



Edward Timpson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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DCSs of Local Authorities

April 2014

Dear Director,

FAMILY JUSTICE REFORMS (22 APRIL) AND PUBLICATION OF THE STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON COURT ORDERS AND PREPROCEEDINGS

Today marks the introduction of the Single Family Court and it is also the day on which the 26 week timescale for care proceedings, as expressed in the new Public Law Outline (PLO), ceases to be a pilot and becomes law.

Last September, I wrote to thank local authorities for your hard work in developing the necessary infrastructure to implement the PLO pilot. I recognise that, for some local authorities, changing practice to deliver a more streamlined system has been extremely challenging. I'm sure, though, that you are as heartened as I am to know that, as a direct result of these changes, cases are now completing at an average of 33.4 weeks, down from an average of 55 weeks when the Family Justice Review reported in November 2011. This is concrete evidence that the work you have done to align with the PLO has contributed to better outcomes for children.

In addition, the revised version of the statutory guidance on Court Orders and Pre-Proceedings was published on 16 April. The guidance explains changes to legislation in the light of the new Children and Families Act, and includes new chapters on Pre-Proceedings and Adoption. I'm grateful to all those who responded to the consultation and to those who have contributed to its development, which has ensured that the guidance is as useful as possible in supporting you in your work.

Looking ahead, DfE has commissioned the development of a suite of on-line materials which outline changes to the legislation, and which are intended to support social work practice. The materials are due to be published in the summer, alongside a pilot version of the ADCS/ Cafcass Social Work

Evidence Template, which aims to bring greater consistency to the evidence produced for courts, and which many of you have commented on as part of the consultation on statutory guidance. I'm grateful to Anthony Douglas, CEO of Cafcass, for leading this development.

Finally, I'd like to thank ADCS and Cafcass for their work to support local authorities in introducing the PLO and in producing the statutory guidance. In particular, I'd like to thank Andrew Webb as out-going President of ADCS. Andrew's commitment and leadership over this critical period have been central to the positive changes we are seeing, and I'm grateful for his efforts, energy and expertise. I welcome Alan Wood, Director of Children's Services at Hackney Council, in his new role as ADCS President for 2014-2015, and look forward to working with ADCS over the coming year.

I thank you again for all your hard work in implementing improvements, and I look forward with optimism to a time when we can genuinely say that, together, we have transformed the prospects of children in care.

Yours sincerely,
Edward

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