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Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Children and Families

Thursday, 10th September 2026

Panel:

Deputy V. Li of St. Helier North (Chair)

Connétable M.A. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair)

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine of St Mary, St Ouen and St Peter

Connétable D.G. Curtis of St. Saviour

Connétable T. Palmer of St. Lawrence

Witnesses:

Connétable R.P. Vibert of St. Peter, The Minister for Children and Families

Deputy M.R. Ferey of St. Saviour, Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1)

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central, Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2)

Ms. D. Marriott, Director, Children's Services

Mr. K. Posner, Interim Chief Officer, C.Y.P.E.S.

Mr. A. Heaven, Assistant Director, Children's Policy

[12:31]

Deputy V. Li of St. Helier North (Chair):

Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. This is the quarterly public hearing of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel with the Minister for Children and Families. Today is 10th September, and this is our first public hearing of the year. I am Victoria Li. I am the Deputy for St. Helier North and I have the privilege to chair this panel. So our remit covers the Ministerial briefs, including Children and Families, Education and Lifelong Learning, and Justice and

Home Affairs. Today's hearing is the first of our quarterly hearings with the Minister for Children and Families. This is also my first public hearing, as you just be aware of that. So I hope that you will forgive me if I keep us to the time rather firmly. Just before we begin, a few housekeeping points. This hearing will be filmed and streamed live. The recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. All electronic devices, including mobile phones and computers, should be switched to silent. I would also ask that any members of the public who have joined us in the room or joined us online ... join us in the room today, do not interfere in the proceeding as soon as the hearing is closed. I think we do not have anyone join us in the room today from the general public. I hope that the majority of the people will enjoy the air display and maybe will join us online. So for the purpose of the recording and the transcript, I will be grateful if everyone who speaks could ensure that you state your name and roles. Also please be close to the microphone if you are invited to speak. So now if I could ask my colleagues to introduce themselves in turn and then the Ministers and then his officers.

Connétable M.A. Labey of Grouville (Vice-Chair):

Thank you. My name is Mark Labey. I am the Connétable of Grouville, and I am the vice-chair of this panel.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine of St Mary, St Ouen and St Peter:

I am Deputy Chris Rebindaine. I am Deputy for St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter.

Connétable D.G. Curtis of St. Saviour:

Good afternoon. David Curtis, Connétable of St. Saviour. If I could declare an interest. I am related to a child in the care of the Minister, so I am conflicted.

Connétable T. Palmer of St. Lawrence:

I am Tina Palmer, Connétable for St. Lawrence.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Constable Richard Vibert, Minister for Children and Families.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):

Deputy Malcolm Ferey, Assistant Minister for Children and Families.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

Deputy Catherine Curtis, Assistant Minister for Children and Families.

Interim Chief Officer, C.Y.P.E.S.:

I am Keith Posner. I am Interim Chief Officer in C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills).

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:
Good afternoon. My name is Andrew Heaven. I am the Assistant Director of Children's Policy.

Director, Children's Services:
I am Donna Marriot, Director of Children's Services.

Research and Project Officer:
I am Ros Sharp, and I am the Research and Project officer supporting the panel.

Committee Panel Officer:
Kaya Camara, committee panel officer, supporting the panel.

Private Secretary, The Minister for Children and Families:
Abbie Moore, private secretary for the Minister for Children and Families.

Communications Officer, States Greffe:
Matt Wellman, Communications Officer, States Greffe.

Deputy V. Li:
Thank you so much for your introduction. Before we start, Minister, I want to say a few words about what our panel is looking for today. Because this is our first public hearing with you and I wanted to be open about how we intend to work. Our interest is always in the outcomes for children. So I think it is whether children in Jersey are actually better off and whether we can demonstrate that with the evidence. We are going to have a great deal of ground to cover in the next 2 hours. So some of the questions we may not be able to reach today or some of the questions you possibly would wish to have with more details to be followed up in correspondence. So, Minister, shall we begin? Thank you. Minister, what are your top 5 priorities for this term?

The Minister for Children and Families:
Top 5 priorities. I think it might be difficult to say the top 5 priorities, but I can say, first of all, a couple of commitments I have made to the Assembly. One is to deliver £22 million in the Children's Services Improvement Programme, bringing services together around the child and strengthening early intervention. We know early intervention is key and we know that is an area we need to improve on. So I think that would be among my top 5. To increase foster care and residential capacity so that more children can be cared for safely in Jersey when they need it. To complete the

transformation of Greenfields and continue investment in specialist residential provision. So certainly those would be in that 5. Reduce dependency on agency staff and build a stable and highly skilled permanent workforce. That is work that we continue to do and have done for many years, and the numbers have improved on permanent workforce. Some areas we were down to a third of staff being permanent I think only a short 2½ years ago. Now, in those areas, we are up to 70 per cent. So that is work in progress. Reducing waiting times for neurodevelopment assessments and strengthening support for neurodiverse children and fully implement the new mental health strategies; so I think that is in my top 5 as well. Ensure the successful opening of the Ann Street Youth Centre and continue investing in prevention and youth services. The Ann Street Youth Centre was, of course, one of my priorities 4 years ago and that is coming to delivery. Certainly the Y.E.S. (Youth Enquiry Service) centre will be open in early 2027. I think, is it January?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
Yes, it should be January 2027.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Then follow on from that, middle of 2028, we will have the youth centre itself. So that will be a dramatic improvement for children in the St. Helier area where there are no youth clubs. Strengthen corporate parenting in Jersey by using the Corporate Parenting Board to drive collective responsibility. I think that is very important, that people recognise that they are corporate parents and they must consider that when they are undertaking any changes or improvements. Performance from that is measured to regular oversight ... sorry, supported by outcome data and performance reporting. We will continue to advocate for children's rights by promoting a rights-based approach to policy-making, ensuring children's voices are heard. So I think within there I had 4 that were in my top 5. The final one is legislative, looking at the Adoption Law, which dates back to 1961. It is long overdue for review and improvement. That is something that I want to do within my next 4 years.

Deputy V. Li:
Thank you so much, and thank you for the details as well. So what is the long-term vision that you see for the department?

The Minister for Children and Families:
The long-term vision is the best outcome for every child in Jersey, and that is what we have got to strive for. We must always strive for the best outcome for every child and work towards that.

Deputy V. Li:

To achieve that long-term vision, how do you see ... what are the biggest challenges now you are facing?

The Minister for Children and Families:

We have got key areas we are working on. Early intervention is obviously ... we have made improvements in the last 2½ years. We have moved from talking about it to actually taking action. However, we are thwarted with recruitment, for instance, on residential staff. We have got a new package and that is looking promising, and we are in the process of introducing that. So that is one of the things that is working. We have seen improvements in some key areas of missing children. But getting our residential homes, we are developing new residential homes, we need the staff to put within those homes. Early intervention, we now have a single point of entry, the Hub. Again, for the first time, there is actually data collected on the number of referrals into there, the outcomes, and I think those are progressing. So I think one of my key areas is early intervention.

Deputy V. Li:

So with all the vision that you were talking about and the improvement programme that you are going to put into place, what would you want to see the outcomes that you are going to achieve in the next 4 years?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Specifically in that area one would like to see a reduction in the number of children that are late intervention. Really because of the, perhaps, policies and history of the past 10 years, unfortunately we have got a number of children that we are working through and who have been failed with early intervention. It is working with those children for the best outcome for them. But seeing a reduction in late intervention is something that I strive for. I do not know if, Donna, you want to say ... it might be useful.

Director, Children's Services:

I think that trying to reduce the escalation of need at the earliest point of intervention, so identifying things early, trying to then put support into families and trying to respond to children's needs at that earlier point. I think it is across the whole system really. I think this part of it is just one part of a bigger thing. Whether that is children getting really early help, schools being able to have the support to be able to get those children the early help, the wider play and support there is about earlier intervention, good youth services. I think all of those things are part of a much wider strategy about reducing need, responding to need early, reducing risk.

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:

I think the Minister might recall in terms of the C.O.E.C. (Children's Outcomes Executive Committee), and your chairmanship of C.O.E.C., you have oversight of the children's plan. Much of the priorities that you are talking about have found expression in Children and Families plan. So it is about, you will be pleased to hear, improving outcomes across a range of different areas of the child's life. So whether that is about education, whether that is about play and leisure, that is mental health, they are all featured there, and the Minister has oversight of those outcomes, as some of the programmes of work that go on to try and make improvements across the system.

