

Report to Jersey Children's Services Strategic Leadership Board

August 2021

Introduction

This is my fifth report to the strategic leadership board since I took up the role of independent advisor to Jersey Children's Services two years ago. I have again written this report without being on island because of Covid restrictions. I have continued to meet regularly with Mark Owers and to receive performance data and attend performance meetings with his senior team.

My role as independent advisor is to provide support and challenge, principally to Mark and his team, and additionally to provide an overview report to this Board, setting out my view of current strengths and achievements as well as areas for consideration and development. I do this in the context of the child-centred, restorative and strengths-based intentions set out in the Jersey Children's Social Care **Our Plan** 2021 – 23.

It is pleasing to see that since my last report in March the *je.gov* public website now has easy to find pages of children and childcare, on Children's Social Care and the children and family hub, and that on these pages are published advisor reports going back to 2019, the Jersey Children's Social Care Our Plan and the Independent Children's Homes Association Review of Children's Homes in Jersey. These pages give families in Jersey, and the general public, access to a wide range of information about services for children and families and other support.

Practice and Performance

In general, the clearer and more focused organisation of early help and social work practice reported to this board in March has continued. The creation of the child and family hub has led to the majority of contacts responded to through information, advice or sign-posting or passing to early help for support. Referrals to Children's social care that go through the MASH have stayed steady at about 50 a month since March 2020, with slight increases in months that include end of school term. In the last year re-referrals rates have remained low at 17 % (England average 23%), another indication that the front door and early help developments have been effective. The number of children open to the social work service has remained stable at around 460 for the last year and this has helped ensure that social worker caseloads are manageable.

Numbers of children subject to child protection plans has remained stable at around 50 for the last year, but there is still a relatively high number of Article 42 child protection enquiries carried out each month. Only 28% of Article 42s this year have resulted in a child protection conference. In the last year a high number (71) of Article 42s has been carried out on 16- and 17-year-olds. This may not be the most effective way of engaging and supporting these young people.

Numbers of children in care have not been above 78 in the last year and in July were 73. However, 46 (63%) of children in care are aged 13 or above, and 20 (27%) are 16-

or 17-year-olds. There is a legacy issue here as half of the young people in care aged 13+ have been in care over 2 years and ten will reach 18 in the next 12 months. This presents a challenge in terms of sufficiency of placements, because it is generally more difficult to find stable foster care that meets the needs of teenagers. 20% of children in care are in residential placements, a high rate perhaps related to this older age profile. In terms of placement stability, just 8.2% of children have had 3 or more placement moves in the last year which is good (the figure was as low as 6% during winter lockdown) and the rate of social worker changes for children in care long-term is now the lowest it has been since 2018 at 1.2.

The service for care leavers continues to develop with 67 care leavers now receiving support. A new team manager post to oversee the care leaver's service has been created. All but 6 care-leavers appear to be in suitable accommodation, however 58% of care leavers are not in education, employment or training. The pandemic may have affected work opportunities, but looking forward supporting more young people into further education and work must be a priority.

In terms of social work practice, a new quality assurance framework was launched in June and Practice Standards were updated and relaunched for September 2021 with each social worker and their manager signing to say they have been read and understood. At the same time new timescales have been set out for different aspects of social work. Case audit activity in the last 6 months has had a stronger learning component and a greater focus on effectiveness and outcome for the children. Of the 27 case audits reported in June, 17 were scored as 'Good', 7 as 'Requires Improvement' and 3 as 'Inadequate' with an average score of 6.15 out of 10. However, I also hear of children's plans that are not well thought through or implement, so I question whether the case file auditing is sometimes over optimistic.

It is pleasing to report that a new permanent Principal Social Worker and Head of Safeguarding and QA has been appointed, who has extensive experience in several London boroughs. She will take up post in October.

The child and family hub implemented in March 2020 is now part of an integrated Family and Community Support Service that pulls together a range of early help services so they are better co-ordinated and targeted. This includes significant new government investment and new posts that are currently being recruited to. This should make more effective early help support available to more families, including those who no longer need social work involvement.

