



## Delivering eCAF for Improved Children's Services

### Benefits Summary

- More efficient child assessments enhance service quality
- Increased confidentiality protects client integrity
- Accurate audit trail ensures effective service delivery
- Improved inter-agency working through information sharing
- Closer alignment with Every Child Matters government ethos

### Executive Summary

Wandsworth is leading the adoption of eCAF to improve children's services with a software solution which improves multi-agency working and enhances the quality and efficiency of children's services. The solution was also the basis for successful Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funding to develop a fully compliant eCAF system by March 2007.

### Overview

London Borough of Wandsworth wanted to improve children's welfare within the borough by implementing a new system that would effectively deliver the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) requirements set down by the DCSF and support the Every Child Matters ethos of services working together in a multi-agency system. Wandsworth helped to design eCAF, a complete assessment management tool.

The new eCAF system means that assessment information is held securely in a central place, making service provision more accurate and efficient, providing a better audit trail and ultimately supporting the Every Child Matters ethos of services working together to form a 'multi-agency' for the good of the child. On the basis of its work, Wandsworth also received a grant from the DCSF in August 2006 to further develop the eCAF system and achieve full DCSF compliance by March 2007.

### The Challenge – Improving child well-being

Uncovering the need for improved integration and accountability across children's services has led to a new approach to the well-being of children in the UK. Triggered by events like the Victoria Climbié tragedy, the Government's Every Child Matters green paper and the Children's Act 2004 have since provided the legislative backbone for developing more effective children's services. Part of the change has been the introduction of the CAF, created to ensure a standardized approach to conducting the assessment of a child's additional needs and deciding how these needs should be met.

The Government has set down a deadline of the end of 2008, by which time all local authority areas are expected to have implemented CAF. London Borough of Wandsworth was one of 12 local authorities hand picked by the DCSF to trial the CAF during 2005 and 2006, to identify any early lessons and enable them to share good practice and help with further development. "We considered that the only way to deliver CAF effectively would be to e-enable it, as it would be almost impossible to manage a paper-based version," said Helen Miriam, CAF co-ordinator of Wandsworth Council.

### The Solution – eCAF, a complete assessment management tool for children’s services

Wandsworth partnered with the UK’s leading provider of integrated childcare solutions, which already provided the Council with software applications, to support its Sure Start Children’s Centres.

The CAF system was developed to provide a complete assessment management tool for the Council and other agencies involved in children’s services operating in the borough. The partnership took just four months to design and implement the new system, which was named eCAF. During this time, Wandsworth continued with the CAF trial, but was struggling to efficiently manage its new processes without the eCAF system.

“We literally breathed a sigh of relief when the eCAF system was ready to run. It was so easy to use and cut down on a heavy paper-based process, enabling us to share information without having to make multiple copies of assessments for meetings or post documents which could compromise confidentiality,” Miriam explained.

Wandsworth Council subsequently became one of the first councils in the country to e-enable CAF and, since the DCSF trial was completed in April 2006, it has continued to roll out the eCAF system to further pilot areas in the borough.

### The Benefits – A central, secure system for children’s service providers in Wandsworth

The benefit of e-enablement of CAF is being witnessed on a daily basis by Wandsworth. A key rationale for CAF is to ensure that any child assessed and identified as requiring additional needs is dealt with in the most efficient and confidential manner possible. The eCAF system holds the assessment form securely in a central place, avoiding the need to make multiple copies for each child’s service provider. It allows the practitioner leading the child’s assessment to identify on a central system if additional needs have been previously requested. By enabling service requests online, practitioners can quickly communicate to the relevant service without the need to chase responses, whilst also enabling the Council’s CAF co-ordinator to keep a track of responses from service providers.

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“We are actually helping to dispel the myth that services can sometimes decline requests from practitioners, as to date all of the services we work with have been extremely responsive to requests via the web-based system. Previously, any refusals would have been difficult to monitor and there was no holistic view of how services could operate together for the benefit of a child’s additional needs,” explained Miriam.

“The Council also has a much better overview of the services active in its borough. Through eCAF, we are finding that the agencies we work with have a better understanding of a child’s needs. This ultimately supports the Every Child Matters

ethos of services working together for the good of the child,” said Miriam.

From the outset, the eCAF system was designed to sit outside the various case management systems used in the borough. The DCSF later supported this approach with compliant eCAF/systems required to be ‘stand-alone’ rather than integrated into existing case management systems. The development of the eCAF system has always run hand-in-hand with the underlying requirements set down by the DCSF. Recognising this, Wandsworth Council received capital grants from the DCSF in August 2006, to further develop the eCAF system and achieved full DCSF compliance by March 2007. The objective of the funding is to absorb part of the initial development costs to ensure that the fully compliant version of the eCAF system is available to other local authorities at a lower cost.

“The eCAF system piloted in the borough has already demonstrated that it works well in delivering CAF objectives. It has been so well received by all the agencies involved that we will continue to roll out the system to other areas in Wandsworth and we can share our knowledge and expertise with other local authorities,” adds Miriam.

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