



Children, Education and Home Affairs

Scrutiny Panel

Budget Review

Witness: The Minister for Children and Families

Friday, 31st October 2025

Panel:

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair)

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Vice-Chair)

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

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

Ms. A. Homer, Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills

[15:29]

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Chair):

Welcome to this hearing of the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. Today is 31st October and this is our budget hearing with the Minister for Children and Families. I would like to draw everyone's attention to the following. The 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 should be switched to silent and I would ask that any members of the public who have joined us in the room today do not interfere in the proceedings and as soon as the hearing is closed please leave quietly. So I am Deputy Catherine Curtis, the Chair of the Panel.

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Vice-Chair):

I am Deputy Helen Miles, Member of the Panel.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Richard Vibert, the Minister for Children and Families.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Deputy Malcolm Ferey, Assistant Minister for Children and Families.

[15:30]

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Anne Homer, Head of Finance Business Partnering for C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills).

Director of Children's Services:

Donna Marriott, Director of Children, Young People and Family Services.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you everyone. We have got 45 minutes for this hearing so I will start with some general questions about the budget. So, Minister, please can you confirm if there were any challenging decisions to be made as part of the drafting of this proposed Children and Families Budget?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think one of the challenges we had of course was we have got the transformation project and the business cases went to C.O.M. (Council of Ministers). There were 3 options, option one, 2 and 3. The first option was very ambitious, the second was slightly less ambitious but provided phasing through future years but those were the sort of Rolls-Royce solutions, and we were pleased that C.O.M. went with option 3. That was perhaps, I think, one of the challenges that we had was over the transformation project. Ultimately, the budget that they agreed on to go into the plan was £7.6 million and that will transform the service over the next few years.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So that option 3, did that not include quite a few parts that options one or 2 would have?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Option one had what would be a very nice to have, but perhaps expensive option, in that it had a floating team in effect which could be put into place at fairly short notice. Those staff would have been deployed in various parts of the business, but could have been brought together as a team. So I think that was a very nice to have but the cost of that would have been quite substantial.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

What was the difference in costs between option one and option 3?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Anne, what was the difference? I know that £7.6 million was the option 3.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think there was about another £4 million, so £11 million in total.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That would have been mainly covering a ...

The Minister for Children and Families:

There were specialists, other specialist workers and there was investment in technology as well that was included in that additional cost. But I think we are happy with option 3. We get additional staff under that and it allows us to transform the business at the same time that we will be transforming the residential estate and we will have homes that are fully staffed. It gives us an extra 12 F.T.E.s (full-time equivalents) in the multidisciplinary service, 6 F.T.E.s in the residential child care officers. So the short-break units would each get an extra 2 additional staff and then there were 2 additional staff in our other homes and then there are 3 F.T.E. business support staff. So we did not get the Rolls Royce of solutions, but we got something which is very good as far as we are concerned and will support children properly.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

You have got that to do the improvements. I do not want to talk about this for too long, but that floating team, would that have meant that there were members of staff ready to fit in where necessary; is that the idea of it?

The Minister for Children and Families:

There would have been. Yes, I think you know now that we suffer from not having adequate number of staff, so that would have left us in a position where we would always have had cover. But, as I say, an expensive recurring cost to that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So, were there any other bids for funding which were rejected?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I am not sure. I do not believe there was anything rejected, no. Clearly, we have had, and I might ask Malcolm, we have obviously had the issue over the scale and the Town Youth Fund and I think that is constantly misunderstood. So we can come back to that, but that was one where again, it has not been rejected, it has been moved along by a couple of years.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So we note that the department is due to make savings of £539,000 in 2026 through office and roles, so could you outline how these savings will be made?

The Minister for Children and Families:

We have done a reshaping of the service which has already brought us savings of £1.7 million this year. It is going to be a tough ask for another £539,000, having already made those recurring savings this year. I might ask Anne what areas you will be looking at, or Donna, to achieve that £539,000. It is a tough ask.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

So, every year we do a sort of zero basing exercise where we look at all the priorities of the department we look at all the business-as-usual budgets and re-prioritise and move them around and then we take a bit of the savings off and fit it all in. So, Donna has not taken any posts off anything in particular, we have reorganized the priorities in a better way, and we have more or less completed that exercise this year, have we not?

