

# Jersey Child Protection Committee



## Year-end Report to Ministers of the Chair of the Jersey Child Protection Committee

### Introduction

*The Jersey Child Protection Committee is the multi-disciplinary body advising the States of Jersey on child protection issues. It acts on behalf of the Minister for Health and Social Services (the accountable Minister) and his States colleagues (principally the Minister for Education, Sports and Culture and the Minister for Home Affairs) and of the Chief Executives of the Health and Social Services Department and other contributing departments/ agencies, with respect to inter- agency and inter-professional roles and tasks specifically delegated to it. Within the scope of its delegated roles and tasks, the JCPC is the body which agrees and publicises strategy for multi-agency child protection processes and develops policies and procedures based on best practice.*

My letter of appointment stated that, as well as chairing meetings of the JCPC and sub-committees as appropriate I should:

- 'As Chairman of the JCPC, ensure that arrangements are in place to implement any recommendations relating to multi-agency child protection arising from the Andrew Williamson Inquiry into child protection arrangements in Jersey'.

and

- 'advise the three Ministers (Health and Social Services, Home Affairs, and Education, Sports and Culture) on how multi-departmental and multi-agency working with children and young adults can be improved into the future. A detailed appraisal would be timely and valuable at this particular time.'

This report covers both these tasks. Firstly it provides an account of the activities of the JCPC over the period 1 October 2007-30 September 2008. Secondly it provides more general information and raises some issues about the work of the Children's Social Services and their partner agencies in providing services to vulnerable children and their families. It incorporates

some of the points made in my response to the Andrew Williamson Report (dated 06.10.08). Throughout this period there has been a risk of 'planning blight' because the Williamson report was delayed due to the police inquiry into historic abuse. In recognition of this possibility, it was agreed between Senator Perchard, Mike Pollard, and myself that I would stay in regular contact with Andrew Williamson and the police, but that any necessary changes to the JCPC should not be held up.

### **Overview of my work as Chair of the JCPC**

1. During the period to the end of May 2008, as well as chairing JCPC meetings I have sought to gain an understanding of the previous work of the JCPC, through discussions with politicians and senior managers, JCPC members, and those working in the voluntary and self-help sectors. I also read relevant legislation, guidance and protocols; committee minutes since the JCPC was formed in 1996, and the two (internally conducted) Serious Case Review reports held to date. Discussions were also held with Andrew Williamson and Peter Smallridge about emerging findings from their inquiry. These inquiries indicated that members of the JCPC were committed to its work and had produced guidelines and protocols for child protection practice and a wide-ranging programme of training. However, having to fit this work in as extra to their other responsibilities has meant that some sound projects (for example, publishing an Annual Report and establishing a complaints mechanism) have not been carried through into actions. It also appeared that the committee structure (which was appropriate for the period when the JCPC was set up and protocols and guidelines had to be written, discussed and agreed) was no longer appropriate.
2. This scoping work emphasised that there was a lack of clarity about the work of the JCPC and the day to day work of JCPC members, in their separate agencies, in protecting vulnerable children and promoting their welfare. This was especially the case with respect to the Children's Services teams of the Health and Social Services Department. This was largely unavoidable as the JCPC had no dedicated staff and its business was conducted through the Children's Services division. (It must be said that this was the case in most local authorities in the UK before the Children Act 2004 strengthened the duty of all agencies to cooperate in safeguarding the welfare of children, and established the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)).
3. Much of my first 6 months as JCPC Chair was taken up in making recommendations on how the JCPC could establish the element of independence necessary for it to be seen by Jersey citizens as a body with an important part to play in monitoring the availability and quality of child protection services, and in particular ensuring that the different agencies and the statutory and voluntary sector worked together effectively.
4. The following recommendations were made to the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services and to the Chief Executive, Health and Social Services Department.

