Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey

Deputy Victoria Li

Chair of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

By Email

Date: 12 November 2026

Re: OCCJ Submission to Scrutiny Panels: Proposed Budget 2027-2030 Review

Dear Deputy Li,

Please find attached the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey's submission to the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel's review of the Proposed Budget 2027–2030.

Please accept our apologies that, on this occasion, we have not been able to respond fully to all of the questions raised by the Panel. The Office is currently working under significant time and capacity pressures, alongside a number of competing priorities, and this has limited the extent to which we have been able to provide the level of detail we would ordinarily wish to include.

We have nevertheless sought to provide as much relevant information as possible within the time available, and we hope the submission is helpful to the Panel in its review.

Should the Panel require any clarification on the information provided, please do not hesitate to get in touch and we will be happy to assist where we can.

Yours sincerely,



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Children's Commissioner

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Office of the Commissioner for Children Jersey

Response to

Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Proposed Budget 2027-2030 Review

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey

1. Established by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2019, the Children's Commissioner for Jersey is the independent holder of the public office responsible for promoting and protecting the rights of all children and young people in Jersey who are:
    - Under the age of 18;
    - Under the age of 25, if they have a disability, have been care experienced or have been sentenced, or held in custody, under the Young Offenders Law;
    - Placed off-island for their care or treatment.
2. In discharging the statutory functions to promote and protect the rights of children and young people the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey (the OCCJ) must regard to any other European or international treaties or conventions, protecting the rights of individuals, which extend or apply to Jersey.

Response to the Proposed Budget 2027 – 2030 Review

3. The OCCJ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review of the Proposed Government Plan 2027–2030. Government budgets are a fundamental mechanism through which children's rights are implemented in practice, shaping the availability, quality, and equity of services that support children's wellbeing. Ensuring that budget decisions reflect and advance the rights of all children is central to the Government's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
4. We regret that due to timing and resources constraints, we have not been able to respond to every question. Our submission therefore focuses on selected proposals and issues of particular relevance to children's rights and wellbeing.

Questions from the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel:

Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey

General Questions

5. The OCCJ has previously publicly commented on the Common Strategic Policy and raised concerns about the absence of specific mentions of children, young people, families and rights. Nonetheless, the measures included that aim to address the cost of living, particularly for children with families, are to be welcomed, as are the commitments relating to education, online safety and sports and leisure.

6. Broadly, investment in children and children's services is signalled in many areas of the Proposed Budget 2027-2030. The OCCJ welcomes the sustained budgets allocated to key departments that impact directly on children and their rights, including Children and Families and Education and Lifelong Learning. It is also positive to note that additional budgetary funds have been made available to support the implementation of the new VAWG legislation which will, both directly and indirectly, impact children. The capital expenditure outlined in the Proposed Budget on both the care and education estates, as well as broader youth facilities is also welcomed by the Office.

7. However, to fully and accurately respond to the above questions to the extent to which the Proposed Budget will prompt and protect the rights and interests of children requires, in the view of the OCCJ, a full Child Rights Impact Assessment, which is beyond the scope and resources of the office.

8. It is difficult from published resources to determine whether there are specific areas of budget allocation or planned expenditure beyond those specifically identified as relating to children and young people that would require additional funding. This is because most budgetary headings do not provide additional information on the proportion of the allocated budget that will be of benefit either directly or indirectly to children. For example, it is not possible to ascertain how much of the budget of the Jersey Health and Care will be spent on paediatric care, or how much of the Infrastructure and Housing budget allocations will be allocated to the building, purchasing or improvement of appropriate accommodation for children.

9. To determine this would require that *all* allocations that support the rights and wellbeing of children, either directly or indirectly, are clearly identified in the Proposed Budget 2027-2030 under the relevant departmental and budget headings. Such an exercise is beyond the resources of this office. However, such an approach could be adopted by the Government and the States Assembly in considering the more detailed breakdown and future publications and debate of budgets.

10. In addition, the OCCJ is aware and concerned that not all Government plans and strategies either focussed on or including children are funded. A clear example of this is the Youth Justice Roadmap. Consequently, not all priorities as identified by the government itself are reflected in the budget.