Director of Children's Services:

Yes, some of it, if you think we had the I.Y.S.S. (Intensive Youth Support System) and we have restructured and moved that because obviously it has changed and now becoming the multidisciplinary service.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Can you explain what that is for anyone listening?

Director of Children's Services:

That was previously the intensive youth service that was based on a bit of a school-based model that was trialled for a while and did not really quite deliver the approach that we wanted. So we have moved that into what is now becoming the multidisciplinary service that then there is some more investment to. So there is some posts that have been moved away because they were not relevant to this model and then there is some new ones being created as well, and you will see there is quite a bit of investment in there as well.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It means that a social worker has the staff around them in effect that can support them in any case that will come up, That is a good model. As you see, we are going to be expanding that model under option 3, the multidisciplinary staff, but it is a much more effective way of supporting social workers and I think the benefits of that we can see is that the upturn in the number of people who want to become permanent social workers, so we have moved from 40 per cent 2 years ago of permanent staff to last week we reached 73 per cent permanent social workers. Somebody said it in the office, I think, but that they can see the sort of positives coming through now.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is really good. Just to check again about these changes in office and roles, so this movement of making these differences to the multidisciplinary team and so on, is that what has already happened or is this what is planned to happen with that 500?

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is already happening.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So that is happening already?

Director of Children's Services:

In process, some is done and some still work to do.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is a road but we are already, and there are social workers already supported by teams that wrap around them.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

This is where you think the continuing savings are going to come from?

Director of Children's Services:

Yes, we have got some as well in things like the move from agency staff to permanent roles, we are starting to see real success. That is a much lower-costing model.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Of course, that brings the costs down as well.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, okay. That is good. So just some more questions about the F.T.E. employees. In comparison to last year's figures, there has been a reduction of 41 across the department, so can you explain what that is about please?

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

It is the other side of the issue that we talked about in the education, so back in last year's budget, when we split the 2 heads of expenditure between Children and Families and Education and Lifelong Learning, we moved the money to the right place and failed to move to the F.T.E.s to the right place. So the total number of F.T.E.s in the Chief Officers Directorate remains the same, 3 down, but there is a movement from A to B, so from Children and Families to E.L.L. (Education and Lifelong Learning), but it is not a real movement, it is a correction in where we have counted the posts, the people remain the same people. So that was 53 posts moved out of Children and Families and the 12 that the Constable has explained are new in the new plan, are the additional ones, so it is a net movement of 41.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so I am just going through it my mind at the moment. I was going to ask another question which was about the full-time employees in the office of the Chief Officer. So that is what you have just explained.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

That is exactly; that is the other side of it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, that is fine then. I think that is for you, Helen.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. I have got some questions about the capital projects, working through that. North of Helier Youth Centre, it has now been designated as a major project in this budget. The funding has been transferred from the group head of expenditure for new school and educational developments. Can you provide a breakdown of the costs, because the total project approval is the £16.1 million?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Correct, yes, sure. So, if I spin it back a little bit, in 2024 there was a sum of money earmarked to the tune of £9.8 million and that was just so that we could start to bring the project into focus. So what we have done this year, and we have all always recognised that we needed more than the £9.8 million, so we have earmarked £15 million of capital towards the project. The overall total is give or take £16.1 million, so the rest of that is revenue costs associated with getting the project off

the ground. So we would not want to obviously start paying for staff and things like that until we are almost ready to open, but we have laid some of that additional cost in as revenue cost.

The Minister for Children and Families:

You have also got 2 projects now, because you have got the Y.E.S. (Youth Enquiry Service), while it is rolled into one project, there is now 2 distinct, there is the Y.E.S. project going into the old Belmont House, which was a pub, and so that in itself is over £2 million of the difference.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, and that will be coming on stream hopefully by December of next year.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. So when are we likely to see the doors open on the Ann Street youth project?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

By mid-2028 is the plan to have the doors open.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay, so the funding is budgeted only up to 2028 so we are expecting it to open in 2028?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Correct, yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Is there any funding in the budget that will develop safe access and walking routes to the youth centre?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, so we are really conscious that it is going to be a real hub around there. There are already some safe access routes to get there, but what we have done with the plans is we have made sure that the access route all the way through, do you remember when we visited the site, so from the road all the way through, children and young people will be able to get through the whole of that site from the front. So if they want to access it from the back where there is less traffic, they will be able to come in from both those sides, and we positioned the door on the side of the building rather than coming straight out into the road, so there'll be a bit of a cushion of a pavement to make it safer.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. In the budget, the named sponsoring department for the Le Squez project is Education and Lifelong Learning.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

But the Minister tells us that that is not the case.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

That is right. So, what we have done is the Minister and I visited the Le Squez youth project a couple of weeks back and saw the small improvements that we have made in the facility, which is brilliant, but we do recognise that longer term we need to get something fixed in the budget to make sure that there is a proper fit-for-purpose, more-modern site on there, in the foreseeable future.

