



THE FAMILY JUSTICE COUNCIL

Meeting held on Sunday 9 April 2006

Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2006 were approved. All the action points had been dealt with, although the following matters arose:

- Marilyn Mornington gave an update on the proposed training DVD on domestic violence. The content of the package was now well advanced and she would be discussing the question of finance with DCA/HMCS.
- The Chair wished to record his thanks to Corinne May-Chahal for having co-ordinated the Council's response to the CAFCASS consultation paper.
- The new FJC website was now up and running.

Building closer links with the Local Family Justice Councils:

- A guidance document on sponsorship of LFJCs was circulated to members who would contact Julian Owen to inform him of the area of their preference.
- Julian Owen proposed to start a newsletter for national and local council members which would be a useful vehicle for communicating new initiatives and developments in the family justice system: good practice, events etc. A draft first edition would be put to the Executive Committee by 8 May with publication before 22 May. Members were asked to provide Julian with any items by the end of April.
- A database of all LFJC members would be established as soon as possible.

Review of Committees

There would now be three main committees: Children in Safeguarding Proceedings (Children Act 1989 and Adoption Act 2002); Children in Families (Children Act 1989 and Family Law Act 1996); and Money and Property (Matrimonial Causes Act 1973). Below these would be a horizontal structure of committees and working parties covering topics such as transparency, experts, education and training and domestic violence.

Finally, it was agreed that the Executive Committee, chaired by Lord Justice Thorpe, might consist of the chairs of the 3 main committees (or their nominees), Judith Masson, a nominee from the Experts Committee, Bruce Clark and Mark Ormerod.

Government funding for Contact Centres

The Chair drew attention to concern over the grant awarded to the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC).

To summarise the current position on funding of contact centres, Bruce Clark said that there were 30-40 supervised contact centres across the country, including the 14 new supervised contact centres that were now receiving their third and final year's worth of funding support from the DfES. A small number of the pre-existing supervised centres had made known to the DfES the funding pressures that they were experiencing. Funding of £3m was available to support child contact services, including those provided by child contact centres, in 2006-07, and £4.5m was available for 2007-08. As well as resourcing the final year of funding to the child contact centres, these resources were available in 2006-07 to design, pilot and develop new services such as the contact activities provided for in the Children and Adoption Bill. The money would also be available in 2006-07 to enable CAFCASS to develop its capacity to commission the new services once the Bill was implemented.

The support given to the 14 new supervised child contact centres was intended to fill in some of the 'gaps in the map' that existed across England at that time, though it was important to recognise that CAFCASS, and its predecessor bodies, had long provided support to many of the small, volunteer-based, supported child contact centres (which might number as many as 300). The funding position beyond March 2008 was not known, as the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 had yet to consider the issue.

Lord Justice Wall's report on domestic violence and child protection

It was agreed that the issues raised would be carefully considered by the Private Law/Domestic Violence Committees and recommendations made to the full Council.

The voice of the child

The Chair drew the Council's attention to the transcript of his speech to the UK Association of Women Judges on 27 March concerning the attendance of children at court. The topic was being considered by the Voice of the Child working group which would report to the Council in October.