11. Additionally, the Panel has not identified whose priorities for children and young people are to be considered here. If this is referring to the outcomes and workstreams set out in the Children and Young People's Plan (Children Young People and Families' Plan 2024-27.pdf), there is insufficient detail within the Budget to assess whether it will effectively support the achievement of these outcomes for all children and young people.

12. If, however, the Panel is referring to the priorities identified by children and young people themselves, there has been no specific consultation with them on the Budget. As a result, it is not possible to conclude that the Budget reflects their priorities.

Question 5: Do you consider that sufficient consideration has been given to children's rights and the potential impact on children during the development of the Proposed Budget?

13. The OCCJ recognises the positive steps that have been taken to consider children's rights during the development of the Proposed Budget 2027-2030. In particular, we welcome the publication of the accompanying Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) addendum, which includes a number of screening assessments and full CRIAs for selected expenditure and capital projects. This is a positive indication that children's rights have been considered during some of the budget development process.

14. Under the Children (Convention Rights) (Jersey) Law 2022, a CRIA is not required for the Budget as a whole. However, Ministerial Duty Bearers must still consider children's rights when developing budget measures and decide which proposals should be assessed through a CRIA. A full CRIA is expected where a proposal is likely to have a direct or indirect impact on children, while proposals with no identified impact may only require a screening assessment.

15. While we welcome the inclusion of CRIA screening assessments across a range of measures, we consider that there are instances where a full CRIA may have been advisable. For example, the Community Cost Bonus appears to have been

screened on the basis that the payment is made to adults rather than children.[1] A fuller assessment could have considered the impact on children living in low-income households and explored whether there are groups of children experiencing financial hardship whose families may not meet the eligibility criteria for support. This may have provided greater assurance that children's rights and interests were fully considered in the design and targeting of the measure.

16. Full CRIAs are an important tool for understanding both direct and indirect impacts on children, identifying opportunities to maximise positive outcomes, and reducing the risk of unintended consequences before decisions are finalised. Their value is not limited to proposals with potential negative impacts; they can also help ensure that positive measures are designed in a way that best supports children's rights.

17. Overall, the Office welcomes the progress made in considering children's rights as part of the Budget process. However, future budgets would benefit from more consistent use of full CRIAs where proposals are likely to affect children, either directly or indirectly, particularly where they relate to family incomes, poverty, or access to support. This would strengthen confidence that children's rights have been fully considered in fiscal decision-making.

Question 7: What are your views on these proposals, particularly in relation to their potential impact on children's rights, educational outcomes, inclusion, accessibility, and wellbeing? Are there any risks, gaps, or opportunities that the Government should take into account as these initiatives are developed and implemented?

Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning Portfolio

18. We welcome the proposed investment in early years provision, free school meals and school infrastructure. Taken together, these measures have the potential to advance children's rights under the UNCRC, particularly the right to non-discrimination (Article 2), the requirement that children's best interests are a primary consideration (Article 3), the right to development (Article 6), the right to be heard (Article 12), the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), and the rights to and in education (Articles 28 and 29). For disabled children and children with additional needs, Article 23 is also particularly relevant.

[1] See Page 9 of the Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) addendum

19. We are pleased to see the proposed expansion of funded provision for two- to three-year-olds as this has the potential to improve children's access to high-quality early learning and support their development during an important stage of childhood. As the scheme develops, however, it will be important to consider not only formal eligibility but whether provision is genuinely accessible to children across different circumstances. It is essential that this extended provision is matched by safe, high-quality nursery places, a sufficient and trained workforce, adequate supply of places and staff, and clear data on impact.

20. The OCCJ welcomes this measure as investment in early years provision is supported by recent OECD evidence, which describes early-years investment as one of the most effective long-term investments to reduce child income poverty and disadvantage.[2] The OECD highlights benefits including improved cognitive, educational, social, and emotional development, alongside longer-term health outcomes. It also emphasises that investment alone is not enough; the greatest benefits arise when children, particularly those from lower-income families, can access and participate in high-quality early-years provision.