[15:45]

So we have designed it deliberately to dovetail with the St. Helier youth project, so we have taken it under our wing. So, what we are going to do is, when 2028 comes, there will be monies already earmarked in the previous and in the forthcoming budgets to start to get that project off the ground.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So, is the Le Squez project entirely dependent on the completion of the Ann Street project?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, so the 2 will dovetail, but we could not be in a position where we started taking one off stream before the other one came online.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So, if there is any delay to the Ann Street project, that will have a knock-on delay to Le Squez.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

It could have a knock-on effect, yes.

The Minister for Children and Families:

What we did see was how far, as well as meeting the children and whatever, who love their youth club and they were really nice, but what we did see is where had it progressed to. I had not seen that. It had only progressed as far as sketched plans, there was no plans, for instance, ready to

submit to planning and I learned some things there which I do not think you would be allowed to do. One suggestion had been that, when it was knocked down, the kids could move into Portakabins on a building site. You would never be allowed to put Portakabins up as a temporary youth club. It is a building site, so with demolition going on.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Because we went not that long ago as a panel to have a look at the youth club there and it is great but it needs updating or redoing. I should know this, I cannot think at the moment, was feasibility work done?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

There was just some outline plans but what we are going to do now, once this budget goes through, obviously we have got a clear line of sight to get the project up and running. So there will be some proper worked-up plans that will almost start immediately so that we have got something more tangible than we have currently got.

The Minister for Children and Families:

So we are going to try to start the feasibility. We would like to try and start the feasibility and at least have something running because, by the time you finish the town youth centre, you want to be ready to go. You do not want to go through another 18 months of planning, so you would need to do that in advance. But, as things stand, they are sketch plans, there is a lot of work to be done and is that still the plan that you would want to go, because you demolish one and literally the new one is sort of built to one side of it, and I think there is a lot more room there than that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Yes, but from this perspective, so the funding is there 2028/29?

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, exactly, that is the important thing.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The other part of the capital project, the important major project, is the Loving Homes Estate, which you are looking for £11.9 million. The budget says that there is 2 components to that work, so there is the residential care and also the specialist care. So can you just explain broadly what both of those things mean please?

The Minister for Children and Families:

So specialist care is the Greenfields site which to some extent will change because there will be greater scope for what can happen there. Because it is not just Greenfields, there are at least 2 other buildings on site. What it should enable is that part of that Greenfields can be used for inherent jurisdiction, which is where children could go out for normal education, but the court decides to what extent their movements are restricted, so in inherent jurisdiction, yes, it is not like the other children's homes, they cannot go out at night. If the court deems it is inherent jurisdiction then they have to remain there at night. But they have other activities, they can go out in some cases supervised, so that would be one of the things that would be introduced there.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Will that be delivered in 2026?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I believe that is the plan, yes. So the plan is that there is one end of Greenfields where there is currently 2 rooms, you have got 6, I will call them rooms, together in a long line. I do not want to sound too much like that, and then at the far end you have got 2 separate rooms that currently are not used. They are part of the original 8 rooms that were built and they would become the inherent jurisdiction. You can have a separate entrance into those, so they are separated from the secure unit, and there is a lot more flexibility. One of the other buildings that is available on the Greenfields site would be used for education.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So that is not the specialist side of things? Is it still specialist?

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is, yes, that is still the specialist side, so some of those activities where we currently have difficulties offering those services, there is education, but it could be a lot better. You will have somewhere where that can be done. There is also greater scope for looking at degrees of, not keeping people in, but where therapeutic sort of care can be given as well.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So that is the specialist care side of things. What will the residential portion develop?

