

Family Justice Network for Wales
Summary Note of Meeting
Tuesday 9 July 2013

The fourth meeting of the Family Justice Network (FJN) took place on 9 July 2013, chaired by Albert Heaney, Director of Social Services Wales.

The Network noted the update on key data collected from Welsh Government, HMCTS and CAF/CASS Cymru, that the work was largely complete and that a final report on the family justice data analytical project would be compiled. It was noted that research on looked after children had been published. Further discussion took place on the potential use of a survey of users in the Family Justice System and how this could be achieved. There were reports of an increase in private law cases and further analysis was being undertaken by HMCTS. Discussion took place on how the Network should monitor the whole system and ascertain whether the 26 week target in court was not adversely impacting on other areas and a joint meeting of the FJN sub-groups would be convened to consider further.

Consultation on the development of standards for expert witnesses was due to close shortly and members of the Network were encouraged to respond. A successful multi-disciplinary event on experts had taken place with one Local Family Justice Board in May, with further events planned for later in the year.

An update was provided on the proposals for workforce development which, in the shorter term, focused on equipping social workers in readiness for system reform, with initial briefings for the workforce on the implications of the family justice review and revised Public Law Outline (PLO) scheduled to take place before October.

The key themes emerging from the Stakeholder Engagement Event, held in Merthyr Tydfil in March, were discussed. These included the voice of children and young people (CYP) in the system, with the need to ensure organisations / professionals are speaking directly to, listening and taking account of the views of CYP; the need for appropriate information (through a number of mediums); and key elements of Workforce training – the need to improve skills in assessments, interfaces with court and in communicating and engaging with CYP.

The FJN noted progress against actions in the current Action Plan and considered future key actions in the development of a refreshed Action Plan, including work on experts, workforce, data, revised PLO implementation, development of national protocols, and a mechanism for CYP to engage with the Network. This Action Plan would also factor in the themes from the Stakeholder Engagement event. The proposed actions were accepted with the inclusion of actions in relation to Private Law cases.

It was noted that the revised PLO had now been issued and was available on the Ministry of Justice website. Model templates had been developed in England and similar templates were under consideration in Wales.