- It should be recognised that child protection work is everybody's business. It is therefore necessary for each relevant government department and voluntary sector agency to budget for some of its staff time to be spent on ensuring that staffing policies, governance arrangements and service delivery systems maintain vigilance on the protection of children from maltreatment. They are also responsible for playing their part in ensuring that the inter-agency child protection system works for the benefit of the children and families they are serving as part of their statutory or voluntary sector remit. There is an over-arching responsibility placed upon the three main States departments to provide support to the voluntary and private sector agencies as well as to their own staff in fulfilling their child protection responsibilities, eg by providing training on recognising child maltreatment and by providing advice on staff and volunteer recruitment and vetting policies.
- The JCPC should be accountable, through its members, to the agencies they represent, but also find ways of being responsive to the citizens of Jersey. The Chairperson of the JCPC should regularly communicate with ministers and with chief officers about intelligence (anonymised) emerging from child protection cases, on heightened risks to children and any threats to the effectiveness of child protection practitioners.
- The Chairperson of the JCPC should be independent of any of the statutory agencies or third sector agencies from whom services are commissioned by them. He/she should have an understanding of key child protection issues; and sufficient experience of the operational context of child protection work to enable well grounded contributions to resolving (where necessary) individual case issues. He/she should have experience of working in the public or voluntary sector at a senior level so as to command the professional respect and authority needed to chair the JCPC and contribute at senior level to policy and management discussions on child protection issues.
- Membership of the JCPC should (as now) comprise senior professional staff of the statutory and third sector agencies which provide child protection, youth justice, education, health or leisure services to children, or who work with those who may abuse children. Sub-committee membership will include members of the JCPC and others who can provide specialist knowledge and expertise.
- The Chair of JCPC should report regularly on the performance of the Committee, against agreed objectives and the annual business plan and budget, to the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services and ministerial colleagues, and there should be appropriate mechanisms for ensuring this occurs.
- A Professional Officer and an administrative officer should be appointed to manage the day-to-day work of the JCPC and support the work of the Chair and the sub-committees. They should have an office base that is not associated with any of the main child protection agencies.
- There should be an Annual Report of the activities of the JCPC and an Annual Public Meeting. There should be a site on the States website

for JCPC to provide information to members of the public and those working with children.

- The contributions of the JCPC members to its work would be more effective if an 'intranet' system could be worked out to improve communications, including for committee members not currently having access to the States intranet.
- The JCPC sub-committee structure should be reconfigured. The JCPC Chair and Professional Officer should be ex-officio members of all sub-committees. Membership of sub-committees should be agreed by the JCPC. Chairs of sub-committees should be nominated annually by members of the sub-committee, in consultation with the JCPC Chairperson, and agreed by the JCPC. The JCPC should agree the formation of short life 'task and finish' groups as appropriate.
- Each department/ agency, third sector organisation represented on the JCPC should recognise the importance of the contributions made by their managers as members of the JCPC and its sub-committees and ensure that they have allocated time for JCPC work.

5. These recommendations were all accepted, and the period May 2008-September 2008 has been taken up with implementation. However, the workload of the key staff in Health and Social Services (increased by the requirement to provide information to the police inquiry and by a higher referral rate of children and families in need of support and protection services) has meant that progress has been slow. Key to improving the pace of implementation is the appointment of the Professional Officer and Administrative Officer. Their appointment has been agreed and recruitment is in hand. Progress on the other recommendations is reported in the next sections and in the Annual Report of the JCPC.

### **Report and commentary on the work of the JCPC 1.10.07 to 30.09.08**

6. The JCPC meets for half a day approximately every 2 months. It met on 6 occasions during the 12 month period (including a meeting specifically to discuss the recommendations of the Williamson Report). Much of the agenda of the JCPC meetings has been taken up with restructuring, and discussions related to the Williamson Report recommendations and any implications for the JCPC of the ongoing police inquiry. Reports from the sub-committees are received at each meeting. There have been fuller presentations and discussions (including the attendance of other interested professionals) on safe recruitment policies and on the future direction of child protection training. The introduction of the new committee structure has mainly involved a re-allocation of the existing work-load so that the knowledge and skills of the membership could more appropriately match the terms of reference. However, two new sub-committees and a project group were formed:

The ***Child Deaths and Serious Case Reviews and Complaints Sub-Committee (known as the Serious Cases Sub-Committee)*** – was established to give a higher focus to examining the lessons that must be learned from unanticipated child deaths and cases where a serious injury or

serious avoidable harm have occurred and to receive and act upon any complaints made about inter-agency practice.

The **Communications sub-committee** was established in recognition of the importance of looking outward and being answerable for our work to the citizens of Jersey. It also has a key role in making the JCPC a stronger force in helping to ensure that the protection of children from all forms of harm, whatever the source, remains high on the public agenda.

The **Safeguarding Children living away from home project group** – was set up in anticipation of the recommendations of the Williamson Report and in recognition that children living away from home are already vulnerable and that special measures and increased vigilance are needed to protect them from maltreatment and other forms of harm.

7. These and the restructured sub-committees became operational over the Summer of 2008. Their work is summarised in the following sections, and in more detail in the Annual Report for 2008 to be published early in 2009.