Recruitment and Retention

A continuing problem for Jersey, as it is for many English local authorities, is the recruitment and retention of social workers. Turnover of social workers and team managers is bad for children and families who depend upon stable relationships to build trust and it makes it more difficult to embed and deliver a consistent practice model and good quality. A permanent head of service team is now (nearly) in place and this has brought much greater stability over the last 18 months.

There is also more stability at team manager level with 6 out of 8 posts filled by permanent staff. The difficulty lies with senior practitioner and social worker posts where 23 out of 58 are covered by agency staff or are unfilled. To tackle this a new permanent social worker recruitment campaign, 'Let's be Ambitious', is about to be launched. This will include developing new advanced practitioner and practice manager roles to reward experienced practitioners who want to stay in practice. There is still a challenge in bringing experienced professionals to Jersey on a permanent basis which effects not only social work recruitment, but also other skilled roles such as mental health professionals and psychologists.

A new approach to vulnerable adolescents

There have been concerns for some time about a small number of young people displaying anti-social behaviour and petty criminality. Some of these young people are in care, some are missing from home and care and some may be vulnerable to exploitation. In recent months several measures have been taken or are planned to address the needs of these young people.

A new Missing and Unauthorised absence protocol was agreed with the Police in May this year. This distinguishes between when a young person is absent but their whereabouts are known and where a young person is missing with whereabouts not known. The protocol also gives some scope for carers to try to locate the young person where they are not believed to be at risk. The Police hold daily meeting to consider children and young people that they are concerned about. Children's services hold a daily meeting to consider young people missing or at risk in the community. Data and information are then brought together for a weekly multi-agency meeting that considers data, trends, and measures to promote prevention or disrupt activity. It is reported that the protocol has raised the profile of and response to missing children internally and with partners.

There are between 20 and 30 children (50 to 100 episodes) reported Missing each month, with numbers higher in the summer. About 60% of the young people are not in care. The main reason given in return home interviews for going 'missing' is to meet with family or friends. For some young people in care who go missing, this may be an opportunity to explore with them and their family the possibility of reunification to (wider) family.

Between January and July this year there have been 31 risk assessments for child sexual exploitation and in ten cases this led to a multi-agency sexual exploitation meeting to consider how best to protect the young person and disrupt potential criminal/perpetrator activity.

As a more strategic and long-term response to this group of young people, and in line with Jersey Children First and restorative and trauma informed approaches, there is agreement to fund a new **Young Person's Intensive Integrated Support Service** which will bring together therapeutic, teaching, youth work and social work expertise to wrap around young people struggling to regulate their behaviour – the approach will be a collaborative partnership one, building a system to meet complex needs. A new

head of service is being recruited to lead this service and it is envisaged that the service will expand its remit and capacity as new appointments come into place and new multi-professional approaches are developed.

As Jersey child protection and children in care numbers show, these interventions are skewed towards teenagers in the absence of other resources and approaches that can engage these young people. The proposed Young Person's Intensive Integrated Support Service is an opportunity to develop an innovative approach that works imaginatively and intensively with each young person and their family to address their needs holistically.

Placement Sufficiency

Related to the needs of vulnerable young people and the high number of teenagers in Jersey's care, is the shortage of sufficient placements of different sorts and of good quality to meet the needs of Jersey's children. In general foster care struggles to meet the needs of older teenagers. Jersey has sought to address this by developing a specialist intensive foster care service. Thus far four families have been recruited, but it is considered that 4 more are needed. Ideas about encouraging experienced foster carers in England to relocate to Jersey are being explored.

In the absence of sufficient skilled foster carers for teenagers, pressure falls on the residential estate to find innovative solutions. These pressures have increased in the last two years as off island placement have reduced from 24 to 16 and some residential provision closed following the care inquiry.

Steps have now been taken to licence and recruit more registered residential managers and ensure all residential staff are trained in understanding trauma and able to adopt trauma informed approaches (in the same way that staff in the short-breaks homes are trained and know how to respond to children with autism). Following the review of residential homes in Jersey, there is a children's homes improvement plan underway which has included significant staff training.

In addition, a property has been identified as a potential new therapeutic children's home for 3 young people and currently regulatory issues are being addressed to set this up. This is part of an overall strategy to develop a stronger therapeutic approach to meet the needs of young people whether in the community, at school or in care. One barrier to this is the continuing difficulty to recruit people with therapeutic expertise, such as psychologists, to the island.

