

# Jersey Child Protection Committee



## Report to Ministers of the Chair of the Jersey Child Protection Committee

### SUMMARY

#### Terms of appointment

My letter of appointment stated that, as well as chairing meetings of the JCPC I should:

- '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.'

This report comprises:

- an account of the activities of the JCPC over the period 1 October 2007-30 September 2008
- information on the children's social services provided to protect children from maltreatment and
- observations about future developments in child protection arrangements and practice. These encompass both the work of the JCPC and also the services provided to vulnerable children and their families by the children's social services directorate and partner agencies.

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

In addition to Chairing meetings of the JCPC and the Serious Cases Sub-committee, I have reviewed the terms of reference and committee structures and interactions with the children's social services directorate of the Department of Health and Social Services. This work led to a series of recommendations to ministers in April 2009.

#### *The key recommendations in the interim report were:*

- Each relevant government department and voluntary sector agency must review whether it allows adequate time for relevant staff to ensure that departmental child protection systems are working effectively.

- Each ministry/ 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.
- 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.
- 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 supporting families and working with children.
- The Chairperson of the JCPC should be independent from any of the statutory agencies and their partner agencies in the voluntary sector.
- The Chairperson 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.
- 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.
- The JCPC sub-committee structure should be reconfigured.

These recommendations were all accepted subject to more detailed discussion and costing, and the period May 2008-September 2008 has been taken up with implementation.

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

The JCPC met for half a day on 6 occasions during the 12 month period (including a meeting specifically to discuss the recommendations of the Williamson Report). Two focused discussions were also held on safe recruitment and on training, to which other colleagues were invited. Responses to the Williamson Report were made, both by the Chairperson and by the JCPC. During this period some restructuring has taken place and two new sub-committees and a new project group formed. The new sub-committee structure is:

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

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. Details of these are now being finalised.

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

This sub-committee has the key role of producing and auditing procedures and guidance for inter-agency child protection practice. Work is near completion on revisions to the Jersey Information Sharing Protocol. An audit of child protection conferences was completed in June 2008.

***Child Deaths and Serious Case Reviews and Complaints Sub-Committee*** – was recently established to give a higher focus to examining the lessons that can be learned from unanticipated child deaths and cases where a serious injury or serious

avoidable harm has occurred, and to receive and act upon any complaints made about inter-agency practice. Links are being maintained with the ongoing police inquiry. Guidelines and an explanatory leaflet on how to complain/comment about the work of JCPC are being prepared and will be placed on the JCPC website.

***Communications Sub-Committee*** was established in recognition of the importance of JCPC looking outward and being answerable for our work to the citizens of Jersey. A public access website will 'go live' very shortly. The sub-committee will advise on the production of an Annual Report and of arrangements for an Annual Public Meeting (both in Spring 2009).

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

A full-time trainer is seconded to the JCPC by the Department of Health and Social Services. During the year, over 400 professionals and volunteers who work with children have attended training courses on recognising and responding to child maltreatment.

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

This sub-committee was set up to focus on child protection issues resulting from increasing use by children of the internet. A LOGO competition for the website address was held across all island schools and the winner selected by the Student Focus Group. The website will shortly be launched as <http://www.thinkb4youclick.je/>

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

This 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. An inter-jurisdictional 'Raising the Standards' conference is being planned for May 2009 by the JDVF.

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

The project group was set up in anticipation of the recommendations of the Williamson Report and in recognition that children living away from home (whether in foster care, residential care, hospitals, boarding schools or custodial establishments) are already vulnerable and that special measures and increased vigilance are needed to protect them from maltreatment and other forms of harm. A report to be submitted in December will describe safeguarding measures currently in place and make recommendations on how they can be strengthened.

### **The work of children's social services in protecting children from maltreatment**

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

In any one month the Children's Social Services teams have on their caseloads on average 558 children living in the community. There were over 1,000 referrals in 2007, a substantial increase from 749 in 2000.

Looking specifically at formal inter-agency child protection work:

- Over the 6 month period October 2007-February 2008, 66 child protection conferences were held – an average of 13 per month. There is a high attendance rate of parents compared with some other jurisdictions.

- At the end of March 2008 there were 46 children whose names were on the Child Protection Register. This number is increasing- it was 27 in 2005 and 43 in 2007.

A larger proportion of Jersey children have their names on the Child Protection Register than is the case for those needing a formal child protection plan in similar areas in England.

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

In March 2008 there were 79 children looked after away from their parents, the majority of whom were living with foster carers or relatives. 25 were in residential care and 12 were placed for adoption during 2007. Although the proportion in foster care is increasing, a larger proportion of Jersey children is in residential care than in similar English local authorities. (32% compared with the England average of 13%).

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

It should be noted 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 should be undertaken as soon as arrangements can be made.

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. However, from discussions I have had with a wide range of people on the Island, and through conversations with Andrew Williamson and the Howard League team about the evidence they received, I consider there are areas for concern to which attention must urgently be given.

- Problems of communication between agencies appear to be related to broader issues of access to social workers and other professionals at times of need, including out of office hours. This may result from, and is exacerbated by, staff shortages during vacancies and periods of sickness and holidays, and the need to keep caseloads to manageable levels. There is some evidence that, over the past 12 months, the higher rates of referral for more formal intervention from child protection workers have resulted from a 'risk averse' climate.
- Whatever the reason, an inevitable consequence is that thresholds for receipt of a social work service are higher than they should be. At least some of those seeking assistance at an earlier stage do not receive help until problems have become more deep-seated. As a result, some parents or those supporting them in the community have become alienated by not being provided with the help that would prevent their difficulties from escalating.

- A further consequence of high thresholds for receipt of services is that too many parents and children that could receive help under voluntary arrangements are dealt with unnecessarily by the formal child protection route or by a Care Order being sought.
- In the coming year 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 communicate with and relate to families who may need their services.
- Strengthened voluntary and community self-help groups have an important role to play in ensuring that families in need of assistance can get their views across. Advocacy and support are also needed by those who wish to make a complaint about an aspect of the service, including about aspects of the JCPC's work.

## **Conclusion**

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 become 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 and sickness absences, and when vacant posts can not be quickly 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.

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 and the support services to their parents and carers.

June Thoburn  
Independent Chair of JCPC      20 November 2008