The Minister for Children and Families:

The residential is quite a change because, at the moment you have, I believe, you have 9 homes. Some of those homes, and I am deliberately not going to name the homes, but some of those homes have as few as 2 beds, some have 3 beds, which possibly is not ideal. The ideal is probably 4 beds in each home with a residential manager. As part of the transformation, most of those houses and

the names give away their previous use in some cases, because some of them are old school caretaker's houses and were never really suitable as children's homes, but they were what Children's Services were given. Others have been on leases that end, we lose the use of the building, have to start work on another building, you need planning permission. So we moved to where we have buildings that have been specifically converted as children's homes for the long term. So we have houses with really a minimum of 4 beds, the only 2-bed one that will remain is one for emergency and remand bed.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So what is the balance of the funding then between residential and specialist?

The Minister for Children and Families:

The balance of the £11.9 million ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

It says £11.9 million for residential and specialist

The Minister for Children and Families:

Okay. We have 5 point ...

Director of Children's Services:

It is on the H. & S.S. (Health and Social Services), that one, this one, Minister, that one.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Right, it is easier if I tell you what the total for Greenfields refurbishment is £5.5 million out of the £11.9 million.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So that is Greenfields though.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, we take that out of the total, so the total overall for both is £14.1 million.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So, if you take the Greenfields out of that, so how much is allocated specialist and how much is allocated to residential?

The Minister for Children and Families:

We have the £11 million is for the specialist.

Director of Children's Services:

No. So, there is some money this year that we are using in year to do the refurb for Greenfields that come into that £14 million, and then over 3 years the money for Greenfields at that site is sort of £5 million. We have already done one property up on that site, which is going to be an assessment home eventually, and then there is a property that needs doing up, which is to the side of the school at the moment. Most of the money is the refurbishment, bringing the school into the site and the external space, bringing the perimeter and creating more recreational facilities inside.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So that is the residential bit.

Director of Children's Services:

That is the Greenfields secure home, so most of the money on the specialist site is allocated to getting Greenfields up to a good state and then there is some small monies on the refurbishment of the other houses on that site, so that whole site becomes specialist because you will have Greenfields secure and remand and then you will have an assessment house, which is the property we have got now, then there will be another emergency bed, which will also be the remand bed, which we just ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So all of that is under the specialist bit.

Director of Children's Services:

All of that site is all specialist, yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So which bit is the residential bit and how much is allocated to that?

Director of Children's Services:

Everything else. So what the Minister has just spoken about, under that less than the £5 million, so about £6 million is all the money on creating one supported accommodation property, which will be shared with Andium, where they will build 3 flats and the garden, and then the extra residential homes that will be built in 2027/28, a bit further up line.

The Minister for Children and Families:

So it is 14.1 less 5.4 for Greenfields less the 1.5 million that has come out of our own budget, so it is about 8 million is for the Loving Homes.

Director of Children's Services:

Minus 1.5, so about 6.

The Minister for Children and Families:

So about £6.5 million.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So I was going to ask you about Greenfields next, but I think you probably said a lot about Greenfields. Is there anything else you wanted to say about Greenfields? I think we have heard quite a lot.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think we have been on a long journey as to how it should be best used. I think that has been a long journey. I think we are there now and, given that it was built 20-odd years ago, probably now, and it was built in a different time, I think we are going to make the best use of the building now.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, and those things, you said some of it is already underway, so it is happening.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is happening. We have used £1.5 million of our own money to do that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Then my next questions were going to be more about the Loving Homes Estate. So I thought this was about the number of residential beds.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is, so the number of beds goes up, so that we have got sufficiency in beds and individual houses. So, as I say, unfortunately some of the houses we were given have got 2 beds in them. If you think that you have got to have a residential manager in there for just 2 children, it makes those houses very expensive. Also, a 2-bedroom house is probably not ideal for a children's home anyway. So those will be gone. We will go up to 4 beds in each house, some of the houses are currently being sourced, and so we are already on the way to the transformation. There are still one or 2 to be found, but we are clearly on the way, and some of those will be delivered, one will certainly be delivered by the end of this year.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Will that be a 4-bed house?

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is a 4-bed, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

By the end of this year, okay. So, by the end of 2026, do you expect to have quite a few of these in place?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes. There is another one in St. Saviour/St. Helier that will come on early next year. One, as Donna said, has already been converted. That is on the Greenfield site, but nevertheless it provides 4 beds. There is another one in the east of the Island. That again will be early next year, if not the end of December this year.

