

**Annual Report**  
**Board of Visitors**  
**Jersey Children's Residential Services**  
**September 2011**

**Introduction**

The new Board of Visitors for Jersey Children's Residential Services were introduced to each other for the first time by Phil Dennett and Joe Kennedy in May 2010. There were nine independent volunteers from a variety of backgrounds who had been selected by a panel chaired by Mike Taylor, Independent Chair of the Jersey Child Protection Committee (JCPC).

The first official meeting of the new Board of Visitors took place on 10 May 2010. A Chair and Deputy Chair were elected for the next twelve months. Within a few months, one member of the Board was experiencing conflicts of interest with her other voluntary role, so she resigned from the Board.

There are currently eight Board members:

Susan Parker (Chair)  
Alice Chanter (Deputy Chair)  
Louise Clark  
Nola Hopkins  
Nicola Santos-Costa  
Keith Shaw  
Anne Southern  
Sheila Warren

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Board of Visitors is to visit open and secure residential units in Jersey to meet with the children and young people to help monitor aspects of their life in care. The members endeavour to monitor that standards are maintained, identify concerns and issues, and discuss these at Board meetings and recommend actions to Children's Services.

**Terms of Reference**

Initially, it was the Board's understanding that the Terms of Reference were in draft and could be amended as the Board wished. The Board decided to use the draft terms of reference document unaltered for the time being in order to later assess if it was appropriate and adequate for the purpose of the Board. It was later explained to the Chair by Deputy Judy Martin that the Terms of Reference was not a draft document, despite the Board's only copy having "draft" written across it. Indeed, it transpired that the Terms of Reference had been signed off by the Children's Policy Group in April 2010.

The Board felt that this contributed to an uncertain start for a new group of volunteers.

## **Training**

The JCPC made recommendations regarding the potential training needs of the new Board members. All members undertook several hours of training before visiting any children's homes. The members come from a variety of professions, including those accustomed to working with children and young people, but we all agreed to join in for baseline training, which would also help us to bond as a group. We are grateful to Jan Brotherton and Cathy Phillips for the Saturdays and evenings that they gave up in order to provide training for us.

The Board felt a little uneasy about identifying our own training needs, but were grateful for the guidance of the JCPC.

## **Familiarisation visits**

The majority of members had not been to any of Jersey's children's homes before, so a schedule of informal visits were set up in order for members to familiarise themselves with as many of the children's homes as possible. The Board is grateful to the managers and staff of the children's homes for facilitating these visits.

The Board agreed that it was important to set the scene for this new group of independent visitors from the outset. We decided that our approach would work best if it was informal and friendly, and we asked to be shown around by any member of staff on shift, or a resident. We wanted to highlight our independence to the children and young people at the earliest opportunity, so we purposefully avoided aligning ourselves with management and senior staff in the homes.

We sent out an email to all residential staff in June 2010 to introduce ourselves before visiting any children's homes.

## **Official visits**

The Board members did not think that visiting a home as a large group would be effective, so we decided to allocate certain members to each home for a twelve month period. The home allocations from July 2010 to August 2011 were as follows:

Greenfields	Alice Chanter and Susan Parker
Heathfield	Anne Southern and Keith Shaw
La Préférence	Louise Clark and Nicola Santos-Costa
New Ways	Nola Hopkins
St Marks Hostel	Alice Chanter and Nicola Santos-Costa
White House	Sheila Warren

In March 2011, a new residential unit known as Ulvik was opened with one resident, so we added this home to our schedule of visits.

In July 2011, New Ways closed as the only resident was found a foster placement in the UK.

In August 2011, Heathfield moved to Brig-y-don, so it will be visited from September 2011.

The Board decided in July 2011 to slightly alter the allocations for the next twelve months for reasons of personal time commitments and also to maintain a fresh perspective. From September 2011, the new allocations will be:

Brig-y-don	Keith Shaw and Sheila Warren
Greenfields	no change
La Préférence	no change
St Marks	Alice Chanter and Keith Shaw
Ulvik	Anne Southern and Sheila Warren
White House	Nola Hopkins

We established our own process for official visits and reporting on visits. We are grateful to Cathy Phillips from the JCPC who provided us a draft template for recording official visits.