The Minister for Children and Families:
It is not just Children's Services of course. The Youth Justice Strategy, which obviously is in Home Affairs, but again that is striving for the same outcome in trying to reduce early measures that prevent children eventually becoming part of the criminal system.

[12:45]

So it is not just Children's ... there are other areas which touch on early intervention and education as well.

Deputy V. Li:
I guess that is how you want to align yourself with the Government objectives.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes.

Deputy V. Li:
How do you describe that in your strategy of approaching other departments and trying to improve the service in general?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):
As I am Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, we can work closely together, can we not? So that is really handy.

Deputy V. Li:
How about other departments as well?

The Minister for Children and Families:
I have to sort of ... because youth strategy comes under B.A.S.C. (Building a Safer Community), and in the previous Government, because I was an Assistant Minister in Home Affairs, but I need to

re-establish some links so that I still get some briefings even though I am not the Assistant Minister, because the 2 are quite aligned in that we are both seeking early intervention. In fact some of the things we are doing you would not want to duplicate because both could introduce identical measures separately.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
Just for clarity, B.A.S.C. is an acronym for Building a Safer Community.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Sorry about that.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
Lots of good work going on there.

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:
Your portfolio cuts right across Government, Chair, and I think working you ... as the Minister was mentioning, some of that work is about influencing and getting alongside other Ministers in multi-Ministerial meetings. Whether that is about online safety, whether that is about safeguarding, whether that is about justice and youth justice. It is a really interesting portfolio that requires a deftness of touch, if you like, and influencing within those Ministerial meetings, does it not?

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
Minister, under your statutory obligations, Article 17 of the Children (Jersey) Law 2022 places responsibility for accommodating children, safeguarding and promoting their welfare on the Minister. So while you do not have operational control, do you accept that duty sits with you and not your officers?

The Minister for Children and Families:
Ultimately, yes, it has to sit with me. These are children in our care. I would never not consider it was my responsibility and to ensure that those children are adequately housed and looked after.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
So in practice how do you manage your accountability under that provision, given your reliance on the operational responsibilities of officers?

The Minister for Children and Families:
By regular dialogue with the director, visiting both the secure homes and non-secure homes and ensuring that they are the standard that one would expect, and monitoring the outcomes for children.

One of my greatest concerns is, while we are responsible, that we have had quite high volumes of missing children. That is improving now. I think that some of that comes back to the failure to have early intervention in the past. I can give you one very good example of where I personally have intervened for the safety of children when we had an area where children were putting themselves in danger, where they could have fallen a considerable distance and they were doing that on a regular basis. I personally ensured that safety measures were taken. I did not leave that to an officer. I was very concerned and I made it my responsibility to ensure that that was done.

Deputy V. Li:

So just to ensure that our panel, because we have some of the new panel members, including myself, to understand what is the definition of a missing child?

The Minister for Children and Families:

The definition of a missing child in Jersey is probably slightly different from the U.K. (United Kingdom) because to be missing in 45 square miles is difficult, but of course what would normally ... not every child ... well no, actually, I do not even think the majority of children that go missing are in our care. Large numbers are reported by their parents in that they have not returned home. In our case the majority of children where we are involved would be children who perhaps have not returned to the home or have insisted on leaving the home perhaps against our advice. Because of course legally we cannot stop a child from leaving the home.

Deputy V. Li:

I do not know if you go on LinkedIn, so I recently posted something on LinkedIn. What I was concerned is that because there were some missing bodyboarding on the Archirondel a couple of weeks ago, and then I think our Island did collectively wonderfully well sending the ambulance and sending the helicopters to search for those children because, again, the general public was really concerned about their safety. So is there any definition of how long the time, what is the time? Are they missing for 24 hours?

The Minister for Children and Families:

No.

Deputy V. Li:

Are we talking about 48 hours?

The Minister for Children and Families:

A much shorter period than that. The missing child ... I think I am right, Donna, if a child left one of our homes at early morning or whatever, then that would be reported immediately. Of course the police share in that safeguarding duty and they would immediately be looking for that child.

Director, Children's Services:
I think each ... if you are happy for me to ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes.

Director, Children's Services:
So each child or situation will be seen differently. If they are children in care they will have a plan; that plan will set out about the risks. We look with the police, we have something called a Philomena Protocol, which is dealt with by the police. That is how we determine whether children are missing or not. So they carry out that ... the police will carry out that assessment in their own right and then that is done with Children's Services. Then we have a daily missing meeting. That is a meeting where we have the multi-agency partnerships and police and Children's Services, Education, Health, all of the people ... the key partners operationally. They meet every morning and that meeting is to look at the children that have been missing or are missing, have been missing in that last 24-hour period. There is a real protocol around that; all of those children would be considered. Some of them might be considered that they are perhaps absent, so we know where they are. We do not want them to be where they are maybe, I do not know, or we are not worried about them because we know they are with their friend or with their relative. Then you would be looking at the children that we are more worried about that are really missing, that we do not know where their whereabouts are and we plan around that.

Deputy V. Li:
So may I just make a conclusion here, because again there is quite a lot of topic we need to cover.

Director, Children's Services:
It is quite complex.

Deputy V. Li:
Thank you so much for answering that. My understanding is that because, Minister, you were saying about the decreasing number of the missing child, which I am trying to understand is how do we measure that our number is going down?

Director, Children's Services:

So we measure ... so every day those children, they go on to our database and on our database we have a dashboard and that dashboard will show you the numbers of children missing every day. We would be able to show you that, if you look, our missing incidents. Certainly for children in care would have been much higher last year than they are now. It goes up and down depending on which children. So we track that over time so you can see what the trajectory and the trend is over time for children. So what we know is ... I think we have done quite a lot of work and learned a lot about how to respond better to our children in care, been more proactive about some of our work. A couple of few years ago we might have ... children might have gone missing and we would not have gone out proactively looking. Now the social workers and residential workers will go and search and try to find them, locate them, tempt them back. All of that work happens more proactively. So what we are seeing is a bit of a downward trend, but you will always have some children that go missing and some children that might go missing repeatedly. The trends will go up and down month on month, just depending on your children.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Very quickly, I can give you an indication. The number of missing episodes, so that is not the number of missing children because some children have gone missing multiple times, but in November 2025 we were running at 55 episodes a month. By July this year, it is down to 24. The number of children involved was 20 in November 2025, and in July this year it is 14. There have been months where it is as low as 7 children in the last year, and that is 7, 8 ... to see that in single figures, you certainly would not have seen that a year, 2 years ago. So there has been a dramatic ... and much of that is down to the staff working with the children.

Director, Children's Services:

I think some good work with the police as well. There is a lot more joining up about how we respond, together with the Youth Service and all of those people coming together. You might target locations that young people go to and things like that.

Deputy V. Li:

Thank you so much. I think we will possibly come with questions, and so we can carry on with this in correspondence. The reason why I am talking about these are the children that we can see physically in our ... we can see them but of course there is the space that we cannot see so we should ... this is where I think we are talking about the online harms, about the digital world. This is the territory that this panel knows well, particularly after the Scrutiny review for last year. Would the ... I am happy to move on.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Yes, indeed. Minister, I am going to move on to that subject of online harms. The gap analysis anchored to S.R.4/2025 was committed for December 2026. What gaps had already been identified between current Jersey law and protections children need, and is that date still firm?

The Minister for Children and Families:
I think the date is still firm but we have not got the outcome of that review yet, but I am expecting that. I have not been told anything that indicates that they will not meet that deadline.

The Connétable of Grouville:
What concrete cross-Government online safety actions have been delivered since recommendation 20 was partially accepted? How has the Ministerial group contributed to that? If they have, do you have any updates to provide the panel at this time?

The Minister for Children and Families:
The Ministerial group has just been reformed, and they had their first meeting this week. Certainly in the realm of looking at legislation, that is in the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development's port, but that is progressing and they are looking at legislation which will enable sites or platforms to be removed .... if there is harmful content, yes. That mirrors something that the U.K. Government are due to introduce. I can say that basically at the moment we are maintaining and promoting up-to-date guidance for parents, carers, schools and young people through DigiSafe Jersey. It is a shared responsibility. It is not just the Government's responsibility. Parents, schools, et cetera, all play a part in this. We are supporting awareness and education with partners such as the N.S.P.C.C. (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) and the Safeguarding Partnership. We work with schools. Obviously, we have had a ban on mobile phones which to some extent will help. But of course, as soon as they are out of school they will be on those devices. We are engaging with telecoms providers and we saw something from J.T. (Jersey Telecom) in the last week or so that they are looking at I.W.F. (Internet Watch Foundation). We are also monitoring development in other jurisdictions, including the U.K.