[16:00]

So, there is a fair bit going on as regards, and these have been sourced through the Government or with the help of Andium.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So just for the numbers, can you just tell us how many residential beds there are now and how many you expect there will be following the expansion?

The Minister for Children and Families:

So, in the new world, there are 30 plus 2 self-contained flats. In the old world, there were 25. So we have gone up by 5 beds plus 2 self-contained flats. Those self-contained flats would be for people that have reached the age where they are soon going to move on to living on their own but they are incorporated on the same plot as the care home, so they are still in care, but they have got a certain amount of independence.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So there is people around.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So that is a considerable amount of money for an extra 5 beds.

Director of Children's Services:

It is more than that. If you work, because what I think with what the Minister is probably looking at is you are counting the Greenfields home, so I think the modelling shows that you almost double the residential space. But because you are counting the Greenfields space that we cannot really use, it is only registered for 4 beds, so it has got an 8-bed unit, but it is not really in the count, if that makes sense. When you take Greenfields out, because it is it not really bed space, because it depends on whether a child is remanded.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So what would it be?

The Minister for Children and Families:

For instance, in the old scheme, there is one house that has 8 beds in it. But realistically you cannot use the 8 beds. It is currently at 4 isn't it and I do not think it probably ever has any more than that.

Director of Children's Services:

Yes, it has got 3.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, it has got 3 at the moment. So that is another 4 that come on stream in the new scheme. You have also got to remember that we are having to get rid of quite a number of houses and convert new ones, because, yes, there are beds in these houses, but as I said before, the premises are not suitable.

Director of Children's Services:

Can I just add, on the list that we have got where you have got the homes that we have had in the estate, several of those are not there now, they have been closed for things like subsidence or planning. So, our bed number as we sit today, compared to the new estate when it is done, will double. The new estate will double what we have got available, not including the secure estate because you cannot count that as bed space because that is all depending on if a child comes into custody. So, if you exclude that ...

The Minister for Children and Families:

So, one of those that is listed as a current with 3 beds is condemned due to subsidence. so there are in effect no beds in use.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So, would you say that at the moment there is only about 15 beds?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Probably not, yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Perhaps we can confirm it in writing.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, in writing, but it is lower than ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

It would be good to know how many residential beds you have got and how many this is going to deliver. Thank you.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So the upgrades to C.Y.P.E.S. estates includes funding for residential homes and secure settings and this is listed as £500,000 for the years 2026, 2027 and 2028. Please could you detail where that work is required and I must say I am finding some of these projects quite confusing and how they all work in with each other. So this part, the £500 000, what is that for, upgrades to C.Y.P.E.S. estates, and under that title it is funding for residential homes and secure settings.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

We have had a rolling refurbishment. It used to be £750,000, but because of the large amount of project work, that is down to £500,000. So that is for upgrading the homes that we have got.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So that is for upgrades to the homes, which are the 15 beds, roughly?

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes, as required.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, all right. There is a separate head of expenditure, I was going to say why is it in a separate head of expenditure to the Loving Homes project, but you are saying this is the rolling amount that has been there anyway.

Director of Children's Services:

Across C.Y.P.E.S., yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Can you clarify and can you say in more detail what that £500,000 is used for?

Director of Children's Services:

Decommissioning of the homes when you close them, or opening them, maintenance, all of those.

The Minister for Children and Families:

It is all the things that you would need to maintain 9 properties in effect, 2 are closed, so 7, yes.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So 7 properties for their ...

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes, remember that a number are on leases, so therefore you have to renovate them and bring them up to the standard they were when you took them on. So it is all the general work that you would undertake.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So that is about £70,000 per property in 2026?

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Shall we get a plan for you when we get back to base? There is a model. That rolling plan has a list this long.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, if we can have that, that would be good.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes, sure.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Moving from capital on to revenue growth, in the annex it says that the funding builds on the previous significant investment provided in previous budgets. The budget has had a lot of money in previous budgets, so can you briefly describe why this further investment is required?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Right. There has been a lot of money in the past spent on Children's Services. I am not convinced that the money in the past was spent in the best way. We did not appear to have made significant progress past the Jersey Care Inquiry and so I am well aware that this is something that is often said, Children's Services have had a lot of money over the years. It was sort of done ad hoc and I think that is the worst way of spending money. So, where the increases come, we have more and more children referred through to the service. We have rising costs. So, in 2021, there were 630 referred; this year there were 721 children who came through our doors or were referred to us, and you can expect that to continue increasing I think. One of the problems, we talk about the past, is that there is an awful lot spoken about early intervention, but it was not really taking place, and the Inspection Report, the most recent one, highlighted that. So we can expect more to come from that. Other things we have got is ...