21. As the offer is expanded, consideration should therefore be given to the affordability of additional hours, availability of places, the capacity and sustainability of the early years' workforce, and the inclusion of disabled children and children with additional needs. Monitoring what children are and are not benefiting from the additional hours will be important in assessing whether the investment is reducing inequalities in practice.

22. The extension of free school meals is also welcome, particularly as a measure capable of reducing the impact of financial disadvantage on children's health, wellbeing, and ability to engage in education. In implementing the scheme, consideration should be given to ensuring that access is straightforward and dignified, minimises stigma, and reaches children experiencing need who may not fit neatly within existing eligibility criteria. In this context, the OCCJ remains concerned about limitations in the data available to identify children experiencing financial hardship, as highlighted in the Minister's recent response to a Written Question on the feasibility of extending free school meal provision.[3] The previous Budget included a commitment to assess the feasibility of extending provision and to collect, collate, and analyse the necessary

[2] Spending Better for Children through Social Policy. OECD. October 2026. Link
[3] Written Question to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning by Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour. October 2026. Link

information,[4] therefore, it important that this commitment is fulfilled. As this proposal is implemented, it will be important to ensure that children whose circumstances are not captured by existing eligibility criteria or datasets are not overlooked, including those currently supported through schools' discretionary arrangements.

23. The proposed new Mont à l'Abbé Secondary School represents an important opportunity to strengthen educational provision for children and young people with additional needs. The development should be informed by the UNCRC alongside the rights of disabled children, including accessibility, dignity, participation, and inclusion. Care should also be taken to ensure that investment in specialist provision forms part of a wider commitment to inclusive education across Jersey, rather than being viewed as a substitute for ensuring mainstream settings are appropriately equipped and supported to meet a diverse range of needs.

24. The proposed North of St Helier primary school also provides an opportunity to embed children's rights from the earliest stages of planning and design. The Budget indicates that further work is required on the proposed Gas Place site, including site preparation and determining the school's size and scope, before a full project proposal is brought forward. This creates a particularly important opportunity for children and families to influence decisions before key aspects of the development become fixed. Consideration should include accessibility and inclusive design, children's journeys to and from school, opportunities for play and outdoor space, and the wider impact of the location and design on children's health, wellbeing, and participation. These considerations align closely with the Jersey Play Plan 2025–2028[5], which emphasises accessible and inclusive opportunities for play and the importance of considering play across the places in which children live, learn, and move through. Given the absence of identified dedicated funding within the Jersey Play Plan 2025–2028, the OCCJ would encourage Government to use investment through this Budget to help give practical effect to its existing commitments on children's right to play, including through the design of new education infrastructure.

25. Overall, the OCCJ considers these proposals to have significant potential to improve children's educational experiences, wellbeing and access to support. The principal opportunity is to ensure that investment translates into real and equitable improvements in children's everyday experiences. This will require

[4] Proposed Budget (Government Plan) 2026–2029 (P.70/2025): Nineteenth Amendment (P.70/2025 Amd. (19)) – Amendment. Link

[5] Jersey Play Plan 2025-2028. Government of Jersey. Link

attention not only to funding and infrastructure, but also to workforce capacity, accessibility, quality, children's participation and the identification of children who may otherwise face barriers to benefiting from the proposals. Children's Rights Impact Assessments should be used throughout the development of the proposals to identify differential impacts and inform decision-making, particularly for children who may already experience disadvantage.

Question 8: What are your views on these proposals, particularly in relation to their potential to improve outcomes for children and young people? are the proposed investments sufficient to meet current and future needs, and are there any additional considerations from a children's rights perspective that the Panel should be aware of?

Minister for Children and Families portfolio

26. The OCCJ welcomes the proposed investment in children's services and infrastructure through the Loving Homes Estate, Le Squez Youth Centre, North of St. Helier Youth Centre, and upgrades to the CYPES estate. Collectively, these proposals have the potential to advance a number of children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including the right to have their best interests treated as a primary consideration (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), the right to express their views in matters affecting them (Article 12), the right to education (Articles 28 and 29), the right to play, leisure and recreation (Article 31), and the right to special protection and assistance for children who cannot live with their families (Article 20).