[13:00]

I think we have a perhaps stronger link to the U.K. now than we may have had in the past. Of course, the change in Prime Minister has also resulted in a change to that department. I think Andrew will be able to ... but it is not a separate area now, is it? It has been merged into a larger area, but hopefully that will not ...

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:
No, we have still got the contacts.

The Minister for Children and Families:

We have still got the contacts. I am looking at other jurisdictions. I am going to take a day out of my holidays when I am in Australia to go to Canberra and see a Shadow Minister about the introduction of the measures there under the under-16 ban and how that is progressing. So I will come back and be able to update people when I come back from holiday. Of course, as part of that, we have just touched on it where we are reviewing our legislative framework. I think looking at what other jurisdictions are doing is quite important. The U.K. is intending bringing in an under-16 ban. France was due to bring in an under-15 ban and, in fact, that seems to perhaps have been blocked already by one of their Assemblies who are worried about data sharing and measures like that, and privacy. So, with the best will in the world, you can introduce measures but you never know what roadblocks there might be. Also, we have to accept that whatever measures we bring in, determined young people will find a way around those.

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:

I am afraid so.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I know, Catherine, it is your area, you might want to ...

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

Yes, I was going to say that the meeting we had of the Online Harms Ministerial Group was a very good meeting because I think we are all in agreement now that there are a lot of good things that have already been done following the report, like the DigiSafe Jersey website. At last some of the telecoms providers or one of them is going to work with the Internet Watch Foundation.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think Sure already did. Sure already did.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

Yes. J.T. will do. So there has been quite a bit of progress, has there not? But I think also the Ministers in the group, we all agree that we have to work in with the national or international situation as well because of Jersey being so small and so on. Our next meeting is going to be in the first week of November and we have also said we are going to go look back at that Scrutiny report and go over the recommendations that were accepted, and see how things are progressing there as a catch up to see if there is anything else that we might be missing. Of course, we will soon have the gap analysis coming in, which will be really helpful as well. So I think I am quite optimistic about it at the moment.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):

So getting back to the first item that the Minister mentioned, which is data protection legislation. So there are some really quick wins in that legislation that we can switch on, and the Minister alluded to giving citizens more powers to have harmful content that relates to themselves removed from the internet. So if someone sees something, a picture of themselves which has been adjusted or is a picture that they do not want on there, is causing them harm or distress, they can contact that platform, get it removed within 24 hours. If it does not happen, they can then make contact with the Jersey Office of the Information Commissioner who will take that up on their behalf. So it empowers citizens to take control of information which is out there about themselves. It is not the whole of the picture, it is not the whole of the solution, but it is the first step that we can do to removing online harms that refer to individuals. So it is something that was seen as a quick win in the whole process. Of course we understand there is far more to be done and lots more, but it is something that we switched on fairly quickly.

The Minister for Children and Families:

We did not opt to go with the P.E.C. (permissive extent clause) some years ago. The door on that is pretty firmly closed, I established that.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):

Shall I just explain what the permissive extent clause is, which is legislation that automatically relates to Jersey from the U.K.

Deputy V. Li:

Yes. Yes, thank you.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Of course, had we gone for that … that is just an option, you would have … you did not have to take it up and there is nothing we can do about that. Now, I have explored that and the U.K. Ministers … quite rightly, there is no way of going back on it now. But what we do know is that they will assist us as much as they can. Of course, as a jurisdiction of 45 square miles, we do not have that clout that a country has into getting the big people like Meta and whatever to agree to anything that we might introduce. We have seen the case in America recently and, of course, if Jersey was to do something similar, well, it would not get anywhere. So it is a case of working with our counterparts, Andrew, and I think that is going well with the ...

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:

I think that conversations during the summer clarified where Jersey is in terms of its legislation. Jersey has its own legislative framework and it has, in the online space, been informed initially by some of the work of Violence Against Women and Girls, there has been a lot of catch-up legislation there in particular that relate to online harms. Assistant Minister Ferey is referring to take down legislation that is being drafted at this moment in time. You can see gradually over time there is a framework of legislation that is being erected, if you like, to respond to that. I think, as the Minister has said, the Law Commission's work will be pivotal here in understanding what we have got already and where our gaps are, and the Minister's aspirations of how they go in terms of ensuring that we have something that is credible, enforceable, proportionate to protect our children when they are online.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:

Minister, I like this question but you have half answered it already. So rather than rehash it and make a mess of it, some States Members went to an A.I. (artificial intelligence) workshop at J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) in June and there was a Dr Kaitlyn Regehr - apologies to her if I have got her name wrong - at U.C.L. (University College London) whose research fed into the U.K.'s Online Safety Act. She finds the core mechanisms for online harm sit at home, at the school, and with the policy maker. She argued that effective intervention requires regulation, standards, testing, as well as measures that address platform design itself. So the question was going to be: what consideration have you given to introducing restrictions on children's access to social media, but also A.I. tools in Jersey and disrupting algorithms, which would include age-based limits and other safeguards? I know a lot of focus is on the social media bit, but there is also a lot of concern about the A.I. element as well. So is that part of your consideration?

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is. Of course that was a big part of the cases in the U.K., this sort of constant … the algorithms are constantly working out what they might send you. So, yes, how we enforce that, though, is the difficult part for Jersey. I think that is where we are going to have to work with our counterparts in the U.K. and see to what extent they can assist us. It is extremely worrying, and I think Jersey is not alone in not being 100 per cent sure how we achieve that at this stage. Perhaps we need to learn from other small jurisdictions, because there are others, how we enforce the large people like Meta not to be constantly monitoring children's input in order to actually then tailor what they send them. I think it is an area where we have got a lot more work to do and a lot more work to find out from our counterparts about how they are tackling that. I cannot really … unless, Andrew, there is more that you can … but it is not easy to add to it.

Assistant Director, Children's Policy:

I think it is a shared challenge, is it not? I think the concern from Governments, families and young people themselves is that there are constant questions about the credibility of the checks that Meta, Facebook and what have you are doing. It is not thought to be robust, that is the worry. A challenge specifically with A.I. is that it is embedded in pretty much everything. I am looking round for computers and I cannot see any. It is embedded in everything, so what is the … how do you respond to that challenge from a policy and a legislative perspective? I hear about the importance of home, school and the legislative environment, and I think the Minister has alluded to that previously that this is going to be, and I think we are already seeing it in other jurisdictions, a very layered response. So, yes, it is about young people having agency and having an understanding about what is in front of them, what has been driven to them. It is about parents understanding, as best they can - spoken as a parent - who are learning about how to protect their children, advise their children and it is also about Government finding its space in terms of legislation about how to help. I think if you look at it globally, you can see different jurisdictions finding positions. So Australia being the obvious one.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
The other jurisdiction that we can learn from is Guernsey, and they have taken a slightly different route to us because they did accept the permissive extent clause into their jurisdiction, yet they have not switched on yet. So it will be interesting to see how their legislation develops and which way they decide to go in comparison to us. There is a good example of pan-Island working because we have the same challenges and perhaps we can work together to resolve some of them.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Malcolm has sort of said the thing that I avoided saying, but I did not avoid it on purpose because you do not want to be critical, but the permissive extent clause could have been taken up without it actually forcing us to actually go down that road. It gives you an option to accept … to then take it up later on. Unfortunately, on that one, we shut the door at the first hurdle.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
Yes, which is a shame.

The Minister for Children and Families:
But now Malcolm has said it, I might as well say it.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
I opened the door.

The Minister for Children and Families:
We shut the door too quickly.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):
That was partly what prompted the Scrutiny Panel to produce the online harms review.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
So when she was speaking at this conference, she also was talking about like under 3s, so even preschool education zone or whatever. Pending any legislation that we may want to bring in, is there support and training that you are hoping to be able to provide to parents in the meantime to try and guide?