#### ***Policy, Planning and Resources Sub-Committee***

##### **Joint Chairs: Barbara Bell and Mike Cutland**

The Committee had already prepared a draft Strategy and Business Plan for 2008-11, but progress on this has been delayed until the question of dedicated staff could be resolved. The sub-committee is now finalising the details of these and (in collaboration with the Communications Sub-Committee) working on the Annual Report.

#### ***Procedures and Audit Sub-Committee***

##### **Chair: Marnie Baudains**

This sub-committee has the key role of producing and auditing procedures and guidance for inter-agency child protection practice. These have been in operation for several years, but are in the process of being revised to accord better with the Children Law 2002 and the 2006 version of *Working Together to Safeguard Children in Need* (DfES 2006). Work is also near completion on revisions to the Jersey Information Sharing Protocol to take account of changes in data protection practice and legislation.

An audit of child protection conferences was completed in June 2008. This provided information on numbers of conferences held, the attendance rates of staff from the different professions and departments. Discussions will be taking place over the next few months to understand why attendance rates, and the quality of reports, varies between different professional groups and agencies. Encouragingly, the audit found a higher rate of attendance at conferences by parents and older children than is the case in most English authorities. This could be followed up next year, if resources are available, by a project seeking the views of parents and older children on how the child protection conferences and other aspects of inter-agency child protection work can be improved. This work will fit with the recommendation of the Williamson report that self help and advocacy amongst parents and children who may need to use child protection services should be encouraged and

facilitate their having a stronger voice in the future development of these services.

***Serious Case and Child Death Reviews and Complaints Sub-Committee***  
**Chair: June Thoburn, Vice Chair: Susan Turnbull**

The sub-committee has met on two occasions and has considered 6 cases where children have suffered serious harm and where there may have been concerns about inter-agency working.

- Further information led to the conclusion that two serious incidents were the result of accidents and not child maltreatment cases.
- In one case an internal report led to the sub-committee concluding that inter-agency arrangements had worked well and the young person had been appropriately protected from future harm.
- Internal Management Reports have been provided on one case and actions agreed to avoid some of the problems identified occurring in the future. These action plans will be monitored by the sub-committee and reports will be made to the full JCPC in December.
- Interim Management Reports are being prepared on 2 cases and it is likely that independent overview reports will be commissioned.

Links are being maintained with the ongoing police inquiry, and recommendations will be made by this sub-committee to the JCPC on any action it should take with respect to learning the lessons from any maltreatment of children in care that has taken place in the fairly recent past. Links will be maintained with members of the Jersey Care Leavers Association who have suffered maltreatment when looked after to facilitate this. We will wish to assist as appropriate in the planned Independent Inquiry.

The Serious Cases sub-committee also plans to liaise with the Health services to ensure that anonymised data are collected and analysed on all unanticipated child deaths, to ascertain whether there are systemic or quality of life issues which may be placing children at increased risk.

There have, to date, been no complaints about inter-agency child protection procedures. This may be because the possibility of making a complaint is not known about, but also because complaints are more likely to be about the actual service received (or not received) from child protection agencies and these are responded to by the appropriate department. This is an area of the sub-committee's work which will receive more attention next year, as part of our follow up on the audit of child protection conferences. As yet there is no formal mechanism for dealing with complaints about the work of the JCPC. When produced, these guidelines, along with encouragement for those who have referred cases to or been involved with the child protection system to give their views, will be placed on the website.

***Communications Sub-Committee***  
**Chair: Shirley Costigan**

The Communications sub-committee is in the process of setting up a public access website (hosted by the States web site). It will, work with the Policy,

Planning and Resources sub-committee on the format of the Annual Report and arrange the Annual Public Meeting in Spring 2009. It also advises the Chair and the JCPC and sub-committees on press releases and other links with the media to further the work of the JCPC or to respond to any areas of concern as they arise.

