

THE FAMILY JUSTICE COUNCIL

Meeting held on Monday 18th July 2005

The minutes of the meeting of 18 April 2005 were approved.

Parents and Carers as service users

Full discussion on this paper was put forward to the October meeting.

Two main areas of concern were raised: mediation and the funding thereof and the ordering of psychological treatment. The paper would be discussed further at the next Council meeting.

Local Family Justice Councils

Her Honour Judge Newton reported that of the four local FJCs in the North West, three had already had their first meeting.

Child Contact Centres

Corinne May-Chahal had examined annual monitoring statistics which showed that there had been an increase in the use of contact centres and an increase in referrals. At her meeting in September she would be looking at; i) how the contact centres were monitored; ii) the feedback process from parents and children, as there was none currently; iii) contact centre funding.

Diversity Sub-Committee

Khatun Sapnara said that there were concerns about the lack of psychologists from ethnic minorities. She also raised the issue of the lack of properly accredited interpreters and the delays this was causing. Khatun Sapnara would report back at the next meeting.

Transcripts

In a discussion led by HHJ Newton it was stated that, if judgments were transcribed in children's cases there would be immediate transparency and that, from a children's rights perspective, transcripts were absolutely necessary. However funding from CAF/CASS was restricted. This was relevant to the work on considering more openness in family courts.

Delay-Ministerial Strategic Group

Katherine Gieve raised the future of the Ministerial Strategic Group on Delay. Members of the MSG had received a letter from Baroness Ashton stating that the Group was to be dissolved. There was reference to possible duplication with the work of the Council. Mark Ormerod said that the MSG had been working in parallel with

the Programme Board on Delay, which he chaired. It was felt that the MSG had given the necessary impetus to the work on delay but there was now danger of duplication with other bodies, such as the Council. This did not signify a reduction in Ministerial interest in delay, which remained a key Government concern. Reports could be provided to the Council on the work underway and progress made, which was significant. It was stressed that there was a need to know about relevant projects going on at the DCA early on, rather than belatedly. It was agreed that Mark Ormerod would provide an update on DCA projects at each FJC meeting. The Chairman reported that during his visits across the country he had taken note of the issues surrounding delay and had reported back to the Minister.

Review of Care Proceedings

Costs per case had increased significantly and there was a strong view from the Government that this needed to be reviewed as well as the question of whether there was scope to expedite cases. It was agreed that there would be a dedicated seminar on the review on the afternoon of 10th October 2005, after the FJC meeting. This would allow Colin Myerscough to provide the Council with an update on progress up to that point and also give Council members an opportunity to make representations. It was also agreed that there would be an FJC member appointed to the 'Review of Care Proceedings' steering group.

Taping of CAFCASS interviews

CAFCASS had responded that they were not set up to record interviews.

Statistics

Two issues were raised, the first being the Children and Adoption Bill and the second being the huge expansion in costs and delay. DJ Marilyn Mornington said that there were programs to which parents who had drug/alcohol abuse problems and those with a history of domestic violence could be referred. It was stated, however, that the Government was unaware of the resources that were needed and to raise expectations for families when there were no resources would be disappointing. Many suggestions were raised, among them an FJC pilot to review available statistics, making approaches to universities for statistics which they held, and contacting the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Roundtree Foundation for assistance.

Rosalyn Proops said that Public Health held a lot of information in this area and children's trusts could also commission statistical research. Jane Booth said that CAFCASS also had information which she would pass to Mark Ormerod who it was agreed would pull all the information together.