later killed in a gang-related attack, from his family home. The Committee was informed that care proceedings and assessment were ongoing at the time of the application which was ultimately withdrawn by the local authority. The Committee enquired whether Cafcass had a Practice Expert in gang membership. The Chief Executive said that there is increased knowledge in certain areas and we would consider the possibility of a Practice Expert in this area.

The Committee queried the level of management oversight in cases. The Head of Practice (NIS) stated that the Supervision Policy had been updated with several clarifying expectations for when an FCA should call on a manager to ensure the appropriate level of oversight is in place.

The Chair informed the Committee that at the Chairs Conference Call, it was decided that Notifications of Serious Case Reviews and Serious Incident Notifications would remain a report for scrutiny by the Quality Committee.

Action 3: The Chief Executive would consider the possibility of a Practice Expert in gang membership and its interface with our work.

7. Strategic Risk Register

The Committee reviewed the Strategic Risk Register and discussed the risks for which the Quality Committee has the lead assurance role. It was noted that there had been little change in the risk profile since the last review and the residual risk across all areas but one are assessed as Amber.

The Committee noted that good progress is being made to expand workforce capability and that the residual risk score is expected to reduce, and that the Ofsted survey could have an impact on the risk profile relating to workforce engagement.

The Committee discussed the benefit of new staff coming in with the consequence of average workloads reducing. They queried whether the quality of new staff is high. The Head of

Practice (NIS) said there is a strong framework in place to ensure the quality of new starters. A core training programme is in place and new staff do not self-regulate so their work is being robustly quality assured. The Committee recommended that a future thematic audit could look at the work of new staff and whether length of time with Cafcass led to better quality.

8. Exceptions Report

The Committee noted the Exceptions Report regarding the reliability of some test results from two laboratories in relation to criminal, coroners and family court proceedings in recent years. No issues or concerns have been raised about the laboratory run by DNAlegal with whom Cafcass contracts for the private law DNA testing programme.

The Committee discussed the potential impact on reputation. The Chief Executive said that Cafcass is only likely to be involved in a small number of cases that might eventually have to be re-heard, but the first stage of review is with the judiciary so it will be some time, if at all, before we are involved or re-involved in individual cases. It was noted that the issue is system wide and not isolated to Cafcass.

9. Any Other Business and Forward Planner

The Committee reviewed the Forward Planner and noted that the Research Governance Committee annual report would come to the next meeting. It was agreed that the future research programme should be aligned with the organisations' strategic objectives. The Committee noted that the report on the national Ofsted inspection should also be available in March and would be added to the agenda.

It was suggested that external experts could be asked to attend future meetings to get a better perspective of Cafcass from the stakeholder perspective.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee Theresa Williams, former Director at the Nuffield Foundation, had been appointed as the new Director of Strategy.

There was no further business.

DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING: Friday 2 March 2018, 14.00 – 16.00

Actions Summary

- Action 1: The Chief Executive would investigate collaborating with ADCS to introduce the Domestic Abuse Pathway as recommended Framework.
- Action 2: The National Service Director would discuss what more could be done to disrupt recurrent care cases with the Operational Management team.
- Action 3: The Chief Executive would consider the possibility of a Practice Expert in gang membership and its interface with our work.