

5.16 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Minister for Children and Families regarding the proportion of the budget for Children and Families spent on early intervention and prevention (OQ.73/2026).

Will the Minister state what proportion of the budget for Children and Families is currently spent on early intervention and prevention, and advise whether any investigation has been undertaken by his department into the impact of increasing spending in this area with a view to reducing statutory interventions; and if no such work has been undertaken, will he commit to doing so?

Connétable R.P. Vibert of St. Peter (The Minister for Children and Families):

I thank the Deputy for this question. As Minister for Children and Families, I can assure the Deputy that I remain committed to ensuring early intervention approaches remain a key part of the wider service provision for children and families. I can say that it is a matter very close to my own heart and I am saddened by those young people who are in that late intervention stage who end up quite often in the area of criminality and imprisonment. As the Deputy will recall, the Assembly adopted the Children and Young People (Jersey) Law in February 2022 and this law placed an emphasis on early help and securing a team around the child which could respond to the challenges at an early stage. We were aware that early intervention in the past had been much talked about but not necessarily undertaken. The current proportion of the budget for Children and Families spent on early intervention is approximately 20 per cent of our budget, which equates to £12 million. This figure does not include the wider Government investment in early help secured through commission arrangements with organisations such as Brighter Futures, Family Nursing and Home Care and Jersey Childcare Trust, to name just a few. Taken together, they provide a comprehensive set of early interventions available to children and families in the Island. The Children's Improvement and Transformation Plan and the allocated investment remain at an early stage. The plan is scheduled to continue until 2030. As part of the plan, there is commitment to continually reviewing the impact and improvements being made and the amount being spent on early intervention services. I can confirm that that work is being done and therefore we do not have to commit to anything new.

5.16.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I am grateful to the Minister for that response. Could he explain what evidence he has that the investment in preventative services is reducing referrals, re-referrals and entry into care?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I do not have figures on that with me but we do continually monitor these areas. Things are at a very early stage. I have to say that I do not like referring to the past but the fact is that what we see now is late intervention, or we see too much late intervention simply because the early intervention did not take place in the last decade and that really does sadden me. I am happy to provide the Deputy with further information from my officers. Thank you very much.

5.16.2 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central:

In his answer, the Minister referred to a number of other third sector organisations that help with early intervention. My understanding is that sometimes his department can refer people to those as part of the early intervention process. What kind of contract or agreement does his department have with such organisations to ensure that they can provide those services?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Those contracts are currently reviewed. I do not have details of the contracts themselves but what we are moving to is, rather than having grants to the organisations, payments for specific services, the contracts will be tailored to that to ensure that the money we give is being spent on the services that we want done by those organisations.

5.16.3 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Is the Minister confirming that it is the intention to move to a commissioning model with all of those organisations that he mentioned?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Certainly as many as possible. I am certainly aware of work ongoing with some of them and I think that it is important that we do not just ... in the past grants have been given. We did not necessarily pin down exactly what services that were being paid for and I think it is important that we do know that. I do not know if the Deputy minds, but I have got a statistic from the U.K. on spending which came out in June from a policy adviser to the U.K. Government, and I think this is quite interesting. They do not have the figure for early intervention but they know that 82 per cent of the budget is being spent on late intervention. When you think that leaves just 18 per cent for all the rest of their services, I think that we are doing significantly better than that.

5.16.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour:

One of the services that the Minister mentioned in his previous answer was Brighter Futures who I agree do an amazing job with the preventative work that they do. I note that earlier this year their C.E.O. (chief executive officer) I believe made a statement to the media that the charity was at risk of not being able to support vulnerable families because costs were soaring. Could the Minister - he was the Minister at that time also - outline what he has done to support that charity since that statement was made?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I think we go back to looking at commission services and we are working with Brighter Futures. I am due a briefing from my officers on the work that they have been undertaking with looking particularly at that charity. At this point I cannot provide any further information but I think we could provide the Deputy with an update fairly soon.

5.16.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I will slightly rephrase the question. That statement was made by Brighter Futures in April this year. What has changed between April and now in regard to how Government is interacting with that charity or supporting or commissioning them?

The Bailiff:

This is slightly beyond the question, Deputy Doublet, because it is about a specific charity. So, Minister, if you cannot answer it, I understand.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I can deal with that very briefly in that I have already answered it because we are working with that organisation to look at that particular issue and the funding. Yes, they made that statement in April and certainly our officers have been working with them to see what funding we might be able to allocate to them.

5.16.6 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Could the Minister describe what assessment has been made of unmet need among those families who do not meet the threshold for statutory social care?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I think wherever possible we would be trying to help those families irrespective of where they find themselves. I have not got any definite information on that area but, once again, I am happy to provide that.

