

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY
THE CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND HOME AFFAIRS
PANEL ON TUESDAY 11th NOVEMBER 2025**

S.R.4/2025 ‘What protection do children in Jersey have from online harms?’

I just want to say a few words about the recently published online harms review. It’s a busy time so for any states members who have not read our 168 Page review, I’ll mention some of the main findings and recommendations. Also, the reasons for this review. As I expect we are all aware there are grave concerns regarding the welfare of children online, especially when it comes to social media. It’s my duty as the CEHA panel chair along with panel colleagues to raise issues which we feel are not being addressed and this was one of them.

We gathered many submissions and held multiple hearings. What we discovered when we started looking into this last year was that there was no overall plan to deal with this problem, and there still isn’t.

Jersey is often considered a safe place to bring up children, but now that children spend so much time in the online world, Jersey is just the same as anywhere else regarding dangers. We’ve seen this in several court cases this year, in which children were recruited into acting as mules in a drugs business, and other children were sexually abused by a man pretending to be a teenage boy online, building relationships on Snapchat in order to meet them, as they thought, but they were actually being groomed by an adult.

There are also the effects on children from seeing terrible things that they don’t have the ability to comprehend, causing anxiety, self-harm and even suicide.

Of course, children do grow up now in a digital world and need to learn how to deal with these matters, and the review does recommend that children become digitally literate and understand digital citizenship, to be able to benefit from all the good that the online world can bring.

Unfortunately, the platforms have not shown sufficient care for children’s welfare and as stated by the UNCRC that means government must step in and legislate. And yet Jersey does not have the same safeguards in place as other jurisdictions. The decision to not accept a permissive extent clause that would have included Jersey in the UK’s Online Safety act was made without any consideration of children’s rights, and without any consideration by other ministers or scrutiny, not even the recording of a ministerial decision. This happened in late 2022. The panel has since been told that the plan when refusing the PEC was for Jersey to make its own legislation to protect children online. So nearly three years later where are we? Well, there’s been no plan, nor any legislation based on the needs of children. Yes, we have some legislation coming into effect soon due to the VAWG report, but that leaves huge gaps in protection for children online.

One example in which Jersey differs from other places is that there is no age verification on adult sites. There is in the UK. But children here, being curious, can search for a major porn site for example, and what they would see on the screen in Jersey is just a tick box to say you’re over 18. So a ten-year-old child could tick that and the next thing they would see is a series of porn videos with their titles. On the day that age verification measures came into force in the uk, we checked whether they were also in place in Jersey, and they were not. And on clicking on to the site of probably the most well-known porn website that day, the major video story was titled, and I can’t use the actual words, but along the lines of “my stepdaughter lets me have sex with her”. Now how

would that make a 10-year-old child feel who lives in one of our many blended families, about relationships with their stepparents? And the evidence shows that due to children's curiosity that they will access this stuff at a young age. Surveys show that one in ten children will have accessed adult porn sites by the time they are nine years old.

As if the online dangers are not enough already, the advancement of technology is so rapid that new dangers are appearing as we speak. AI chatbots are becoming very popular with children. These have not been designed with children's safety in mind, and we have probably all heard of the 14-year-old boy who recently killed himself, having become obsessed with intense messages from a chatbot. His mother is now suing the platform. One wonders how Jersey's government's legal position would be viewed if something tragic like this were to happen here, considering our lack of legislation.

This is an evidence-based review. There are no opinions in the review's findings and recommendations, just fact. It would have been nice for the panel to offer up our views and say we believe in having our own legislation, or conversely the panel believes we should accept the permissive extent clause. Or we could say that we believe in the ban on phones in schools, or we do not believe in that. We have refrained from making comment. I repeat this is an evidence-based review, and the next step is for the government to follow the recommendations and make some difficult decisions.

These recommendations call for a comprehensive online safety strategy, for a gap analysis of legislation, for work with public health to deal with the physical dangers of prolonged screen time, and on suicide prevention, for digital literacy support for parents, updates to counter cyber bullying, and many more.

I want to thank my fellow panel members, and all those who contributed to this review, and of course the excellent panel officers.

Coming back to the fact that children have been left without the same protections here as children have in the UK or other countries, what we didn't expect to find as a panel, was that the government, and previous governments, have not properly embedded children's welfare into policy making. This means that major decisions affecting children's welfare can be made without any thought to the effect on them. We recommend that all policy considerations should be subject to a formal assessment of children's rights at an early stage. This we think should be urgently considered.

What we are also hoping for is an acceptance from the government that these are systemic failings that need to be addressed. I really hope there is not going to be a defensive response to this because as elected representatives of the people we are here to act in their best interests.