

Report to Jersey Children's Services Strategic Improvement Board

I was asked in August to take up an independent advisor role to the Government of Jersey, following the departure of Steve Hart in the summer, who had supported Children's Services in Jersey on the improvement journey over the last three years. The independent advisor role is intended to provide advice to senior leaders and some critical friend challenge about the key issues facing the service and how these might be responded to.

I am a qualified social worker and for the last 12 years, until I retired in autumn 2018, I led children's social care service at Assistant Director or Director level in Milton Keynes, Essex and Birmingham.

This initial report to the Strategic Improvement Board is based on reading reports, examining performance data and spending five days in Jersey talking to leaders and managers, IROs and others and including a visit to Greenfields and some time spent in the MASH.

This report is very much a 'first impression' of some of the strengths, weaknesses and areas for development in children's services. I have not yet met with partners or many frontline staff, nor looked at social work practice in detail to triangulate this first impression.

Strengths

There are many positives about Children's Services in Jersey. It has the advantage of being small, of staff and operational partners knowing each other face to face and thus able to build collaborative relationships. Caseloads for social workers are manageable (average 16) which gives social workers the time to work effectively with children and families. The MASH information-sharing process is now more stream-lined and responses are more proportionate to need. Mash is resourced well enough to deal with demand. Operational partnership arrangements are good with, for example, good partner attendance at child protection case conferences.

Following the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry much work has been done to examine and respond to the needs of children in residential care in island. There are now just seven children in Jersey children's homes. There is a small and effective seven day a week Edge of Care service which has successfully supported several young people to remain with their family whilst facilitating improved family relationships.

The complex care team supports children with special needs and their families well and has strong relationships with health and education colleagues.

Work is underway to grow the Jersey foster care service so that more children in care can be looked after in island. There is a developing independent advocacy offer (available through Jersey Cares), an in-house children's rights service, developing

'entitlements' for children in care and care leavers, as well as a stronger Government and States-wide ownership of corporate parenting responsibilities.

A recruitment drive over the summer has resulted in a cohort of some 10 newly qualified social workers who are about to begin their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) and 10 more experienced social workers.

Areas to explore and develop

A model of social work practice

My initial assessment is that Jersey's Children's Services has been characterised in recent years, almost certainly because of the too frequent turnover amongst senior leaders, by pendulum shifts in policy and practice. Two examples are: firstly, that staff undertook systemic practice training in England in 2018/19 (and some staff who completed this found it very beneficial), but in the last year systemic approaches in practice have not been supported or encouraged. Secondly, in early 2018 there was a move to reserve the child protection process only for children suffering *significant* harm, but in the last year the child protection process has been widened to a larger group of children.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the above, it has left staff feeling that no change is ever embedded and to be wary of new initiatives.

Jersey has not yet fully developed and implemented its own model of social work practice. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has been commissioned to co-produce a model, but internally this is viewed as slow and distant. Now that a permanent appointment has been made to the Director of Children's Safeguarding & Care position, there is an opportunity for Jersey to develop this further through greater staff engagement and to accelerate the implementation of its own model of social work practice.

A clear model and persistence with a consistent message will help social workers feel more secure in their work, which inherently involves working with risk and uncertainty, and therefore support improved recruitment and retention of staff over time. To build a strong and successful Children's Services, one methodology is to pay attention to each of the McKinsey Seven S's (see Appendix) as highlighted in the Munro review of child protection in England (2011).

The Independent Jersey Care Inquiry and Ofsted have both highlighted a number of areas in children's social care that still need attention, while recognising the progress made over the last two years. In particular, in relation to social work the Inquiry stated:

'We recommend that a model of social work practice is developed which is fit for the Jersey context and which offers effective help for families experiencing hardship and distress and is delivered by a well-trained and stable workforce.'

Early Help and MASH

The Inquiry made comments about the experiences of the public of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which in essence are about the dual nature of MASH in Jersey and in English local authorities as both a front door for advice and referral to children's services, including for early help and other specialist support, and as the multi-agency information-sharing hub for child protection concerns.

The MASH does process work effectively; the information-sharing is timely and streamlined and all contacts are processed to referral where needed within 24 hours, and Ofsted share this view. However, the Inquiry and Ofsted both express concern about the lack of development of the early help offer. Indeed, Ofsted say, *'too many children will continue to be referred to the MASH and their needs assessed, rather than them being able to access support when they need it.'* This is compounded by a lack of an embedded focus on working with children and families consensually through social work child in need plans.