### ***Training Sub-Committee***

**Chair: Ann Kelly**

A full-time trainer, Janet Brotherton, is seconded to the JCPC by the Department of Health and Social Services. A full training programme was delivered in 2007-8, with training and workshops provided on a single and inter-agency basis at foundation level (recognition and passing on concerns); inter-agency working for professionals more involved in child protection working, and more advanced training relevant to inter-agency child protection practice. In 2007 foundation level training was provided by 5 trainers for around 400 professionals or volunteers whose work brings them into contact with children (in health, day care, youth service and school settings). There were 249 attenders at level 2 inter-agency training events (there may have been some overlap as these were on different aspects of practice). There were over 150 attenders at more advanced training (again with some potential overlap in attendance). In 2008-09 Jan Brotherton and colleagues will provide training for the trainers so that foundation training can be undertaken in-house by each agency / school/ centre employing staff who work with children

Foundation training continues to be needed as new people start to work with children, and more advanced inter-agency training is necessary to update knowledge and introduce new guidelines and procedures. Considerable progress has been made (despite limited administrative support and problems in identifying suitable venues) in ensuring that those working with children in Jersey have had some training on child protection. The Training Sub-Committee is in the process of surveying members to learn about future training needs and plan the programme accordingly.

### ***E-Safety Sub-Committee***

**Chair: Philip Durban**

This sub-committee (which started off as the Children Online Protection Committee) has been active throughout the year. It was set up to focus on child protection issues resulting from increasing use by children of the internet. It co-ordinates its work with that of the Department for Education Sports and Culture (DfESC) focusing on similar issues. Both of these link with and use training materials on internet safety produced by BECTA (the English Government's lead agency for information and communications technology (ICT)). They also link with (and use resources developed by) the UK wide Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) which provides training for professionals who are in a position to influence children's 'on line' behaviour and self protection skills. A member of the committee has attended the CEOP Training and this is being 'rolled out' on the island via the JCPC trainer and sub-committee members, particularly through the DfESC. A seminar for parents is also planned. There have been discussions about respective areas of work with the Prison Me! No Way! staff. In the early part of

the year resources and advice were made available by Standard Chartered Bank, and Jersey Telecom has provided a staff member to assist the work of the group.

A LOGO competition for the website address was held across all island schools and the winner selected by the Student Focus Group. Prizes of a school laptop (donated by Jersey Telecoms) and vouchers to the value of £50 (donated by NSPCC and DfESC) were presented to the top three submissions. The website will shortly be launched as <http://www.thinkb4youclick.je/>

### ***Domestic Abuse project group***

**Chair: Brenda Cochrane**

This short-life group was set up to consider the special issues for children who may suffer harm as a result of violence between the adults in the household. It works closely with the inter-agency Domestic Violence Forum and has joint membership. It will make recommendations to the JCPC and the Jersey Domestic Violence Forum (JDVF) in December. Following that it is likely that the work will be continued by the domestic Violence Forum, linking in with JCPC via joint membership. An inter-jurisdictional 'Raising the Standards' conference is being planned for May 2009 by the JDVF.

### ***Safeguarding Children Living Away From Home project group***

**Chair: Jo Forrest**

The sub-committee was set up as a short-life group, charged with preparing a report for the JCPC on the ways in which children living away from home are protected from, and enabled to protect themselves from maltreatment, whether by family members, fellow residents, members of staff or others. This includes children in foster or residential care, longer term health service care, boarding education or custody. The project group will report back to the JCPC in December 2008. The group is referencing 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: 11.2 to 11.22.' to identify where Jersey meets the outlined standard, and will make recommendations for action where it does not. Following the Williamson and Howard League recommendations, a decision will then be taken about how best the JCPC can continue to monitor safeguarding arrangements for this group of children and young people.

## **The work of children's social services and their partner agencies in protecting children from maltreatment**

### ***Children living in the community***

8. In any one month the children's social services teams have on their caseloads on average 558 children living in the community. This number disguises the very considerable through-put of work. In the first quarter of 2008 there were 275 referrals (an average of 92 per month). There are in excess of 1,000 referrals each year, a substantial increase from 749 in 2000. In an average month:

- 31 were referred because of concerns about actual or possible maltreatment.



- 21 were referred because of the impact on them of living in a home where there was violence between their parents or other adults in the home
- 31 were referred because a child had additional needs that could not be met by the generally available services or for 'other' reasons not easily categorised
- 9 were referred by the Judicial Greffe following disputes about residence and contact arrangements for children after parents have separated or divorced.

