



Report of the Independent Chair 2012

Introduction

With the agreement of the Ministerial Children's Policy Group, the timing of this report was moved to year end as this made more sense in terms of reporting on performance and budget for the full year. It also presents the forward work programme for the JCPC for 2013. The latter will need to be flexible given the proposed changes with the creation of the post of Joint Chair and the integration of many of the multi-agency safeguarding activities and Committee functions as the year progresses.

Given the ending of my contract as Independent Chair of the JCPC on 31st January 2013, it seemed to me that there would be merit in my giving an overview of that 3 ½ year period, with specific observations on the year just gone and referencing the key components of the forward plan and work programme.

Achievements

Procedures – The bedrock of consistent quality child protection work is the multi-agency procedures. These must be intelligible and supportive to all faced with complex presentations of abuse in all its forms and provide a clear reference point for the limits of decision-making and onward referral. The publication in February 2011 of our Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures and the promotion of these across all agencies working with children was a huge step forward for our work in Jersey. More recently, procedures to investigate presentations of organised and complex abuse have been approved and I am grateful to colleagues in the States of Jersey Police for their work in formulating and promoting these.

Procedures are only as good as their consistent application and we continue to use a range of mechanisms to test this, ranging from the experience of Serious Case Reviews through to direct commentary and the engagement with our training events. A major source of information will be the Independent Safeguarding and Standards service within Social Services. This team oversees the management of the Child Protection Register and chairs all conferences and reviews. As such its members are superbly placed to test the effective application and outcomes of our Procedures. The JCPC has made significant contribution to the development of this service and we anticipate this moving into a mutually challenging and informative working relationship in 2013.

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Serious Case Reviews – The JCPC published its first Serious Case Review (SCR) completed under Working Together procedures in 2010. Based upon this experience we now have robust SCR procedures of our own and have continued to review both child deaths and other areas of concern in a child protection context. This activity forms part of the regular report to the Ministerial Children’s Policy Group and the learning is translated into action plans for the relevant agencies to implement. Any action under SCR Procedures is a challenge to those providing services and I wish to acknowledge the commitment at all levels to engage with this demanding process and focus upon the benefits of the learning which can flow from it. Keeping this activity in a clear multi-agency construct is the responsibility of the SCR Sub-Committee of the JCPC and I have received significant support from this group throughout my period in office. This has been supplemented by advice and guidance from the Law Officers and the Data Protection Commissioner, which has always been generously provided.

Training – Another key component of the JCPC functions is that of assessing the need for multi-agency training and then ensuring that a high quality programme is in place to respond to this. The JCPC has been fortunate to have the services of a committed and resourceful Training Officer over the past 10 years and its programme delivery has been highly valued throughout Jan Brotherton’s time in post. Jan retires at the end of 2012 and she leaves with our grateful thanks and best wishes. The feedback from our training events reflects the improved investment in multi-agency collaboration which is the cornerstone of our working together.

The Training Sub-Committee of the JCPC has devised a Training Strategy and is now in the process of delivering this. With staff turnover and changes in policy and practice coupled with the integration of learning from SCR’s and other sources, the task for those constructing the programme within budget is difficult and I am indebted to past and current Chairs and members of the Sub-Committee for their sound work in this regard.

The extension and reach of our training programme is immense. This has been enhanced by the move to our new offices and the facility of a training room and resource room on site there. In the ten months from February to November this year 544 delegates have received training there. Another initiative which has been hugely beneficial has been the development of a Training Pool. These are staff in child protection agencies who undertake training and refresher courses and take lead on foundation and other course delivery within their service; a good experience for them as employees and an excellent extension of our training profile.

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Conferences – During my period as Chair we have run two major Conferences with nationally recognised speakers and each has been over-subscribed. These are a huge demand upon the JCPC team and on each occasion we have delivered a high quality event, appreciated and valued by the delegates, which has resulted both in greater awareness and understanding of the issues as well as providing a whole new range of resources for people to draw upon and networks to enhance working practices.

Alongside this we have developed a programme of professional seminars and, in facilitating these, we have drawn upon Jersey based specialists to present and lead. I have been consistently impressed with the high quality of research and policy/ practice material which has been presented to a hugely engaged audience – again these events are over-subscribed whenever we put them on. I see these as both raising the standing of the JCPC as a public agency in Jersey and responding to the strong demand for stimulating and high quality presentations on important themes which can be widely accessed at a sensible cost.