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Sorry, can we just check that figure with you, 721 children referred to Children's Services, was that last year?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Current year to date.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

To date?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

But that is not necessarily for admission to care.

The Minister for Children and Families:

No, no, they are known.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Given the given the level of funding and awareness that has gone into education, you would kind of expect that number to increase anyway. The other thing was also ...

The Minister for Children and Families:

So the other thing that we have ... sorry, no.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The annex also describes that urgent action is required and I think my question is the same, why is this urgent when there has been so much ongoing work and focus on Children's Services in the preceding 3 or 4 years?

The Minister for Children and Families:

We are building up a service that I think, as you are aware, that we are building up a service that has been criticised for many years as not performing particularly well. There are costs involved in that. So, we have a reform plan. We have to create new roles, as we have said. We have got 2 new homes. Sorry, I have lost track of where we are.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think the issue for us, Minister, is that once again there is an awful lot of money going in. I could read the figures back for the money that has gone in since 2021. You are now having £11.7 million. It has not been successful, the previous investment, so I think what we are wanting to know is why is the money that you have put in, in this year's budget, going to have better success and improve the outcomes for children in the Island, when over the last 5 years, despite significant investment, that has not happened.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think the first thing is that we have got a plan. In the past there has been no plan. There is a clear plan.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

We had a children's plan.

The Minister for Children and Families:

We have not had a transformation plan as to how the service should be transformed. We have never had that. We have never had a proper residential plan. This is the first time where we have got that. I have got confidence that things are changing. As I said, the staff can see that as well and I think that we come back in a year's time, or somebody else comes back, and you will see that this is money well spent. Donna, do you want to ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just really conscious of time, but in terms of the budget, you have indicated different levels of required funding moving forward. So, based on what you have just said, what assumptions and forecasts have been considered when you are preparing the budget and when you are responding to the plan and making the transformation, Minister?

Director of Children's Services:

I think probably there are, from my perspective, the range of different issues there. So I think there has been quite a lot of investment in the service if you look back, but you were going from a place where previously it had no real resource and it was not configured at all, so a lot of that previous investment was to increase the volume of social workers to respond to changes in legislation like the care leavers legislation that required you to have a P.A. (Personal Advisor). None of those things existed historically in the service. So that investment has gone, in my perception, when I have come in and looked, it has gone predominantly into making the service run how it should run. So there was a lot of investment to make a budget to provide U.K. (United Kingdom) placements, because there was not a budget for that, so every year the service did not have the resource. So I think that a lot of things, funding was put in to bring it up to speed into some degree. I think what did not happen is probably an investment in the residential estate. So what you have got, and the reason why it has become an urgent and critical thing is that a lot of those homes are closing or not fit for purpose at all. What we have got today, as we stand, is a whole estate which does not have beds for children to come into care. There is not homes for them. That has to be fixed and property and homes cost a lot of money and getting planning on property and building suitable homes is a really significant factor. Then I think Greenfields, in its right, has not had the investment to create the work it needed --

The Minister for Children and Families:

That is a good example of how money was probably not well spent in the past. So we spent £1.7 million on, not buying 2 homes, but in effect converting and staffing 2 homes, which were on leases, and have now been taken away from us. So that is money that was spent on very short term ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just conscious of time, but where in the budget have you got any investment in fostering services? Does that come under the children's social care reform as well?

Director of Children's Services:

Yes.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So part of the 7.6 there will be for fostering as well.

Director of Children's Services:

Yes, so that is to create hub and bespoke fostering constellations that will wrap around support for foster carers.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Once again, the question has to be, a lot of money has gone into fostering over the few past years and we have not seemed to increase the level of foster carers. So what are you going to do differently to meet that outcome using the funding that you have got, Minister?