***Inter-agency child protection work***

9. Looking specifically at formal inter-agency child protection work, for which the JCPC provides the guidance and which is monitored by the JCPC procedures and audit sub-committee:

- Over the 5 month period October 2007-February 2008 66 child protection conferences were held – an average of 13 per month. These are chaired by an experienced social worker independent of the mainstream work of the social services teams. 53 mothers and 39 fathers attended these conferences and in 58 of the 66 cases the chairperson talked with at least one parent before the meeting. 7 children attended in person and 14 contributed in some other way.
- At the conclusion of 36 of the 43 initial conferences a decision was taken to place the child's name on the Child Protection Register as in need of a formal, inter-agency child protection plan; in 7 initial conferences a decision was taken that this was not necessary.
- At the end of March 2008 there were 46 children whose names were on the Child Protection Register and who were the subject of a formal, inter-agency child protection plan. This number is increasing- it was 27 in 2005 and 43 in 2007. During the five month period audited, 24 children had their names placed on the register and 30 had their names removed from the Register. This represents a large volume of complex work, often undertaken under considerable pressure.

***Comparisons with other jurisdictions/ authorities***

10. It is not easy to decide with which other localities Jersey could helpfully be compared because of the unique context of the Island. However, it would be reasonable to expect lower rates of vulnerable families and child maltreatment requiring statutory service intervention than is the average for England. In fact, Jersey is a heavier user of formal child protection Inquiries and the Child Protection Register than one might expect. The rates for Jersey, England and other local authorities which may be broadly similar, for children on the child protection register (subject to a formal child protection plan) are:

- |                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| ▪ Jersey          | 22 per 10,000 children 0-18 |
| ▪ England         | 25 per 10,000               |
| ▪ Isle of Wight   | 20 per 10,000               |
| ▪ Gloucestershire | 15 per 10,000               |

- Cambridgeshire 13 per 10,000
- Winsor and Maidenhead 8 per 10,000

### ***Children looked after away from home***

11. In March 2008 there were 79 children looked after away from their parents:

- 28 in foster care
- 21 in care but placed with family or friends
- 25 in residential care.
- 5 supported in other ways (eg supported lodgings)

During 2007, 12 children were placed with adoptive families

As with services to children living with their families, this disguises the throughput of work. In 2007 67 children started to be looked after; 84 left care and 86 moved between placements (usually a difficult time for the children and requiring a great deal of social work time). Just over half of the children are looked after on care orders, and just under half were accommodated with the agreement of their parents and the (older) children themselves.

Even though numbers in out-of-home care have come down considerably in recent years (from 143 in 2003), as with children on the child protection register, comparisons with other localities indicate that Jersey is on the high side in terms of rates of children looked after away from home (these figures for all except Jersey are for 2005 but later rates for the English authorities are unlikely to be substantially different).

- Jersey (2008) 44 per 10,000 children 0-18
- England 55 per 10,000
- Isle of Wight 64 per 10,000
- Gloucestershire 35 per 10,000
- Cambridgeshire 33 per 10,000
- Winsor and Maidenhead 18 per 10,000

(It is interesting that the other comparator island (IoW) also has a higher rate than expected, given the comparative lack of urban deprivation which is usually associated with high rates in care. I do not have access to comparable data for Guernsey and Isle of Man but it would be interesting to make these comparisons.)

Children in care at a given time are to an extent the result of past practice and policy, so a better picture of what is happening now can be obtained by looking at those entering care in the past year. It appears that rates entering care in Jersey are high, but that they may stay away from home less long than, for example, children in the Isle of Wight, where there is a low rate of entrants but a high rate in care.

- Jersey (2007-8) 37 per 10,000 children 0-18
- England 23 per 10,000
- Isle of Wight 22 per 10,000

- Gloucestershire 12 per 10,000
- Cambridgeshire 12 per 10,000
- Windsor and Maidenhead 6 per 10,000

Jersey differs from all English local authorities in having a large proportion of its children in care placed in residential care (32% compared with the England average of 13% - and a low of 8% for the Isle of Wight).

I have read the working party report on the future of residential care, and also Andrew Williamson's recommendations on a reduction in residential care placements and expansion of the family placement and family support services and consider that these are a sound basis for future planning.

### ***Children's services staffing levels***

12. The children's social services staff group providing these services is divided between the Assessment and Child Protection Team; the Child Care Team (working with children looked after and longer term family support cases) and the Placement and Support team providing a limited range of preventive family support services. The Fostering and Adoption team recruits, trains and support foster carers and adoptive families. Additionally 4 social work posts have been identified to be attached to the multi-agency school based team (although currently these posts are vacant); and one full time and one part time worker provide a social work service to children about to leave or who have recently left care.

In total the staffing allocation (not including staff in residential units) is: 5 service or team managers, 11 senior social work practitioners, 19 social workers, 3 family support workers and 4 secretarial and support staff.