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes, there is the work through the N.S.P.C.C. I cringe when I see parents - even, well under 3 - giving children an electronic device to basically amuse them or whatever while they are doing shopping or chatting or whatever, because there is a child perhaps of 2½ already to some extent addicted to pressing the buttons and getting up screens. That is quite worrying because if you start at that age and then you are later saying you are going to introduce bans, you have opened the door, have you not, right at the beginning? So I think there is something about educating families not to give children those devices at a very young age.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
So the Minister and I have visited the National Society for Protection of Cruelty to Children on a number of occasions and they have talked us through their programmes that obviously are pointed at children, but are also pointed at parents. So to show the safe use and the safe screen time, and interestingly, their view on an outright social media ban for under a certain age was not favourable because their view is you are better to teach people how to use something than to keep it out of reach of them until they become an age where they do not know what to do with it anyway.

[13:15]

Equally, you do not want to deskill children and young people, you do not want to separate them too far from digital devices because when they become adults they are all going to need to use digital devices. So teach them how to use it safely, teach them how to ask for help if they see something that they do not like or upsets them. That is a far better approach and actually probably produces better outcomes rather than just keeping it at arm's length. I think even the Australian experience has shown that children and young people are smart enough to circumvent many of these rules anyway. So if you put an outright block on lots of devices there is almost always ways around them through virtual private networks or whatever it may be.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

One thing just to say, though, is that if a ban was brought in here as well, of course, from the educational side, we would ensure children have access and learn how to use devices properly. But what I was also going to say is that another thing that the Online Harms Ministerial Group is keeping in mind, especially regarding small children as well, is the public health aspect of being stuck in front of the screen for a long period of time. It is not good for their health as well, even if the content is harmless.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, it is not good for development.

Deputy V. Li:

So I think in summary then, back to what Deputy Rebindaine was talking about, it just reminded me of why we are having this conversation because we did not … the law was not passed. So one of the main points we are trying to understand is about where is the responsibility and duties of the policymaker and what is the responsibility from the school. The parental responsibility is, yes, we can … offering the help by supporting the parents to understand about the impact of such use. But I think, again, we need to ensure that throughout the children's whole life journey that we are not going to deliberately … not filling any gaps for them to fall into it because the parents are not supposed to observe the responsibility that the policymakers need to make it happen. I really appreciate that you are giving us, again, detailed answers about what you are doing and how you are going to do it. I think also one of the things that I want to be very mindful of - I am very mindful - is that when we compare ourselves with much bigger jurisdictions, like Australia, is that we need to understand about the financial implication. What is our ambition, what can we do, and how we can best quickly win to support the children and young people and even ourselves more. Because the thing is, on average, that each adult will spend over 7 hours on digital devices. So it is not just for children, it is also us with the lived experience. So I think we are going to move to foster care because I am very conscious about the time.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Minister, it is reassuring to hear that foster care is in your top 5. So the question is, the panel is aware of the Hive Fostering model. Minister, could you update us on the implementation of that model so far?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Sorry, I missed that.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):

The Hive.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
The fostering model.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Right, the Hive. The Hive is developed from something called the Mockingbird model in the U.K. In effect what happens is you have a group of foster carers and within that there is one person who is a key member perhaps, they do not have a foster child but they have a bed available. That person is paid and undertakes some of the administration duties to relieve the foster carers of some of the tasks that they have to do. They are also there for respite holidays and so they alleviate some of the stress perhaps that foster carers face, and it has been successful in the U.K. The Jersey model perhaps has been enhanced in that each Hive only has half the number of foster carers so instead of 10 there would be 5, and also the fee package to the … I do not know how you describe the head of the Hive, but the package is enhanced compared to the U.K. offer as well.

Deputy V. Li:
The Queen.

The Minister for Children and Families:
I was avoiding the Queen bee. **(Laughter)** I think Donna can tell us a bit more but I am particularly supportive of doing this for, I think, the first time. It introduces a sort of community where the children can meet together, the families can meet together and I think bringing together the community rather than being single foster carers is quite important and they can learn from each other. I do not know, Donna, you have got experience from the U.K.

Director, Children's Services:
It is obviously much further progressed in the U.K., and the Government have invested a lot of money across the U.K., across England now to create Mockingbird. It is just that model the Minister talks about. I suppose probably a couple of added things is there is more support to that hub. So you have like a whole community of carers and the idea is there is more support. We have got a therapeutic offer we have been building across the service. That is not really for the children. The therapeutic offer we have got is about wrapping around staff. So how do we help to understand when children have got trauma or things are happening for them, helping our staff and the foster carers and residential workers to understand how to respond and how to hold the foster carers through that, how to understand about what the child's behaviour is. So quite a lot of that investment is around trying to bring in that skill base. There is more family support, worker support to that foster care hub. Then the main hub carer is the person that then acts as a support, but they are supported

to do that. We have just launched the first campaign back in July. So it is early doors in terms of the campaign. We have got it in the marketplace, we have got all of the little Hive … all the honeycombs everywhere and things like that, and bees. From that we have got a Skills to Foster course which is about to run now, this month. We also ran an in-Government campaign and we ran a Skills to Foster course in July as well. We have, I think, 5 people on the Skills to Foster course in September and some interest, so I think it will hopefully be, along with our in Government campaign, 2 successful … I think a handful have come from each Skills to Foster course. The one we ran in July, we have got 3 or 4 sets of foster carers going through for assessment. So it feels like perhaps our first chance to starting to create something new that we hope will bring a better support package to make people feel held and supported, because that is what fostering is about. It is a tough job.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
Just to refer back to the hub home carer, could you just enlighten us on the roles and responsibilities and how they will be appointed?

Director, Children's Services
So we have been developing some guidance. It has been built on the Mockingbird model from England, because obviously they are a lot further along. So that the foster carer, they could have a child ... like the Mockingbird is in England, but the Mockingbird in England, they do have one. We are saying how can we make it the least pressured and their responsibility … some of them might have a child in place, they will help to create the community of foster carers where they sit alongside the other carers, they arrange things like a coffee morning, getting the group together, they provide some of the overnight breaks, so sleepovers; just sleepovers. They are not really a full respite offer because that comes through a different arrangement, but they offer overnight. So for the group of children that are in this hub they create a relationship with the other children in the hub and it is more like a normal thing that you would have in your extended family, they become a bigger extended family. So the foster carers role is really in that space, rather than relying on they have to have a child placed, their reliance is they have to create this hub and support these other foster carers to care for these children because it is a tough job. So the roles and responsibilities are built around that. Some foster carers might be a foster carer and have the hub, some people who might have 2 children placed but we have tried not to make that part of a must do. So it reduces down the pressure on the hub carer as least as we can.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
I know it is a bit early yet, but any feedback from young people, foster parents?

Director, Children's Services

We do not have any children yet in the system, so, no. Foster carers, I think it would be fair to say … our foster carers that are currently fostering are perhaps cautious, maybe not sure about it, perhaps not sold on it. Some questions about why are we doing that, is it the right thing, how do we know it will work in Jersey? Some reasonable questions that you would expect carers to ask, I suppose. We know the research in the U.K., Mockingbird has run for quite a long time.

Deputy V. Li:
Sorry, so before we go into details, you did not have any consultation with the current foster carers?

Director, Children's Services
Yes, there have been conversations and discussions about the … I think the design is obviously Mockingbird, so it is already a U.K. model. So there have been some conversations about building it. The foster carers have only just started to engage in the dialogue around what it would look like and the creation of moving it forward. Because it is a national model, if that makes sense.

Deputy V. Li:
So this is one of the things what I am trying to understand because we cannot just be … because it is a U.K. national one so it is going to work in Jersey because the online harm, which we were discussing, is about what model works best in Jersey.

Director, Children's Services
Well, we have tried all the models in Jersey so there have been lots of recruitment campaigns the last 3 years that have not been successful. So what we know, as foster carers tell us, it is a really tough job and that they need more support. So the foster carer offer has been looked at and strengthened, and that is about things like the pay and other things; that has not yielded results. We are following the same trajectory as England in terms of reducing volume of foster carers, it is the same challenge that we have. What we are saying is that this is another model. So we have got the normal fostering running alongside it. So normal fostering carries on. This is a pilot to try to see if this delivers something different really, if that makes sense. It is not saying everything becomes hive.

Deputy V. Li:
So when you say the parents wanted … the foster parents wanted more support, do they mean that they want more financial support or do they mean the more emotional, more tangible support?