Performance Monitoring - We have commissioned and published audits into Case Conferences, Referrals and, most recently, on the Voice of the Child. I remain concerned that we lack the base material of multi-agency activity measurements to even begin to inform judgements as to investment in services and we are certainly not in a position yet to comment with confidence on performance and outcomes. The Performance, Procedures and Audit Sub-Committee has recognised this challenge and is working on a common and consistent framework of returns which will give the JCPC and its agencies robust source material on which to address quality and performance. I believe this to be a crucial aspect of our public accountability and would expect such material to be collated as part of this Annual Report in years to come.

I am impressed with the work of the Independent Board of Visitors and the way its members have established and developed their role, which I see as contributing both to the safety of looked after children and a quality assurance function. The JCPC has an established relationship in assisting with budget management, providing meeting facilities and co-ordinating training for new Board members.

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Staffing and Facilities – I take every opportunity to comment on the quality of the JCPC staff team and this report will be no exception. They are a team which works together exceptionally well – this is exemplified in our various ‘conference’ activities – and shows a huge commitment to improving all that we do for children in Jersey. The level of support which I as the Chair have received throughout my contract has been consistent and responsive. The role of Professional Officer is complex and demanding; all the more so as the Chair is not on site. It requires political and organisational skills with a sensitivity to the multi-agency profile and a capacity to move issues forward without a statutory base. I have been fortunate to have had the services of two postholders during my contract, each with different skills and abilities but each responding to my dependence upon them well beyond what could be expected. Our Administrative Officer has reliably supported all our meetings and ensured consistent capacity in all our support functions. Jane Errington is leaving us to return to employment in the UK and we wish her well in this new venture.

We have developed effective budget monitoring and reporting systems which meet both our needs and the requirements of the financial procedures. Governance and oversight is provided through our Planning and Communications Committee which is made up of Sub-Committee Chairs and leads from service areas. We have devised a Risk Register which is regularly reviewed and ranges across core services to reputation.

To finally have the quality of office accommodation and independent resources which the JCPC merits is a huge achievement and a proper recognition for my team and our work. This was a demanding piece of work requiring labyrinthine negotiation with Property Services which still continues over rental.

We also finalised the Partnership Agreement with the Minister for Health and Social Services securing definition of our independent status and three year funding. Ministerial responsibility for this Agreement will transfer to the Chief Minister’s Department in the coming weeks.

Themes

Independence - Essential that everyone relating to the JCPC invests in the independence of the profile of its functions and reflects the added value of this in quality assurance and evaluating performance.

Multi-Agency – Equivalence of Member status recognised along with contribution to the JCPC deliberations and work as a whole. This creates a tension for agency members of the JCPC when the JCPC decisions and actions may be viewed as critical or multi-agency requirements put additional demands upon the service.

Consistency – Ensuring the application of Procedures and the use of Thresholds. Developing and applying a Common Assessment Framework and using Training and service points such as the projected Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to test a reliable and resourceful response to any presentation of child protection concerns.

Raising the Profile – Never an end in itself for the JCPC. Using the national engagement with Local Safeguarding Children Board Chairs, Conferences, Newsletters and media/briefing materials to ensure that safeguarding children in Jersey remains a public, political and professional concern.

Key Components of the Forward Plan 2013 and Beyond

Hearing the Voice of the Child – testing the capacity of all services, including our own, to understand expressions of concern and ensure the effective contribution of children and young people to the services they receive.

Statutory Base for the JCPC – the safeguarding profile and the multi-agency work confirmed in law.

Revised Working Together and Munro Review – Testing performance against the requirements in these essential guidance documents. Delivering the Jersey Common Assessment Framework and implementing this consistently.

Children’s Policy Group/Vulnerable Adults Policy Group – working with a new Ministerial relationship and contributing to the development of a Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee (VAPC) under a new Joint Chair of both Protection Committees.

Performance – meeting the challenge of reporting on quality as well as level of activity; testing the JCPC against approved standards. A recent discussion on the new Ofsted inspection guidance gave us a sound basis for self-evaluation in 2013.

Training – sustaining the programme and range; delivering on a broader basis which engages politicians, professionals and parents.

Communication – Delivering our strategy with proactive and reactive media briefings and the production of high quality information materials.

Conclusion

In July 2012, the JCPC ran a workshop to address the changes proposed in the revised version of Working Together (the Government Guidance on Safeguarding Children in England and Wales) and the outcomes of the Report of the Munro Review into Child Protection. The final point on our summary document produced on that day is a strong endorsement of the potential for the work of the JCPC and all its partners to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in Jersey:-

“The fact that Jersey is a small jurisdiction with control over its own affairs was seen as a strength, it is easy for professionals to know each other and develop good relationships, government is accessible and change possible....”

“We want Jersey to be a centre of excellence; we want a Rolls Royce service”

MJT/12/2012