However it is important to record that there has been a high vacancy level throughout 2008 (in part because the high cost of living and difficulty in finding accommodation acts as a deterrent to qualified social workers who may consider moving to Jersey, and possibly because the high profile in the media of child abuse cases may be deterring some applicants). In January 2008 there were 2 vacant senior practitioner posts and 4 vacant social worker posts, cutting the actual 'front end' social work staff numbers from 30 to 24 for much of the year.

In view of the number of referrals and the pressure of the work, this has, throughout the year, been a cause of concern to JCPC members, and we have written to ministers asking if measures can be taken to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.

### **Observations on how work to protect vulnerable children and support their families might be improved**

13. These observations are based on conversations with professionals, voluntary sector workers, committee members of the Jersey Care Leavers' Association, reading reports on allegations of abuse, and a study of the

statistics. My comments should be read alongside my response to the Williamson Report (Appendix 1). It should be noted, in particular, that I have not attempted to conduct an audit of child protection work and that I consider that it is essential that an independent audit, both of the work of Children's Social Services, and of inter agency child protection work (including the JCPC) should be undertaken as soon as arrangements can be made.

14. It is also important to say that I have been presented with evidence of very good practice, both in single agency and inter-agency work. I consider that the opportunities exist for excellent practice to take place in Jersey to provide a supportive service to struggling and stressed families and to children experiencing a range of difficulties, or in need of a protective or out of home care service.

15. However, from my own conversations and reading, and through conversations with Andrew Williamson about the evidence he received, I consider there are weaknesses in the service to which attention must urgently be given. Concerns expressed by members of the public about the services provided to vulnerable children and their families were around 'what they perceived to be unfair, or judgemental, decisions concerning parental skills or the demonstration of a lack of clarity and professionalism in the decisions regarding child welfare and family life'. (Williamson Report Para 9.1) 'A significant percentage were from current or former users of the Children's Service and they were critical of the service they had received. .... In a significant proportion of these complaints, the main area of concern was to do with a perceived lack of effective joint working between schools, Youth Action Team, CAMHS or voluntary agencies and the Children's Service on the Island'.

16. These problems of communication between agencies appear to be related, in the eyes of those making submissions to the Inquiry, to broader issues of access and responsiveness, especially of children's social services staff. 'A common issue that arose was the perception either by individuals or other agencies of difficulty of access to the service' (para 11.6). (These also contributed to recommendation 11 on the out-of-hours duty service.) This may be the result of specific duty arrangements, of staff shortages, or of policies to keep caseloads to manageable levels. There is also the possibility that, particularly over the past year, the higher rates of referral for more formal intervention from child protection workers have resulted from a 'risk averse' climate, and that in some of these cases a community based support service might have achieved the desired improvements. Whatever the reason, an inevitable consequence is that at least some of those seeking assistance at an earlier stage do not receive a service until problems have become more deep-seated, and parents or those supporting them in the community have become alienated by the refusal of a service. There is evidence in the Williamson Report that problems around timely access to 'in need' services are at least in part responsible for the dissatisfaction being expressed by some vulnerable families (some of whom are first or second generation victims of the abuse being investigated by the current police inquiry) and some of those in the community who seek to support them.

17. Some of the dissatisfaction identified by Andrew Williamson has resulted from the lack of a distinct social work and reporting services to the courts when parents are in conflict over post-divorce contact and residence arrangements for their children. The lack of a clearly identified service (similar to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) in England) is a cause of confusion since currently the same workers undertake child protection court work and post divorce reporting to the courts. I welcome the discussions that are underway to remedy this very real difficulty, especially in the light of the increase in marriage breakdown.

18. The report goes on to acknowledge that there will inevitably be disagreements between professionals charged with the duty of protecting children from abuse and neglect, and those who are judged to be failing in some way in their parental or caring responsibilities. However, in order to ensure that parents and children receive a fair and appropriate service, it stresses the importance of a robust complaints system. Children's social services have a complaints system, but I am not aware how frequently it is used by families and children referred for a child protection service, or whether those who complained to the Inquiry had also used the complaints system. It must be acknowledged that there are many difficulties in providing a complaints system which is trusted by members of the public, when the agency complained against has the power to remove a child or to withhold or withdraw a much needed service. This is especially problematic in a small island community. A stronger voluntary and self-help sector (including encouragement to groups such as the recently-formed Jersey Care Leavers' Association) could have a role in providing advocacy and support to those who wish to make a complaint about an aspect of the service.