Director, Children's Services
I think more, so I think there was a question historically about the financial package that was reviewed and uplifted. I think some of it was the package was not clear, so we have created a foster

carer handbook which sets out all of the details about what the entitlement is if you foster. That explains about all of the things that foster carers can access. Then I think the third thing is about the … yes, it is about the support package, about the therapeutic offer and things like that which is this extra bit.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):
I was just going to say that I have fostered in the past for about 5, 6 years or something. From my experience and a lot of foster carers I knew then, you do often feel alone - very alone - because sometimes your children, lovely children, but sometimes their behaviour is quite challenging, for example, or some sort of difficulties. So I think this idea of having that support, that hive, it should be really helpful actually, for someone there to talk to when things are tough.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
I think the other side of that is in a small community part of this goes on anyway because lots of foster carers do know who each other are in a small community and they want to support each other, and that will still carry on. But this is more of a formalised process. So if people want to be part of that more formalised process, stronger support, they have got that while they can still have their own separate little units that they communicate with each other and highlight their issues and their wins. So it is building on something that was already happening.

The Minister for Children and Families:
It is very early days. I think you have only had the first ...

Director, Children's Services
We have only got the first Skills to Foster … we have not even got a group of foster carers assessed yet. We have had the first campaign. We are about to run the Skills to Foster course that then we will see how many people come through that that want to be assessed to be foster carers. Then we will have to spend several months going through an assessment before we even get our hive. So we are quite a way off.

[13:30]

The Minister for Children and Families:
But you have to have something to show; you have to show them something of what the model might be. Obviously through consultation then we may make some changes, but there has to be a starting point and that is basically where we are at the moment.

Deputy V. Li:

So we are going to be running a consultation?

Director, Children's Services

The team have met with the foster carers, they have talked about it, there has been some feedback backwards and forwards. I think until you until you run it and trial it and have a pilot, you are not going to really know. Because it is still fostering, we are not asking anyone to do anything different to what they do, which is fostering. This is having exactly the same thing, foster carers, but just bringing the support package differently around them, giving it a trial and seeing if this support package works differently. So when you build that and you get your group of foster carers that come together in your hub, they will be part of the pilot and that will be a consultation where they will grow and develop it really themselves, in a way. They will make it what it is.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

How many foster carers registered now do we actually have, compared to 12 months ago or 24 months ago?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Thirty-two, is it not??

Director, Children's Services:

Yes, we have got, I think ... I can give you the number. Sorry, bear with me.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Well, I have got February's number.

Director, Children's Services:

We have got 32 but that does not include our connected carers or our short-break carers.

The Minister for Children and Families:

No, there are 6 connected carers and there are 3 short-break carers.

Director, Children's Services:

I think we have probably got ... I do not think you can quote me on this exact figure because I would need to look, but I think if you look back sort of 12, 18 months, 2 years, like you are saying, we have probably got about a net loss of about 10 foster carers overall but, when you look at that, they are similar to what England is seeing. Although it might feel a really negative figure, actually when we start to look, quite a large chunk of those 10 are children ... their foster carers have decided to keep children for "staying put", which is really good. It is a really good thing because young people stay

post-18 and they do not leave but what it means is that those people do not end up staying fostering, so we have lost ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
They come out of the fostering service and the young person living with them.

Director, Children's Services:
We have lost quite a few through that route, which is a good thing for the children but it is not so good ... and then we have not been getting growth and then we will have some things like foster carers retiring, ill health, and some where there is some dissatisfaction in what they are doing and not wanting to carry on.

The Minister for Children and Families:
I looked at the 10 that we have lost over the sort of year, 18 months, because you hear lots of rumours that it is because they are dissatisfied with the service but actually that was not the case. There are the odd one or 2 that are dissatisfied with the service but there is a vast number of reasons, retirement, quite a number wanting to continue with the young person staying with them over 18, which is quite encouraging really because that is just like, in effect, being a family in that that young person accepts that these are ... and wants to stay with them. So there was a vast number of reasons in probably the other 8 that ... it was not dissatisfaction with the service.

Deputy V. Li:
Could we have a little bit more? I think that is what I wanted to understand more about what the 10 people are saying and how do you ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
I think privately we could do that. I think it would be unfair because in going through those reasons you would identify ...

Deputy V. Li:
I think it is about having the exit appointment, keep that on the record. I think for me, for us as a panel we just want to make sure ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
Privately we can share that information.

Deputy V. Li:

If you possibly can just to use some identifying numbers to give us about ... again for us to have a whole picture and to understand about what is causing it. Apart from Deputy Curtis, yourself, none of us are fostering carers ourselves so we cannot really speak up and say our lived experience. I think it is better to and I think it is fair for the people who left the service to give us the data and give us the insight. I think again I am very mindful of the time, so shall we just carry on?

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
Minister, how many children are in foster care at the moment?

The Minister for Children and Families:
The number of children? I know the number of families.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
I appreciate that that data may not be at hand so ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
I have not got it.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
Okay. How many are in residential care?

Interim Chief Officer, C.Y.P.E.S.:
In residential care 27, and 29 in fostering.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Twenty-nine in fostering? I have got a different version. So residential we have ... I can give you the numbers. We have got 27 in residential, 29 in fostering and 17 off-Island.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
Perfect. That was my next question.

The Minister for Children and Families:
There is a mixture of fostering and specialist care.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
Thank you. I will pass over to Deputy Rebindaine for the next set of questions.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:

Minister, to what extent do foster carers' views and children's views take primacy when making education placement decisions?

The Minister for Children and Families:
That is done through the virtual school. There is a shared responsibility between the Children's Services, the Minister and the foster carer and the virtual school. It is slightly difficult because obviously there is a recent judicial review on this, so I am reluctant until that is published to go into too much detail. In fact, I cannot really until that ... yes.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
No, okay. Can you come back to the panel once that is ...

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes. We do not know when that will be published. That is the ...

Director, Children's Services:
I think what I would say, because your question is really about how much we focus on the foster carer and the child's views, that happens in every decision about a child. For every child, every big decision we make about children in our care, we will always try to focus on what the child's views and wishes are primarily. Carers will come into that, so do parents as well and their families. They are all part of a bigger picture and, I guess, the balance, as always, with everything about big decisions about children's lives, is balancing wishes and feelings with what we believe are in the child's best interests, and that is a really difficult balance. It is hard to get right. What might meet one person's wishes and feelings in that scenario may not be what everybody wants but it will be about being a needs-led decision that drives the best interests. They do not always correlate the same.

The Minister for Children and Families:
It is case by case and it is very difficult.

Director, Children's Services:
What I would say, whether that is about any big decision for children, whether it is where they live and where they go to school, where they live, who they live with, all of those are really big decisions.

The Minister for Children and Families:
What friendships they form. There is a vast number of things you have to consider. As I say, the factors are numerous that you have to consider. So, yes, of course, the foster child and their family,

yes, absolutely, those considerations are considered but there are numerous other considerations as well.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
Rather than pursue it further, I will pass back to the Connétable.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:
And I will pass back to the Chair. We are conscious of time, Chair.

Deputy V. Li:
Thank you so much. I think we would like to turn now to the Children's Services and the improvement programme, which is quite a big, heavy, chunky workstream for your department.

The Connétable of Grouville:
Minister, as the Chair quite rightly said, this topic is about Children's Services and the improvement programme. Minister, can you provide a red, amber, green assessment of the major workstreams within the improvement programme?

The Minister for Children and Families:
The creation of the multidisciplinary service and the creation of the edge-of-care adolescent service, those are things that have occurred already, so those are green areas of creation of new homes for children. There has been significant progress with refurbishment of homes. I have seen one of those new homes. I am not sure if it has opened yet but it is amazing where it has come from a large disused house to a very pleasant place to live, but that will soon be opened. The substantial system reform that has already been established, the development of hundreds of new policies, and that is quite interesting. The lack of policies and procedures across Children's Services was very evident I think when I became the Minister, and there has been significant progress in improving that and staff are a lot clearer about what we expect and what their responsibilities are and what the standards are. That is something that should have been in place a long time ago. So there is restructuring going on. The leadership team have been delivered and give greater stability as all posts are recruited from existing leaders within the service. There is a restructure of the assessment service to ensure reduced changes of social workers for children and more joined-up children's plans. I have got to say that there is real improvement there in the fact that we now have 70 per cent of our social workers are now permanent staff, and you will never get 100 per cent because there has to be a certain amount of flexibility in the system, but 70 per cent from something around 30 per cent is a dramatic improvement. There is a residential restructure with new contracts for staff, including an uplift in pay, designed to be a more responsive service, child-centred approach to the care of children. The plan is really structured around supporting families, loving homes, care

and support. So most of those green. The residential restructure is ongoing at the moment, so that is probably in the amber area. I do not think we have got anything in the red area. As part of this, C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) went through this earlier, did it not, with quite a bit restructure and it has shown dramatic improvement? Yes, we are mostly showing greens.

