



Leading Social Services
in Wales

Yn arwain
Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
yng Nghymru

ADSS Cymru Response to

The National Assembly for Wales'
Children and Young People Committee's

Inquiry into the work of the Children and
Family Court Advisory and Support
Service in Wales (CAFCASS Cymru).

Introduction

The Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru) is the acknowledged professional leadership organisation for Social Services in Wales. It represents the interests of the 21 statutory Directors of Social Services and the heads of services (adults, children and business) that support them in delivering Social Services responsibilities and accountabilities, across the twenty-two Councils in Wales. Its primary purpose is to support social care & health policy development and formulation, and thus, provide a national voice for the care and protection of adults and children in vulnerable situations in Wales.

ADSS Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond on behalf of the local government family to your inquiry into the work of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in Wales (CAFCASS Cymru). We are overall very positive about the nature of the changes underway in CAFCASS Cymru, and while it is clearly a journey value the strengthened professional relationship that now exists between CAFCASS Cymru and Social Services.

ADSS Cymru has a much improved and consistent interface with the operational services within CAFCASS Cymru across all regions and notes that working relationships have improved significantly since the CSSIW inspection. Our engagement at a strategic level with CAFCASS Cymru and critically the CEO has improved significantly and it is evident that this has had an extremely positive impact upon the quality and consistency of services delivered to children and their families.

In developing our response we have consulted with ADSS Cymru members, in particular the Heads of Children's Services responsible for the planning and delivery of services to children and young people. The response submitted provides a professional social services and social care perspective.

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The Committee has informed us that they wish to review

- Progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) inspection of November 2010 and the subsequent organisational restructure of CAFCASS Cymru;
- How effectively CAFCASS Cymru is delivering its services in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for example user engagement, decision-making in the best interests of the child;
- How effectively CAFCASS Cymru is delivering its role in the provision of child contact centres;
- The implications of the Family Justice Review and its effect on the work of CAFCASS Cymru.

Accordingly, we have responded to the above review questions, in turn.

ADSS Cymru Response

1. Progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) inspection of November 2010 and the subsequent organisational restructure of CAFCASS Cymru.

Our response:

- 1.1 CAFCASS Cymru has made structural changes which have improved consistency in the delivery of services across Wales which has also significantly improved the working relationship between CAFCASS and Local Authorities.
- 1.2 CAFCASS Cymru has demonstrated its commitment driven by its CEO to renegotiate and strengthen relationships through regular meetings between the Heads of Service of CAFCASS Cymru and Local Authority Children's Services.
- 1.3 In addition, it is generally our experience that there is little or no delay in the appointment of Guardians in Public Law proceedings cases.

2. How effectively CAFCASS Cymru is delivering its services in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for example user engagement, decision-making in the best interests of the child.

Our response:

- 2.1 The 2010 CSSIW Inspection Report judged CAFCASS Cymru as 'Inadequate' in the areas of 'Performance Management', 'User Engagement' and 'Partnerships' (1). Since then, we believe that CAFCASS has made significant progress in developing and sharing performance information with local authorities which is supporting and informing joint service development and improvement.
- 2.2 Regarding consistent services to children and young people it appears that a guardian's actual contact time with children and young people during the course of the Public law proceedings varies between practitioners. Local Authority staff report that the majority of CAFCASS Guardians as 'very good' in terms of working with LAs and also around the work they do with children and their parents. We are aware that this was a criticism in the CSSIW report, and on balance, the CAFCASS officers are usually experienced with a very sound knowledge base and a comprehensive understanding of children's needs. There are now clear mechanisms in place at an operational and strategic level to address and resolve issues in a timely and effective manner.
- 2.3 We believe that the CAFCASS Cymru website could be enhanced by having a dedicated area for children and young people. Although there is a one page children and young person's complaints leaflet there appears to be no key online information designed for children and young people about the role of CAFCASS Cymru and Guardians. The use of social media may help support the CSSIW's recommendation for CAFCASS Cymru to:

"...develop and implement systematic user feedback and evaluation, including regular feedback from children and young people which contributes to change in practice and policy" (2)

- 2.4 A valued improvement is the interface between the local authorities and the CAF/CASS Operational Manager. This proactive engagement on the part of CAF/CASS Cymru is very welcome. In addition, the higher level engagement across Wales led by CAF/CASS Cymru's CEO has also been very positive and productive.

3. How effectively CAF/CASS Cymru is delivering its role in the provision of child contact centres.

Our response:

- 3.1 We are aware that CAF/CASS Cymru has introduced an all-Wales approach to the provision of child contact services in Wales, by appointing the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) as the network manager for Wales. However, we have little information where it operates child contact centres in Wales.
- 3.2 We are aware that Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas AM, recently announced changes to the funding of child contact services in Wales, in order to ensure consistent, high-quality provision across the country, (September 2012). However, the CAF/CASS Cymru contact centres are used primarily for private law cases, and even in private law cases Guardians are often keen to use local authority contact centres if social services are involved. Local Authorities cannot provide this service, due to resource limitations, unless they are already working with the family.

4. Implications of the Family Justice Review and its effect on the work of CAF/CASS Cymru.

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Our response:

- 4.1 It is much too early in the implementation of the Family Justice Review's recommendations to assess the impact of the FJ review. However, the tripartite forum (comprising CAF/CASS Cymru, ADSS Cymru and HM Court & Tribunal Service) is proactively working together to drive forward the changes required to support the recommendations set out in the FJR. There are early signs that changes are taking place in court proceedings including a greater focus on resolving cases within 26 weeks and a more proportionate response to appointing expert witnesses.
- 4.2 A combination of high numbers of proceedings and new timescales to bring cases to conclusion may lead to increased pressure on CAF/CASS Cymru.
- 4.3 In addition, the reduction of the use of experts may result in the nature and content of the Guardian's report avoiding a repetition of information already presented in other documents and a greater concentration on providing a more analytical, evidence based assessment of the child or young person's circumstances, which is welcomed.

END

Conclusion

With regard to CAFCASS Cymru there has been a very positive change in structure, direction, leadership, data sharing, performance management and partnership and, that this is manifest in our joint development of a joint work programme to address the issues CSSIW has identified among others of mutual concern. Our joint priority is planning for the implementation of the FJR and the local FJ Board and on collectively improving performance as an urgent objective within that.

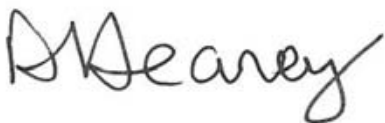
ADSS Cymru acknowledges, alongside other key players, that we are at the beginning of a journey with CAFCASS Cymru. Essential building blocks are now in place, and as mentioned above, we value the strengthened professional relationship that now exists between CAFCASS Cymru and Social Services. Our ultimate goal is to jointly ensure long term positive outcomes for children and young people in vulnerable situations in Wales.

We look forward to presenting oral evidence to the CYP Committee later this month.

References:

1. CSSIW Inspection of CAFCASS Cymru, November 2010, p.7
2. Ibid., p.12

Signed:

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A unified professional and strategic leadership voice for social services in Wales
Llais arweinyddiaeth proffesiynol a strategol unedig ar gyfer y gwasanaethau cymdeithasol yng Nghymru