19. Other than around the issues of thresholds and accessibility of staff, I have not been made aware of deficits in the operation of the Child Protection Conference system and the operation of the Child Protection Register and other processes put in place and monitored by the JCPC. As noted earlier, I have been impressed by the high attendance rate of parents and older children at child protection conferences. I have received some evidence that those families who are allocated to a social work caseload and have some continuity of social worker are, in the main, satisfied with the service they and their children receive.

20. From my conversations with Andrew Williamson and in my role of 'gaining a detailed understanding of the current mechanisms and structures' as well as from recent conversations with committee members of the Jersey Care Leavers' Association, I conclude that the JCPC and Children's Services managers must take steps to further understand the extent of any dissatisfaction about the ways in which both the JCPC and the protective services staff relate to families who may need their services. This applies also to those in the wider community and voluntary sector who provide support and refer parents and children for 'in need' and 'protective' services.

21. An initial tentative conclusion is that in Jersey, as in many other parts of the UK, pressure on front line children's social services staff, especially the Assessment and Child Protection team, is such that thresholds for the provision of an 'in need' or child protection service have become too high. The Williamson Report and some of the reports to the JCPC indicate that this high threshold may result from staff shortages, especially in times of sickness. This is a real problem, not easily surmounted in areas with small populations, and relates to the recommendations in the report about staff recruitment, retention, professional supervision and training.

22. An inevitable consequence of high thresholds is that too many referrals that could receive a service under voluntary arrangements are dealt with unnecessarily by the formal child protection route or by a court order being sought (as demonstrated by the comparative statistics above). This more coercive route to help, especially when people had sought a service at an earlier stage, adds to the tension between workers and the parents and young people who become involved in the formal child protection services.

23. The evidence given to the Williamson Inquiry, as well as some of the cases considered by the JCPC serious cases sub-committee, points to the need to explore whether an inappropriately wide gap has opened up between the community-based preventive services (mainly provide by the voluntary sector and the youth service) and the formal child protection services provided in response to allegations of maltreatment. This is only partially filled for vulnerable families in need of additional services by the longer term child care team and the family support and family centre service. If such a gap exists (and I am not in a position to say with any certainty that it does) it is dangerous because it can mean that children who need protective services may not receive help until problems are so advanced that a satisfactory outcome is very difficult to achieve. It is also dangerous because the work of intervening in these situations involves high levels of stress and few of the rewards that come from successfully helping families, and hence contributes to high vacancy rates and sickness amongst front-line staff.

24. Implementation of the proposals in the Williamson Report (10.4.7, 10.7 and 11.8) should result in clearer accountability and a more seamless and responsive child and family social care service to vulnerable families. A first step should be to look at the referral processes between the community-level family and youth services and the social services department 'in need' and child protection services. This could start by looking at the way in which the *Comprehensive Assessment Framework* is being implemented on the Island, with a particular focus on engaging families and encouraging them to seek help at an earlier stage. The child and family social work teams should be responsive to all vulnerable families and to all age groups of children and young people, though there will probably still be a need for specialist teams working with young families in the community and with troubled teenagers and their parents and carers. Flexibility of case allocation is also important so that, wherever possible, there is continuity of social worker and duplication of workers in one family is avoided unless there is a good reason for it.

25. I have also identified a lack of a clear training and development plan for children's social services staff. Whilst it is appropriate for the trainer attached to the JCPC to undertake multi-agency training, and advise on single agency training at a foundation level, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to the post qualifying needs of the child and family social workers. The training plans must focus on the particular needs of social workers working with complex cases of children at risk or with challenging behaviour. Some of this advanced level training may appropriately be undertaken in inter-professional groups with colleagues in health, police, education and youth services.

## **Conclusions**

26. As detailed above, I have seen at first hand the results of a great deal of hard work in seeking to make the formal child protection system in Jersey work for the benefit of vulnerable children and their families. This is all the more commendable as staff from all the agencies have to fit JCPC responsibilities in as an 'extra' to all their other duties. I have also been made aware of examples of very good practice with children and families. The impression I have gained is that some of the weaknesses identified above result from the front line staff being over-stretched. During holiday periods, if staff are off sick or vacant posts are not filled, I have concerns that the staff may be unable to respond appropriately to those seeking assistance, with the risk of families remaining un-helped and maltreatment remaining un-recognised, or inappropriate responses made. Without a more detailed independent audit, it is not possible to be sure that this is the case, but I again stress the importance of such an audit taking place as soon as possible.