Director, Children's Services:
Not because they are delayed but they are in progress, things like homes that need planning and need to be built or need to be refurbished.

The Minister for Children and Families:
So there are a number of planning ... there is certainly one I am aware of that is still in the planning process.

Director, Children's Services:
Yes, Greenfields is one.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Well, yes, I have got to say Greenfields is ...

Director, Children's Services:
On track.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes, on track. That is a green. There have been big improvements. I do not know, have you visited?

The Connétable of Grouville:
We will be.

The Minister for Children and Families:
When you look at the outside area, it is unrecognisable from what it used to be and big improvements on the rooms. The not very pleasant, cell-like doors will have gone. There are electronic passes rather than keys. For a secure unit, it has a far more homely feel about it. It was built at a time when ... it was designed, sadly, on a prison and things changed, but we have made big improvements. One thing I would say is that we have introduced family rooms where families can come and visit. They can cook a meal. They can sit down, have a meal together with the young person who is there, and those are all part of the improvement plan.

The Connétable of Grouville:

So we can broadly say that quite a few things within this programme are broadly on track and the workstream ... some of them are working and making very good progress. We just wanted to ask as a panel, has anything slipped in this programme because of the recruitment freeze?

[13:45]

The Minister for Children and Families:

Nothing, no.

The Connétable of Grouville:

No. Thank you, Minister.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

I was just going to say, we were up at Greenfields a week or so ago and were really pleased to see the changes.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):

With the trampoline.

The Minister for Children and Families:

The trampoline, yes. I have to say what was rather nice was the young person who take us round. He was absolutely brilliant. He took us round.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Did you go on the trampoline, Minister?

The Minister for Children and Families:

No. I think one person did.

Director, Children's Services:

I did. Just in contrast to your question about anything stopped because of ... we have had growth. So we have increased our establishment in the multidisciplinary service base around the response to missing, exploitation and the adolescent service. We have had growth and not reductions.

Interim Chief Officer, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Just to add as well, one of your earlier questions about how the department works with other departments in government, we think the momentum within the reform programme is a testament to

how the department is working with other departments. This is not just a C.Y.P.E.S. ... it is C.Y.P.E.S. led, of course, but it involves other departments across government to make it work.

Director, Children's Services:
Infrastructure and Social ...

Interim Chief Officer, C.Y.P.E.S.:
Treasury, Infrastructure, absolutely, and they are all aligned to their responsibilities to improve the lives of children.

The Minister for Children and Families:
The refurbishment of Greenfields, without the co-operation of other departments ... it has worked extremely well that everybody has co-operated.

The Connétable of Grouville:
It seems to be on track. Thank you, Minister.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
Minister, in circumstances where the court has expressed significant concerns regarding the adequacy of care planning, educational provision, proposed placement arrangements for a child in care, how does the Government reconcile such criticisms with its position that its statutory duties are met?

The Minister for Children and Families:
Well, I think we learn from anything the courts might tell us in specific cases. I think that the refurbishment of Greenfields, the education provision is improving. I remember visiting the facilities 4 years ago and they were not really adequate. I think, Donna, you would know more about it, but certainly education is improving and it is part of our improvement plan.

Director, Children's Services:
I guess that is a bigger question really about the quality of our care planning and the quality of our practice and our decision making. I think with any largescale improvement programme in somewhere like Children's Services, it is a quite complex thing that takes time. I think you have to start with your foundations and structure, which is probably the last couple of years of the plan that we have in place to get those core foundations in. I think the quality of practice and how that then correlates into what you start to see in children's cases that end up in the court system and the quality of how good we do that takes time. So every time you end up in ... it is not only about court either. In all of our practice we should look at the learning that we have got from it, whatever we are

doing, and always trying to strive to look at where we have got gaps in practice, we do not get things right, about how we learn from that and build a stronger system and we make practice work more effectively. A lot of the structure in Children's Services that you will not see is around our audit and our quality assurance and our supervision. We have got to keep making that stronger, things like the quality of our management oversight, for example. We have got a new programme that will start this month for front line managers, first line managers, and that will be about driving the quality of care planning in court for those children that are in proceedings but also the children on plans. How do we make that quality better? It takes years to really effect full change in Children's Services. It is not a one or 2-year plan. It is 5, 8, 10-year plan. We know it is getting better. If you look at our audit, which you will not see and would not be in the public domain, you would see that the quality of what we are doing is moving from inadequate practice, slowly getting better, and it is a long-term trajectory, really, but we analyse that a lot and then we look at the learning of the things we are not getting right and how we need to improve that. That then feeds the loop into training, learning and development, quality of supervision, how we get the front line managers to grasp that work better, but it takes time. It is a long haul.

The Minister for Children and Families:

The difference is that there is now a plan. In the past, there really does not appear to have been a plan although Children's Services, I think, received quite a lot of money but it was more almost like a firefighting-type scenario and ad hoc things being done, which actually at the end of the day are no longer there and are not effective. They might solve a problem one day but it reappears again and there was no formulated plan. This is a 5-year plan where we can see it to be a path and we are making progress, but with the number of changes that we have to make, it is not something that can happen overnight or within the space of a year, but I am pretty certain by the end of this 5-year period we will see a significant improvement. We are starting to see some of that.

Director, Children's Services:

It is a bit like the Minister said earlier on about the development of policies and procedures. Really, to make practice right, you have to start with policies, set procedures, set standards, set expectations. Then you have to follow through and you have to embed them, so you have to think that in that journey for us we are in that early phase of those things. Some of the judges will tell us we do really well, we have got some really excellent bits of work. It is inconsistent, and that is what we are seeing is inconsistent practice. So some things we do really well and some things we really do not. Our task, my task and the task of the leadership team, is to embed consistency and then it will slowly get better because people will be clear of what their ask is and then we hold them to account and keep training and learning and developing people.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think they would recognise, for instance, the improvement in social workers. In the past, in the course of proceedings they might have seen 4 or 5 different social workers for the same child, which is counterproductive, whereas now they are recognising that we have got a lot more stability and that is essential.

Deputy C.J. Rebindaine:
Will the plan highlight within it the remedial measures that need to be undertaken and then have an ability to track progress?

Director, Children's Services:
It most certainly does. It is not something you could show like this but there is an extensive database that is tracking and monitoring every part of it and we have just built all the benefits realisation underneath that. The benefits realisation is a whole range of measures, targets, performance indicators where we are saying we need to understand we are here now, or when we started, and where do we want to be and where we are measuring ourselves. Some of those will be national targets, some of them will be quality standards, and that is happening whether it is around missing an exploitation or whether it is outcomes for children in care, whether it is children involved not in education, employment or training. There are lots of different bits, children's voices, wishes and feelings. We run things like the bright spot survey that children did in 2023. We have run that now to look at children and what they are telling us about their own experience. So it is really multifaceted and it runs as a trajectory over time and looks at a lot of impact evidence.

The Minister for Children and Families:
If you think about it, 2½ years ago we did not measure or record what came into the hubs right at the beginning. So if you do not know what is coming in, exploitation, safeguarding, could be ... if you do not know what is coming in how do you measure the outcome? I think: how did they measure the outcome? The only stat that I was ever told when I was Assistant Minister was that numbers of children in care were falling and that was a success and, of course, that was even said in the Assembly, and of course it was not successful at all. It actually meant that we were not doing early intervention.

Director, Children's Services:
There is that basic data. I think we did not have things like exploitation, we did not understand about children in that part of the system. There was some information not really as joined-up.

The Connétable of Grouville:
If I may move on, we have mentioned and discussed and you have already said to the panel about social workers. This panel has been concerned for many years about the social workers, the

turnover, the number of agency staff, and I just wanted to continue that with the new panel. How has the reduction in agency social workers affected caseloads, staff turnover and the continuity for children and families?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Well, of course, the turnover is lower than it was. When you had people who might have stayed only 3 to 6 months and you have now got permanent staff, that has improved tremendously. The caseloads are lower than those in the U.K., so I do not think ... caseloads generally have not increased, have they? No?

Director, Children's Services:

Caseloads are pretty good, what we would expect them to be. Different parts of the system have different what we would expect to be the right caseloads, but our children in care caseloads are low, I would say. Our family safeguarding is about average, maybe a little bit below average if you compare them with U.K. comparators.