[16:15]

The Minister for Children and Families:

So, specifically for fostering, we have had numerous campaigns to try to increase the number of foster carers. Particularly, we need foster carers to look after teenage children and, despite 2 or 3 campaigns aimed at that, we find it virtually impossible, and that is where we have got real demand. We do not have those problems in finding people who want very young children, babies or very young children, they are fine, but it is tough.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The question is, what are you going to do differently with the money that you have been allocated for fostering to encourage people to come forward?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I think one of the things is Mockingbird, so that is where you bring together support, not only for the foster carers, but the foster carers can also find a group that can support themselves. So we are going to build on that model that has been used in the U.K. effectively. In doing that, if people can see that you have got that type of support, I think you are more likely to encourage more people to join the service. So there is a plan there and that is one of our key things is introducing this Mockingbird model.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. Is part of the Children's Service improvement programme the multidisciplinary service? Can you provide us with some information about how the multidisciplinary service will work please?

The Minister for Children and Families:

The multidisciplinary service works by supporting social workers. So social workers taking on cases have a group of people around them who support them, so pretty much whatever the case is, there are people within that multidisciplinary service who have got the expertise to assist the social worker with whatever they may require.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So what sort of roles would that look like then?

Director of Children's Services:

The youth workers, when they are family support workers, they are the ones you have looked at where you have got, there is like family support workers that are doing direct intervention with adolescents.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

We have already had family support workers.

Director of Children's Services:

What there is not, so when the I.Y.S.S., there is no adolescent service. The adolescent team closed years ago. So there is no work to do around missing, exploitation, adolescent intervention, edge of care, that does not exist in the service.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

But that is what the I.Y.S.S. was doing.

Director of Children's Services:

Yes, was doing but was not effective and was closed obviously quite some time ago. So this model is slightly different because it was set up as one sort of school space where a really small group of children went, and it was servicing I think about 10 or 12 children, a really small group. This is a much bigger offer that wraps around all of those edge of care, so it provides a resource to a much larger group of children and young people and families, across the whole system.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

The annex document as well says that more capacity is needed to support children living at home with their families. But in relation to this funding accompanying the budget references that practice has been too focused on avoiding bringing children into care. So, can you just reconcile that statement, those 2 statements please, Minister, and explain what the practice and priorities will be going forward?

The Minister for Children and Families:

Can you give me the first statement again?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

More capacity is needed to support children living at home with their families.

The Minister for Children and Families:

Then the other statement is that ...?

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Practice has been too focused on avoiding bringing children into care.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I suppose the 2 things are slightly different. You have got to support children that are with their families and in most cases you would think that the family is the best the best place for children. However, what has been avoided in the past is that very difficult decision. This is where I think the change is, that very difficult decision where you decide that it is not in the best interests of the child to stay with that family. So I do not think they are contrary to each other. They are different sets of circumstances. Families with children do need more support, but likewise there are those families, as I have said, where it is a difficult, very tough decision, but I think it is one that has been avoided in the past, and those are right, and that is why very sadly we have children coming into care who are 15, 16, and there should have been early intervention when they were 3 or 4 years old. There is no other word for it, that those children have been failed. To give those children the life that they deserve now, it is extremely difficult because the damage is done and they are the children that are seen as vulnerable by other individuals, they are drawn into crime. It is an awful situation and I think that we have a cohort of children, probably from the age of 10 through to 16, that we are going to be working through and that are going to come into our care in the next few years, who should have been seen at the age of 3, 4 and 5.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, thank you. We have gone over time. If I can just ask one more general question. I also wanted to say I can recommend fostering teenagers, I have done it, and it was lovely.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I would have one if I was allowed, I would

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Why are you not allowed?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I might do; I have got to move back into my own house first. My son is living in it, but I have a spare bedroom there and my friends foster teenagers, so I am well aware of the need for it. I would do it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, it can be really nice, very rewarding.

The Minister for Children and Families:

I will have to talk to my partner about it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes, it is good. So a last question, general one, Minister, please could you confirm if there are any other highlights that we have not covered in this budget?

The Minister for Children and Families:

I do not think so. We have done the tough ones, the Greenfields, the St. Helier Youth Centre, we have covered Le Squez. I think the transformation of both Children's Services and the properties will be evident in 12 months' time. I think that the highlight, I have already told you, in one way is the fact that we have now got 73 per cent permanent social workers. I have got to say, to build that up from 40 per cent 2 years ago, and the fact that people want to stay now.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So children will be having more continuity.

Assistant Minister for Children and Families:

Better outcomes for children and young people, really important.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, that is really good. All right, thank you. That is it then, we are done.

[16:22]