27. Finally, returning to the work of the JCPC in the months ahead, I am confident that the appointment of a Professional Officer and administrator to support the work of the chair and JCPC members, and especially of the sub-committee chairs, will enhance the ability of the JCPC to fulfil the important role and tasks entrusted to it. I am confident also that its effectiveness will increase as it becomes more outward looking and learns from a wider range of Jersey citizens how best to improve the protection of children.

June Thoburn  
Independent Chair of JCPC

20 November 2008

## APPENDIX

### **Response of the Chair of the JCPC to the concluding comments and recommendations of the Williamson Report which bear directly on the work of the JCPC**

1. I concur with the broad direction of the conclusions and the recommendations and will value the opportunity of commenting on detailed plans for their implementation. I comment here only on those recommendations which have a direct bearing on my own terms of reference.
2. The above comments about a need for a seamless social care service for vulnerable families lead me to strongly support the recommendation for a clearer management structure for children's social care services, with clear political and departmental accountability. I also agree that mechanisms are needed at Chief Officer and Ministerial level to ensure that the social care, health, education, leisure, youth justice and voluntary sector services work co-operatively, especially for those with multiple difficulties such as children with challenging behaviour. Since the problems for many children arise from the difficulties of their parents, links across to adult disability and adult mental health services are essential.
3. If a decision is taken to appoint a Minister for Children, I consider that the focus of this appointment should be services for vulnerable children and families. Whatever is decided with respect to recommendations 1, 2, and 8 the accountability of the JCPC and reporting mechanisms within this structure need to be clear, and to provide for independence of opinion and advice to ministers and chief officers.
4. I strongly support recommendation 3. I suggest that one of two inspectorates would be well-equipped to provide external quality assurance of the work of the JCPC and of the child protection services: the children's social care division of the Office for the Inspection of Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED); or the Scottish Executive Social Work Inspection Agency. OFSTED staff are responsible for quality assuring all Serious Case Review Reports for England as well as child protection services in local authorities, youth justice and voluntary sector establishments. The Scottish Inspection Agency has a similar role but focuses more particularly on social work services, including those for adults. It also inspects local authorities in terms of what is required of them as employers of GSCC Registered Social Workers. Oversight by a body which has experience of inspecting the implementation of these Codes would assist in the recruitment of social workers who, at the moment, are less well protected than colleagues in the UK in terms of what they can expect of their employers to allow them to maintaining their Registration.
5. For the reasons identified earlier, the Williamson Inquiry did not look in detail at child protection processes and practice. Given the pressure



that these services have been under, it would be helpful (to staff and to ministers) to have such an 'external audit' conducted as soon as possible to assist with forward planning.

6. I concur with the arguments in the report about a strong independent reviewing service for looked after children. More discussion is needed about how to provide this element of independence in a cost effective way for looked after children and for children and families whose cases are before the courts for civil or public law reasons (the CAFCASS service in the UK). The role and tasks have similarities to and differences from the role of the Chair of Child Protection Conferences. It may be that a small team with an element of specialism could operate from an independent base within the Island.
7. Serious thought must be urgently given to building up the confidence of the people of Jersey who may need services in the staff who provide the services. Recommendation 5, the establishment of a forum or forums for those who use child protection services, is an essential first step. A JCPC sub-committee is looking specifically at the safeguarding mechanisms for children and young people in out of home care, and a looked after children's forum is one of the possibilities they are exploring. The Jersey Care Leavers' Association has a specific focus to support those who have left care, but its members have important messages to pass on to those caring for children currently looked after. Other self help organisations exist for different groups experiencing stress in the community. As Chair of JCPC I would greatly welcome ideas about ways of consulting parents who have been referred to a child protection service and parents of children in care about how the services can be improved.
8. Robust whistle blowing procedures for staff and volunteers, and complaints procedures for those who use service, are essential to the provision of safe services that have the confidence of those who currently use services or may need them in the future.
9. Recommendation 10. I welcome this recommendation. A JCPC sub-committee has already started work on reviewing the guidance and processes to ensure that children living away from home, especially those in secure accommodation or custody, have avenues for seeking help if they are experiencing, or at risk of, any form of maltreatment whether from staff, other residents, family members or others with whom they come into contact, and whether this is in person or 'on line'.
10. For the reasons given in paragraphs 13-20 about the importance of the initial response received when assistance is sought with a child and family problem, I support the recommendation that the first point of contact outside normal office hours should have a health or social care focus. Discussions will be needed about a cost effective way to achieve this which does not over-stretch front line staff.