The Minister for Children and Families:

What we have not got now is the number of children being passed from one social worker to another as one leaves. There is a lot less of that and there is a lot more stability. That is, to me, a major improvement because this whole thing of not knowing who the social worker was, all the information being repeated again when the next one arrives and the expectation, probably, from the young person that: "The social worker probably will not be here in a few months' time anyway and I will get somebody else who I do not know." That is a key area of where we have improved.

The Connétable of Grouville:

So have we got a figure, for the record, of the current turnover rate for permanent social workers?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Unfortunately the system at the moment I do not think specifically identifies social workers. It does the whole of Children's Services, but we are working on it.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay. One final question, if I may; I think other questions have been covered. What proportion of social workers' time, in your opinion, is currently spent on administrative tasks and how does that compare with your target position? In other words, how much red tape?

Director, Children's Services:

We do not have a target, as in a figure, but too much will be spent doing administration, is what I would say if you wanted me to be honest. So I think that is part of the improvement plan; quite a big part of the improvement plan. There is a section on the development of our database, Mosaic, and the fundamental work underneath it sits under the plan. Some of that design is about how we reduce down what we ask of social workers. We have administrators that take up quite a bit of the administration task. We have increased some of those administrators to take the pressure off the social work workforce. Some is we need to reduce the length of some of the forms that have become too long that we require social workers to fill in. There is repetition, so a big bit of that. I think we have got a big bit in the world of A.I. as in the U.K. social work system in England has got quite a lot of technology around the use of A.I. that is built into things like Mosaic that reduces down the ask for social workers because it does a lot more minute taking within the system. We do not have that, so that is part of our plan to do that work.

The Connétable of Grouville:
We were very keen on, as you will remember, Donna, exit interviews and you now say that you do stay interviews as well.

Director, Children's Services:
We do.

The Connétable of Grouville:
How much of that administrative burden was mentioned in those exit and stay interviews?

Director, Children's Services:
Actually, to my recollection, I do not think it does feature as a big issue but if we talk to social workers - take something like the exploitation work that we have been doing and we have done a lot of - the challenges we have had with that have been things like getting the social work forms filled in for the screening tools or the risk assessments. What the social workers tell me is that the forms are too long. We have just done a piece of work where I have sat with the team and said: "Let us have a look at the form."

[14:00]

I have looked at the form and said the form is too long. So we can see that what they are telling us is right and now we need to do the work to make the form shorter and then we will get better quality. I think that is part of the work we are here to do.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Okay. That is always a result.

Director, Children's Services:
We have got it on our mind, definitely.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (1):
Also, another part of the mix there is return to work interviews. If someone has been off on absence for a period of time if they have had a health issue, what reasonable adjustments can we make to make sure that they come back into the workplace and are there any other challenges that perhaps we are not seeing. So all of those interview processes are a really important part of maintaining your staff base and keeping that permanency up.

The Connétable of Grouville:
Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Deputy V. Li:
Of course the whole improvement programme is for you to provide better service for the children. A lot of kids just received today their exam results. We do not know if you are monitoring the education attainment for this group of children. Do you see any improvement of the results or any other indicators that can tell us a much bigger, broader picture?

Director, Children's Services:
We do monitor all of the children's ... the virtual school is there for that. I know you are going to speak with the virtual school, but their task is to be always, I suppose, reviewing, exploring and making sure that the education attainment and well-being of children, so that is monitored. I have not got the data for this year to know where we are in terms of progress. A lot of the work … we measure different things. We measure attainment. There will be all of the work the virtual school does about the monitoring through children's P.E.P.s, their personal education plans. We will measure the number of children that go to university or the number of young people in college, the not employment education and training as well. So, it is all part of a system-wide approach for children in care.

Deputy V. Li:
So, if those children ... just to say, if one child decided that they want to go to university, will the Minister support the child?

The Minister for Children and Families:
Yes. We have children at university, yes.

Deputy V. Li:
How many have you seen?

Director, Children's Services:
Well, over time I do not know, but certainly I think we have got 2 children about to go now that are children in our care. We support them. They go to England, because that is where they put their university is, and the care leaver's offer we have supports them. So we support their accommodation in England.

Deputy V. Li:
We are talking about 2 children out of the …?

Director, Children's Services:
We have got 57 children in care and I do not know the exact number of care leavers today, but in the 90s region. Each year we will only have a small number coming out of the education system, and each year there will be a small number that go to university. Some will go to college.

Deputy V. Li:
I am not indicating ... going to university is basically going to give them …

Director, Children's Services:
No. They are supported.

The Minister for Children and Families:
Some go to Highlands.

Deputy V. Li:
I think because, again, the outcome is that we want to ensure that throughout the service that the children would be equipped and they will be empowered to be a better version of themselves, and I think that the fundamental purposes of the services, right?

The Minister for Children and Families:
There is provision at the moment to improve the position where they come back from university and they need accommodation here as well as in university, so we are working on that at the moment as part of the residence.

Director, Children's Services:

It is extra support for those children if they need it.

Deputy V. Li:

I think that is really important, because they are the ones who have the lived experience and they can tell us how they felt about the service that has been provided to them. So we know that there will be successful stories to be telling the general public that, yes, the Children's Service is doing well, but I think through them then you will have the direct endorsement, if you are doing your job well.

Director, Children's Services:

So, we know that. The Bright Spots survey is a survey of all children in care and children care-experienced who have left care, care leavers in the law, that 18 to 21 group. That survey was run in 2023 and that survey has just been; we have just run that survey. It is done by a national company in England - not here - and so they have all the benchmarking against English outcomes. We do not do it for that bit, but we do it about getting the engagement of our children and young people. So, we have just run that survey now, and in that survey we had, I think, about 67 per cent return rate, which is really high compared to other places. What we can tell is that we have got, across the range of different indicators, children and young people telling us things are better. Not fixed, not sorted, but getting better and moving in the right direction. Some of the children's outcomes are improving. So, it is very much about what they are telling us.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I was going to say that the work that we are doing on accommodation for when they return during the holidays is as a direct result of feedback from the children. So, they have told us what they need, and so we have listened and we are doing it.

Deputy V. Li:

Our final area this afternoon is the children and young people's emotional and physical well-being and mental health. I will have Tina to start with this topic.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I am conscious of time, so we are just going to probably focus on one key area. The first question then is, the diagnosis of A.D.H.D. (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and other neurodevelopment conditions and the number of children prescribed medication for them appears to have risen in recent years. Is that the department's picture, and can you put figures on that trend?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Well, it is a picture across the U.K. and Europe, in fact. It is not a Jersey-specific issue. There are, I think, roughly 771 children who are on A.D.H.D. medication treatment at present. There was a massive increase post-COVID. I think it is something that I have discussed because I think we were expecting a tail-off to some extent by now, but the numbers coming in this year are fairly consistent with last year. So, I think everybody across the U.K. was expecting it to tail off, the COVID effect, but it still appears to be there. I do not think anyone has been able to explain. Children were, obviously, restricted at home and probably could not … their conditions worsened. So, that was understandable but, as I say, we expected to start to see a fall in there. So, it is not that that may not happen, it is just going to ... may take longer than we expected. The numbers, I would say, are going to remain probably at that sort of level for the next few years. We are constantly monitoring those, and we have certainly improved on assessments. There are currently 187 children awaiting A.D.H.D. assessments, and 37 appointments have been booked for those, but last year we completed 678 assessments.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
That is a lot.

The Minister for Children and Families:
That meant putting, to be honest, savings from other areas went into funding that, to bring down the backlog, and I have got to say credit to C.A.M.H.S. that it has done that. As I say, it was an area where we put significant effort and savings from other parts of the department into funding that.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
That is interesting, is it not, because we expect it to tail-off and it has not?

The Minister for Children and Families:
It has not.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
What do you think is driving the rise and the increasing need? Is it better identification or was it other factors? How does the department tell these apart in planning for the future?

The Minister for Children and Families:
It is a combination. It cannot just be better assessment because it is not a Jersey unique problem. There was a shortage of A.D.H.D. medication across the world for the very reason that they were not expecting this dramatic lift. There currently is not a shortage because the pharmaceutical companies have upped the volumes and caught up with the demand. But no one expected that demand.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

There is better knowledge, is there not, among the public? I think people did not know about it so much a few years ago. Also, girls were never assessed a few years ago, were they, so there is that backlog coming through as well?