27. The proposed expansion and modernisation of residential care provision is particularly positive for care-experienced children and young people. Article 20 of the UNCRC recognises that children who cannot remain with their families are entitled to special protection and assistance from the State. Investment in safe, stable, and nurturing homes may help improve placement stability, reduce disruption, and support children's emotional wellbeing, development, and sense of belonging. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently emphasised that alternative care should be child-centred, rights-based, and focused on providing stable relationships and continuity in children's lives.

28. Investment in youth provision through the Le Squez and North of St. Helier youth centres is also welcome. Accessible youth services can support children's rights under Articles 12, 15, and 31 by providing opportunities for participation, association, recreation, and positive community engagement. The inclusion of the Youth Enquiry Service (YES) within the North of St. Helier Youth Centre may

also strengthen children's access to support for their mental health and wellbeing, helping to realise rights under Articles 24 and 39 relating to health and recovery from adversity.

29. The Committee has made clear through General Comment No. 17 that play, leisure, recreation, and participation in cultural and community life are fundamental rights rather than optional activities, and that States should ensure children have safe, accessible, and inclusive spaces in which to exercise these rights. The proposed youth centres provide a valuable opportunity to advance these principles in practice.

30. Similarly, investment in the CYPES estate has the potential to positively support children's rights to education, development, health, and wellbeing. Safe, accessible, and well-maintained schools and residential settings create the conditions in which children can learn, develop and participate fully in school and community life. Consistent with General Comment No. 9 on the rights of children with disabilities, the Office would encourage a continued focus on accessibility and inclusive design so that improvements benefit all children, including disabled children and those with additional needs.

31. The key opportunity across all of these projects is to ensure meaningful participation by children and young people throughout planning, design, and implementation. Article 12 requires that children are given the opportunity to express their views on matters affecting them, while General Comment No. 12 emphasises that children's views should be actively sought and given due weight in decision-making. Involving children from the outset is likely to lead to services and environments that better meet their needs and improve long-term outcomes.

32. Overall, the OCCJ considers these proposals to be broadly positive and capable of making a meaningful contribution to the realisation of children's rights in Jersey. As implementation progresses, consideration should be given to ensuring that investment in physical infrastructure is accompanied by sufficient investment in staffing, accessibility, participation, and service quality so that children, especially children who are vulnerable, experience the full intended benefits of these developments.

Q9. What are your views on these proposals and their potential impact on children and young people? In particular, are there any implications for child safety,

safeguarding, access to support services, participation opportunities, or children's rights that the Panel should consider?

Minister for Justice and Home Affairs Portfolio

33. Due to competing priorities, the OCCJ has not been able to analyse every proposal within the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs portfolio in detail. We have therefore focused our comments on the proposed investment in Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and the wider Building a Safer Community (BASC) programme, given their potential significance for children's rights and wellbeing.

34. The OCCJ welcomes the significant investment being proposed to support implementation of the new VAWG legislative framework and associated commitments. We are particularly encouraged by the recognition that effective implementation requires investment not only in legislation, but also in workforce capability, victim services, police capacity, training, data collection, community engagement, and cross-agency coordination. The proposed investment in additional police resources, victim services, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), training, and the development of a centralised dataset should help strengthen Jersey's ability to prevent, identify, and respond to violence and abuse.

35. From a children's rights perspective, these proposals have the potential to positively contribute to children's rights under Articles 3, 19, 24 and 39 of the UNCRC. Many children experience domestic abuse and sexual violence directly, while others are affected indirectly through exposure to abuse within their homes, relationships, and communities. Strengthening prevention, safeguarding, victim support, and access to recovery services can therefore make an important contribution to children's safety, wellbeing, and development.