There also appears to be a shortage of suitable supported accommodation options for 16+ young people to be helped develop independence skills and supported accommodation for care leavers.

The development of the residential estate to get the right broad range of placement options for young people is a complex piece of planning that will require a government wide approach and dedicated project management and political support. Central to these plans is the redevelopment of Greenfields and secure provision and the associated buildings and services on that wider site. There are lots of good ideas, but

it seems that there is not yet a clear and agreed long-term strategy and financial plan adopted across Government in place. Current plans appear piecemeal and reactive to current pressures. However, it may be that this complex set of issues around sufficiency (also a major problem facing many English authorities) can only be tackled by taking opportunities when they arise.

Corporate Parenting

The Jersey care enquiry and subsequent Ofsted inspections emphasised the importance of Corporate Parenting – an all-Government responsibility to meet the broad needs of Jersey children in care and those who have been through the care system. A Corporate Parenting Board chaired by the children’s minister was established in early 2019. I understand that because of the pandemic and the changes in Ministers the corporate parenting board has not met for some time. The Jersey care inquiry 2 year review suggested that the board should be ‘a small group of politicians with one or two officers’ with other work carried out in sub-groups.

The quality and experience of care and support after care remain core issues to address for Jersey, so that this small group of Jersey’s most vulnerable children are well supported to achieve good life outcomes. A strong Corporate Parenting Panel, building on Jersey Children First commitment, would be able to:

- Hear and consider the voices and experiences of young people in the Government’s care and care leavers
- Give political support to a broad sufficiency strategy to develop the best range and quality of provision
- Consider how improvements can be made to the educational experience of children in care to raise their attainment
- Support a range of work opportunities, vocational training and apprenticeships for Jersey care leavers
- Improve the access to accommodation and housing for care leavers
- Strengthen the therapeutic support available to children in care and care leavers in school, in placement and in early adult life

There has not been a properly established Virtual School in Jersey thus far, although the function of Virtual school head-teacher has been included in a senior post covering a wider education and inclusion role. A virtual school is one that advocates for and supports the educational needs of children in care. In England this includes ensuring each child has a PEP (Personal Education Plan) supported by pupil premium allowance, and this support now extends to care leavers and to other children open to social care such as those on a child protection plan.

Since January a multi-agency working group has developed plans and recommendations to establish a formal Virtual school in Jersey. Progress is being made with the current recruitment of two case workers and all children in care of school age now have a PEP. There is a role for the Corporate Parenting Board in overseeing the implementation of the recommendations made by the Virtual School working group.

Conclusion

Despite the pandemic the leadership team in Children's Services have achieved a lot in the last year – notably, establishing a more stable management team in children's social care; improving access to early help and social work services; developing more consistent practice standards; building a service for care leavers; working with partners across schools, Police, Health to develop an understanding of and commitment to restorative and trauma-informed approaches that put the needs of children at the centre. Jersey is a small island with limited capacity, but it is commendable to see how much development work across Early Help, Social Work, CAMHS, and foster and residential care has taken place, in particular to find ways to respond to children with high and complex needs.

Despite this work and the progress made, Jersey continues to face a number of challenges. These challenges are essentially no different from those faced by children services in England, but Jersey's size, geography and unique history can make these challenges more difficult to resolve.

The following areas remain priorities for Jersey:

- Continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of early help and social work practice through stable staffing, good learning and development, consistent supervision and high expectations, supported by good quality assurance.
- Strengthen support to vulnerable young people to meet their mental health and learning needs better and to reduce the need to enter care
- Develop a strategic sufficiency programme that addresses foster care and the range of residential and supported accommodation provision, including the redevelopment of the residential estate. A partnership approach that includes Education, Health and Justice inputs is required here.
- Re-establish cross government corporate parenting board to plan and oversee strategic improvements for Jersey children in care and care leavers. These are the Government's own children and young people.
- Develop a broad recruitment and retention strategy to attract skilled and experienced professionals that builds on the 'Be Ambitious' initiative. This may need to include review of HR processes, terms and conditions, grade levels and housing etc.

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