The terms of reference require each unit to be visited at least three times per year on a planned basis and unannounced visits as deemed necessary. The members decided that these visits would be too infrequent for us to establish trusting relationships with the residents, so we increased the number of visits to monthly.

Since July 2010, the Board has visited each home once per month, alternating announced and unannounced visits where it has been appropriate to do so.

The visitors complete a report on each visit and send a copy to the Chair who collates all of the reports.

## **Independence**

The Board has always felt that it is important to maintain its independence. It is for this reason that we declined the secretarial support offered by Children's Services. We also declined to meet at The Bridge in case any costs incurred were paid for from the budget of Children's Services.

The Board meets at NSPCC Pathways due to two members having access to the building and no costs being incurred. We take our own meeting notes.

The Board developed a leaflet to be given to each resident and also to be displayed on a notice board in every children's home. The Board purchased a mobile phone so that we could be contacted by residents and the mobile number was printed on the leaflet.

## **Budget**

The Board requested a budget in July 2010 and is disappointed to report that we still do not hold a budget in a clear manner. Phil Dennett has organised for several receipts to be reimbursed for members, but we are disappointed that we still do not control our own budget.

We asked for £2000 to be allocated for our first year, and we understand that the budget allocation was made, but we are obliged to submit all receipts for reimbursement to Phil Dennett which, due to his position as a senior manager and his voluntary redundancy from his former role, remains unsatisfactory.

Members give up a significant amount of time for this voluntary role. Due to the lack of a clear budget holder, members have made very few claims for out-of-pocket expenses such as stamps and stationery to print and post reports, petrol and small gifts which members gave to homes at Christmas, for example. It is our understanding that members have claimed under £200 in total in the past year.

The Board requests that this situation be remedied as soon as possible. The JCPC offered some twelve months ago to be the budget holder so that our receipts could be submitted through their administrator. This seems wholly straightforward and appropriate to the Board.

## **Key observations**

The Board of Visitors has been made to feel welcome in all residential children's homes. Members have invested many hours and visits in building trust with the children and young people, as well as the staff, so that they know that we are there to listen to them, not to judge them.

All members enjoy visiting the homes, chatting with the young people and gradually getting to know them. Members are pleased that no serious areas of concern have been raised by residents, or indeed by staff. The Board is happy to provide a more detailed report on each individual home if required. The Board is also happy to share its monthly reports of visits.

The Board is starting to develop a more effective means of communicating with the managers of the children's homes. As small areas of concern have arisen, members have recorded their concerns but it has not been clear what to do next with this information.

The Board feels somewhat concerned that we are a "tick in the box" and that our views are not really taken into consideration. Members feel that the issues they raise are not often acted upon. The Board is happy to provide specific examples of this.

The Board is grateful for the support of the JCPC but we are aware that they are an independent body without statutory powers.

Since the Chair met with Stuart Brook in July 2011, the Board has felt more valued and positive about its future role. However, members are aware that Mr Brook's role in Jersey is not permanent.

The Board feels that the standard of care in Jersey's children's homes is good, but there is room for improvement. There has been huge financial investment in some of the children's homes and very little in others. The improvement in life chances and outcomes for residents is not commensurate with the amount of money spent on improving the building.

The Board has seen examples of excellent practice in some children's homes, but little sharing of good practice across the homes.

The Board is concerned that the staff rotas in several homes are irregular so the young people do not know who will be looking after them in the coming days. We understand the constraints and difficulties of staffing, but we believe that all children should know who will be looking after them and when.

The Board is aware that we need to start planning to recruit new members but we want to be sure that our role is clarified, meaningful and valued before involving any new members. There were no nominations to replace the Chair and Deputy Chair in July 2011, so Susan Parker and Alice Chanter have agreed to fulfil these roles for one more year.

## **Conclusion**

The Board of Visitors has made significant progress since May 2010 from a group of strangers to a body of volunteers who work well together and who keep the interests of the children and young people at the centre of everything that we do. We hope that there will be more willingness to listen to and act upon our findings and suggestions in order to improve the care of looked after children in Jersey.