36. However, whilst the Office welcomes this investment, we note that there remains no identified investment in the delivery of the Building a Safer Community Youth Justice Roadmap.[6] This represents a gap in the wider BASC programme. A comprehensive child-rights approach should address both children who experience harm and children who may cause harm. Some children may come into contact with the justice system as a result of behaviours falling within the scope of the new VAWG legislation. Whilst accountability is

[6] Reimagining Youth Justice: A Child-First Roadmap for Jersey 2025 – 2030. Government of Jersey. Link

important, these children remain rights holders under the UNCRC (most notably Articles 37 and 40) and should be supported through prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and reintegration. The OCCJ therefore considers that investment through the Proposed Budget should also support delivery of existing child justice commitments within the BASC Youth Justice Roadmap. This would help ensure that investment in victim support and protection is complemented by measures aimed at preventing future harm and improving outcomes for children who come into contact with the justice system.

Questions from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel:

Q10. How will the Proposed Budget 2027-2030 allocations impact your organisation, including any impacts on service delivery?

37. As many Panel and other States Members will be aware, the OCCJ budget position has remained unchanged since Budget 2026. While the office acknowledges the commitment not to further decrease this budget in 2027, the issues raised year in relation to the applied savings of £139,000 over the period 2024-2026 remain valid.

38. While this represents a relatively small decrease in funding when considered in relation to other offices and departments, it must be considered in the overall context of the small size and operating budget of the OCCJ. These cuts have been significant and have impacted on our ability to fulfil our statutory functions and add value to children and young people's lives through influencing positive legal, social and cultural change.

39. As in previous years, these budget cuts have resulted in the OCCJ having to make difficult decisions and choices about the extent and nature of the work we undertake. While core services have been maintained throughout 2026, the capacity of the office to fully engage in planned work, such as a commissioned consultation with children with SEN/D, has been adversely affected. Such cuts have effectively reduced the capacity of the office to do the job that it was established to do, and respond to the issues raised with us by children, families and Government and States Members. It requires the office to be administered on a minimal estimated non-staff operating budget of approximately £200,000, to include fundamental operations charges, such as rent, service charges, utilities and IT support services.

40. Two factors impact on the offices ability to meet its statutory functions in a meaningful and professional manner. The first is that, while human rights

expertise in Jersey is not well developed, the use of external, off-island consultants will be necessary, as is the case in most other services. The office comprises a small staff of eight highly committed staff. Despite their commitment, they cannot be expected to be experts in every area of children's lives from early years to youth justice nor to be legally trained. These commissioned services frequently provide the expertise and information on which Commissioner's offices often rely to provide robust advice to Government as well as individuals who approach us for advice and information. Within the context of the current budget, our capacity to engage in such work will be severely curtailed.

41. The second consideration must be the independent status of the OCCJ. While it is open to us to request additional, project-focussed funding from the Cabinet Office on an as needed basis, this places the independence of the office at risk of requiring Government approval for work that may or may not be in the interest of the Government. Independence is a fundamental principle of all Commissioner's offices. The fettering of this independence creates long-term reputational and operational damage. Having established the OCCJ, it would now, in our view, be a regressive step to undermine the trust in this office that we have worked hard to build over the past years for the want of a relatively small amount of money. These are concerns that the OCCJ has raised with our Accounting Officer, individual Ministers and the Council of Ministers.

Q11. Have any discussions taken place with Government about the functions of your organisation as part of any review into Arm's Length Organisations?

42. No formal Government review has so far called upon the OCCJ to take part of give evidence in relation to the functions of the office. However, the OCCJ has been in scope for non-Government reviews by the Jersey Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee.

43. It is essential that the classification of the OCCJ as an ALO is considered in line with its distinct characteristics and statutory functions. Many other arms-length bodies play a regulatory or inspection role. The OCCJ is neither of those things – it holds a unique role within the Island as the only independent human rights institution, and it is imperative that it's functions and powers are not confused or diluted for purely cost-saving purposes.

Q12. Overall, are you confident that you can maintain core service delivery with the allocations provided for in the Proposed Budget 2026-2029?

44. As stated in our submission on the Proposed Budget 2026, if the ambition of the States of Jersey is to provide the minimum in respect of the Office's role and functions in achieving children and young people's human rights, then based on the proposed budget for 2027 the OCCJ is confident that it can provide this level of core services. However, it is the view of the OCCJ that is an unambitious aim for the jurisdiction to have in terms of both its children's human rights and the Children's Commissioner.