Director, Children's Services:

The changing landscape, I think, that children are growing up in, is it not? It is a different ... if you went back 20 years and looked today, the online world and everything else, children are just operating in a different environment. So, there is a whole range of things that will be a growing body of research, I guess, over time.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I remember years ago epilepsy and screens were not as good as they were. If you were on TV being recorded for news or whatever, the screen in the background would be absolutely flickering, so you do wonder whether the screens and the A.D.H.D. are connected.

The Minister for Children and Families:

As I say, there are lots of factors, and that is probably one of them, the amount of screen time, the effect of the screen, yes.

Director, Children's Services:

Children's worlds are different as well. I suppose we are becoming professionally, and I suppose in society, much more aware of these things. We are much more attuned, are we not, to understanding things that we did not know about 20 years ago to today? I think parents and children, parents are more curious and so there is a lot of ... and anxious about it. So, there is some of that anxiety and curiosity about checking it out as well. I imagine there are a range of factors that are all driving that same … it is fascinating.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Interesting. I think we live in at a faster pace now as well, and I think the pace of life has played a part in it, has it not? Definitely for sure.

Director, Children's Services:

It is the organic … there are a whole range of issues, are there not, that are quite complex?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I do not think it is going anywhere anytime soon, which is a bit sad.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Our biggest pressure is neurodiversity A.D.H.D. because children under 12 get 4 assessments a year, children above 12 get 2. So that is a lot of each new child coming on; it is a significant amount of work.

Director, Children's Services:

That is because they have to be ... because if you have medication, those children, the younger children, need to be reviewed more regularly.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

It is a real pinch-point, is it not?

Director, Children's Services:

Like the Minister is saying, they require more if they are on medication to keep reviewing that, because obviously it is a complex medication to take as well.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I am assuming it is the same set of doctors that are assessing the adults, which gives it an even higher pinch point.

Director, Children's Services:

No. They are different parts of the system, and we are seeing ... to be fair, we are seeing adults … I met with the director for Adults at Mental Health, and they are seeing equally large volumes.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

It is fascinating.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, it is not just children. So, whether it is the COVID effect ... I think that the last few years, they have put this down to the COVID effect, but it is clearly not just COVID.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

No. Interesting. So, for my next question, for children on medication then, what ongoing review - you have pretty much answered some of this - and monitoring is in place, and who is accountable for it?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Ultimately …

Director, Children's Services:

It sits under Children's - I cannot get the words right - the C.G.O.G. - do you know what the …? Children's Governance and Oversight Group - that is it - it sits under that group under Health, as in a governance arrangement, but we are responsible because these children sit within our department, so we have got a director of C.A.M.H.S., Darren Bowring, and he would have oversight of that department.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

So, they need to report into him?

Director, Children's Services:

Yes. I supervise him.

The Minister for Children and Families:

The prescribing is still a problem which has not been resolved, which has been ongoing for some years in that repeat prescriptions still have to be signed off by C.A.M.H.S. and cannot be signed off by other doctors. So a lot of valuable resources are being used just signing prescriptions ... signing off repeat prescriptions, and although that has been looked at by the Jersey Medical Board a number of times, they have not allowed other doctors to prescribe all of the repeat prescriptions.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

If they are getting reviewed twice a year, 4 times a year …

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, 4 times in some cases.

Director, Children's Services:

That is a lot of resource.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

… that does not make sense, does it, that they cannot get their repeat prescriptions in that gap?

The Minister for Children and Families:

A lot of resource if you think that …

Director, Children's Services:

You cannot leave children with prescriptions; you cannot give long prescriptions that do not get reviewed. Because of the substance they either have to be carefully overseen or governed.

[14:15]

The Minister for Children and Families:
So, the prescribing is still a major issue for C.A.M.H.S. and for the Adult Service.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
My last question then is, given how stretched the surrounding support services are, obviously, how is that monitoring happening in practice?

The Minister for Children and Families:
The monitoring of?

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
Of the medication, making sure they get it and the repeat prescriptions. If the doctor is not available, then I am assuming the waiting lists …

The Minister for Children and Families:
It is done, but it is a big pressure on the business, obviously, because they monitor it and the prescription follows on, they get their prescription. But it is a big pressure on the business and it comes up time and time again, does it not? So, Darren has got …

Director, Children's Services:
Needs to be elsewhere.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:
So, this is probably going to be an ongoing thing then in A.D.H.D.?

Director, Children's Services:
Yes.

The Minister for Children and Families:
We just need to persuade the powers that be that those prescriptions can be signed off, the repeat ones, by other doctors.

Director, Children's Services:

There has been some work about changing the prescription length and things that are trying to help that, and obviously there has been work to do to try and increase capacity in parts, but it is a pressure still.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, I suppose you do not want a parent running round with all the medication, but then, I suppose, the chemist could hold on to it. The chemist could hold and they could take so much and drawdown out of their prescription.

Director, Children's Services:

It is because it is a very regulated substance, it has to be done a really particular way because it would be unsafe not to.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Because at one stage they could only prescribe a month, could they not?

Director, Children's Services:

We are just in the process of that being slightly extended but still being quite well regulated so, yes.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Hopefully we will go into a world where …

The Minister for Children and Families:

So, when you think about that, that is 12 prescriptions in a year.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

That is crazy for all of those children.

Director, Children's Services:

But is obviously a really significant substance to prescribe.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Hopefully the world that we are in they will come up with alternatives and it will be non-medicated and learning to live with the … and then the education system would change.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Well, I think that is what everybody wants. There are some non-medical things that can be done. I think, unfortunately, we are in a situation where there are so many cases that drugs are the only option at present.

Deputy V. Li:

I agree with what we ... I can see where the train of this conversation is going to lead to, and I think there is a huge focus right now on A.D.H.D. and the A.D.H.D. diagnosis and medication. Some of the panel members have, I think, heard me saying that Albert Einstein could only tie his shoes when he was 16, and in the modern days he would be identified as a child with severe learning difficulties, and yet we know how much he has achieved. So, I think, again, this A.D.H.D. is just one number of the forms of neurodivergent. Children, they learn different, they communicate differently and engage with education in different ways. So, it is great to see your children's department is doing very well in understanding the needs of the diagnosis, but of course whether under education, in that kind of setting, that our environment, particularly the school environment, is enabling the children learning differently. Also, to what degree that the children need to be on medication or whether the environment itself will help them to thrive instead of being on the medication. So, Minister, I absolutely agree with you and I think that is the kind of thing we need to really look at with the whole how we support the children and the families, and how we can ensure that we respond to different learning styles rather than just solely relying on medication.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is a shame Darren is not here, because I know that Darren is quite an advocate for non-medical intervention, but he finds himself in a position currently with 771 children and under great pressure. He is very much an advocate for looking at non-medical intervention.

The Connétable of Grouville:

For the public's point of view, Minister, could you … Darren who, for the record?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Darren Bowring.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families (2):

I was just going to say ... of course, I will not say anything much about it here, but we are working on making the school environment much kinder for children with sensory difficulties in different ways.

I have to say, though, that there are families and children who find the medication helps them enormously. So, I think we have to respect their findings as well.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Sorry, I was saying I watched ... there have been a couple of programmes on television recently, "Has my child got A.D.H.D.?" and the 2 children had very different needs and had different medication, had actually come from the father, and then there was "A.D.H.D. myth", where they took a child off his medication for 6 weeks. I do not know if you watched that one? And yes, the child had some challenging behaviours but he was so much happier. So, the mother thought he was being medicated to fit the educational system rather than being medicated to give him a better quality of life, and that was the outcome. I thought it was fascinating given this was coming up.

Director, Children's Services:

I think what we know is that all children are different, and some children respond really well to medication, it is the right thing for them, and it absolutely is the right thing for that child. Some it is environmental and they need different things, and that is why the C.A.M.H.S. service has a C.A.M.H.S. early intervention and it does a lot of work about environment, nature and other things. But then there is a group of children that do need medication, and a group that needs environmental things. I think we have to accept that all of the children are different, are they not? We have to tailor our packages to try to meet need. So, it is a complex world.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

They will become adults who will need different needs.

Deputy V. Li:

Thank you so much, Minister, Assistant Minister and the officers. Thank you for your time this afternoon and for the openness for the questions and answers they have given to us. I also would like to thank my panel colleagues, officers, Kaya and Ros for preparing for today. Thanks for my panel members. That concludes this hearing. Thank you very much.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Thank you very much.

[14:21]