Performance data confirms this. In September, just 3% (i.e. 6 contacts) of contacts progressed to early help and in the last year, 10% of contacts that went through the MASH process were sent on to early help but there is limited data about what service they received. The rate of referral through MASH was 679 per 10K children against an England average of 552. Similarly, there are 47.4 (102 children) children on a child protection plan per 10K in Jersey, compared to the England average of 45.3. This suggests that the early help and social work system in Jersey still sees referral and assessment through a 'safeguarding' lens rather than seeking to work restoratively with families to provide help and support. There are 265 Article 42 per 10K against an England average (S.47s) of 167, but only 35% of these Article 42s (child protection enquiries) result in a child protection conference. Thus, many children and families are put through an intimidating Article 42 process, who could have been better engaged through the offer of child in need support.

Ofsted also said in relation to referrals to MASH: *'Central to building confidence is the need for greater clarity about how consent is sought from and explained to families by referring agencies.'* If this were addressed across the partnership, it would resolve the concerns expressed to the Inquiry about being 'Mashed'.

Other areas

Other issues, including those that the Inquiry or Ofsted highlighted, for reflection and development are:

- There is an urgent need to implement the 'Right Help Right Time' early help model and offer which has been developed, so that there is a strong partnership early help offer, included a targeted early help service working with families in need. Alongside this, the continuum of need document (which has not been formally adopted) needs to be reviewed so that there is greater clarity about what early help can do for families and what is appropriate for children's social work

- An improved virtual school for children in care that ensures good quality personal education plans are in place for each child and that children in care are only excluded from school for very exceptional reasons. This sits alongside each school's corporate parenting responsibilities
- To develop stronger complaints and advocacy service for children and care leavers, including stronger participation services such as a children in care council or forum.
- A better resourced service to care leavers with pathway plans from 16, more personal assistants and improved accommodation, further education and employment options.
- Services to support children with complex needs in their homes are limited, more so since some care agencies decided to register only as care providers for adults. There is a need to develop home based care support for these children and their parents.
- The provision of child and adolescent mental health services dedicated to children in care and care leavers
- The monitoring of the welfare of privately fostered children and those home educated.
- A Quality Assurance and case audit system that shifts from a predominant focus on compliance to one of embedding learning and sustaining practice improvement.
- A review of the contact service, including child and family friendly venues
- A children's services website and pages for children, families, professionals and the public

In conclusion, Jersey has the advantages of being a relatively small place where staff and partners can get to know each other well and work collaboratively. Children's services are adequately resourced (although some resources may need to be realigned) and demand is manageable. The ingredients are all there for a good service.

The challenge is to develop a sustainable model of practice that staff and partners own and feel a strong sense of purpose in delivering. In addition, a range of services need to be developed to support families and to improve outcomes for children in

care and care leavers. This will require leadership with stability, consistency, persistence and determination.

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Appendix

A whole system

Children's social care from targeted early help to leaving care and all its component parts needs to operate to be effective as *one whole system* in which all the different parts and staff work together to make the best possible use of all available resources to help disadvantaged children achieve their best and grow into responsible adults.

This review adopts the principle that getting all the relevant children's services to work effectively as possible as one whole system is the best way to establish a strong foundation for a long-lasting 'Good' children's service. To shape this whole system, one model is to apply the McKinsey 7S framework for effective organisations (discussed in the Munro report). The model says structure is not enough; an organisation needs to pay attention to each of the S's to be successful.

Strategy – Is there a clear and coherent over-arching plan and direction of travel that is shared and well understood by senior and middle managers?

Shared values – Is there a common sense of purpose and agreed principles that all staff share, that are often talked about and used as a guide in problem-solving, in training, induction etc, that inform day-to-day policy and practice; are thresholds and practice models understood and used by all?

Structure – does the structure allow work to flow easily from one point in the organisation to another when needs change; is line management and decision-making responsibility clear; does the structure encourage dialogue and problem-solving between one service or team and the next?

Systems – Do the current systems in place support and encourage better interventions with children and families or make them more difficult for practitioners and front-line managers?

Style – the culture of the organisation; is it a learning organisation that encourages openness and creativity, debate about the best way to do things, role generosity, a commitment to helping each other, that is not overly rule-bound or procedure-driven, that provides high support and high challenge, being brave and supporting the management of risk and uncertainty?

Staff – the most important resource in the organisation. Do they have the tools and support to do the job, are there sufficient learning and development opportunities, are they feeling 'safe' and well supported in their teams, do they receive good supervision, is there a clear practice model for them to follow?

Skills – Do staff have the necessary skills needs to do the difficult job of social work intervention and what is the plan to equip them with these skills; is poor performance picked up and challenged effectively?