



Jersey Care  
Commission

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

Children's Social Care and  
Independent Reviewing Officer  
(IRO) Services

**4 – 8 December 2023**

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# Introduction

## Overview and Scope

This was an inspection of Jersey's children's social work and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) services relating to the support provided to children looked after. Children's social work services are delivered under the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department (CYPES). The purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality and impact of the leadership, oversight, and delivery of its services for children who are in the care of the Minister for Children and Education. Inspection activity focused on highlighting the service's achievements and areas for improvement. Areas for improvement have been established in collaboration with the services during the course of the inspection and will lead to development plans at the conclusion of the process.

This report triangulates a range of inspection activities, including direct sampling of children's social care records and review of documents, data, and performance information. Central to the inspection methodology is the inclusion of the views of children and young people, parents and carers, service staff, and partners about the service's performance. This report is not a definitive statement of performance as it does not include a review of every child looked after. However, its findings are reflective of the service as a whole, given it draws on a review of the casework of over three quarters of children looked after by the service, a considerably larger sample rate than would be seen in the UK inspection system.

Many of the Jersey Care Commission standards represent best practice, and it would be unusual for any service to meet all of the standards. Where criteria were not met, it served as an indicator for identifying areas for improvement. Where areas for improvement were identified, these were supplemented by discussions with the leadership team to explore ways of working that might support those required improvements. These have been set out in the report under suggestions for ways of working to help the service consider alternative approaches to delivering the improvements discussed.

## Timeline

The inspection took place over five working days, from 4 - 8 December 2023, on-site at Jersey children's social work and IRO services.

## The Inspection Team

The inspection team consisted of four inspectors, with three engaging in direct viewing of children's care records, liaison with social work staff and the senior leadership team. The remaining inspector had responsibility for pre-inspection planning and took the lead in conducting interviews with partner agencies during the on-site inspection period.

## The Inspection Standards

The inspection team reviewed practice against the [inspection standards](#) set out in the handbook under the following areas:

- Statement of Purpose
- The service is well-managed and effectively led
- Partnership working
- Staff recruitment, retention, training, and support
- Recording, information sharing, and data protection
- Children and young people share their views and are listened to
- The effectiveness of assessment, planning, and intervention
- Placements meet children and young people's needs
- The effectiveness of reviews and the delivery of the IRO function.

## The Inspection Methodology

The inspection team spent five days on site in the service, as well as two additional weeks of offsite preparatory work. The inspection methodology draws on a range of approaches to support the triangulation of evidence, including:

- Interviews with staff from children's social work and the IRO services.
- Sampling children's case files.
- Interviews with children, young people, and parents/ carers.
- Interviews with partner agencies, including the Children's Commissioner, Advocacy Services, Education, Police, Jersey Family Court Advisory Service (JFCAS), and Health.

- Interviews with political and corporate leaders and operational managers.
- Review of the social work and the IRO self-evaluations.

Inspection findings were also informed by the review of evidence provided by the services, including:

- Strategies, plans, and reviews
- Service documentation
- Performance data
- Tracking and oversight tools that support practice oversight.

In order to enable a current evaluation of the services and support provided to children looked after, sampling of casework formed the spine of the inspection methodology, structured on interventions delivered to children and young people in the preceding six-to-twelve-month period.

### **The Jersey Care Commission Survey**

The inspection methodology also included triangulation of the Jersey Care Commission's survey carried out by an independent company, the Picker Institute. The survey was only open to children, young people, and families who were currently accessing Children's Social Care Services.

Children and young people were eligible to take the survey if they were aged up to 25 years and had used one of the services being evaluated.

Parents and carers were eligible to take the survey if their child had used one of the services being evaluated.

Staff were eligible if they were working in one of the services being evaluated at the time of the survey. The survey was available online between 3 July 2023 and 25 August 2023 and was widely promoted.

The Ofsted Children's Social Care survey questions were the initial basis used to create core questions across the Jersey children's social care surveys. In addition to these core questions, service specific questions were included.

The results from service users and staff employed in the Children's Social Care Service were as follows:

- 53% of service users, parents, and carers said that they feel able to get in touch with the service if they are unhappy about something.
- 48% of service users and parents and carers said that their child is encouraged by staff to do their best at school.
- 63% of service users, parents, and carers said that they know how to make a complaint if they are unhappy about something.
- 81% of staff said they involve children and young people in decisions and plans about their care.
- 89% of staff said they encourage children and young people to do their best at school.

### **Action Planning**

In collaboration with Children's Social Care Service system leaders, this inspection has highlighted seven priority development areas that leaders must focus on to have the most significant impact. These should form the basis for the service's development plan. Suggestions included ways of working which were discussed on site, to support delivery of the development priorities, as an aide to thinking and planning.

# Inspectors' Summary

Services for children looked after in Jersey have improved since the last [inspection](#) in 2019. Foundations have been established to ensure a more coherent social work offer for children and young people. Many shortfalls identified at the previous inspection have been responded to, including the creation of early help support, improved financial investment and infrastructure, and better support to care leavers.

This inspection has focused on the effectiveness of the support to children looked after, including the oversight of the IRO function ([IRO Handbook - Jersey](#)) in children and young people's care planning. Inspectors found that children looked after are receiving better support than they were in 2019, and some receive a good service, though the practice remains variable. Children looked after are now more central to thinking and planning, and for many, their outcomes are improved as a result of the intervention provided. Due to staffing pressures and some weaknesses in practice, the IRO function has been slow to develop. Recent actions taken to respond to those weaknesses are beginning to deliver more effective oversight of care planning for children, but it is too soon to evidence sustained impact.

Many of the critical practice shortfalls identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed, such as children's access to mental health support, an improved focus on education, and more effective supervision and management oversight.

Positively, many of the political and corporate weaknesses have or are in the process of being addressed. There is now a greater commitment to corporate parenting responsibilities, Ministerial support, and a real focus on the vision for the reform programme by the Chief Officer for CYPES.

Some areas have been slow to progress, such as the development of the Government of Jersey's corporate parenting responsibilities. This has been hampered by the pandemic but also by continued changes in corporate and political leadership, and some real challenges remain to ensure that the Government of Jersey understands and delivers in this vital area for children and young people. Additionally, issues such as workforce instability, the lack of placement sufficiency, and weaknesses in infrastructure to drive improvement are proving to be formidable challenges. Resolving these weaknesses is fundamental to enabling the reform that is needed.

Progress in some areas continues to be hampered by perceptions of the service based on historical events. These continue to fuel a negative narrative, leading to anxiety and some silo working. Tackling this negative culture is the greatest priority for leaders to address, or it will continue to define the department and hamper progress. **Area for improvement 1**

Although there is still much more to do to provide consistently good services for children looked after, the inspection team did not find evidence to support the negative perceptions of children's social work services. The inspection team found that many children now receive good quality support and experience improved outcomes.

Leaders clearly understand the further work needed to deliver practice improvement, but leadership changes continue to impact the improvement programme. A new interim director was appointed during the inspection period, making this the third in less than two years. This creates fragility as new leaders 'start again,' often changing the direction of travel, inevitably impacting the pace of progress. It is now time to think differently about how to mitigate the continuing risk of workforce instability and take action to create a coherent approach to improvement, which should remain in place regardless of changes in political, corporate, or operational leadership.



This is a pivotal moment for Jersey's children's services. Although children are now receiving a better service, there are some stubborn challenges that are tough to fix. Jersey has the potential to become one of the best performing childcare systems in the British Isles. Political leaders have provided much-needed financial investment to support the needed reform. These additional resources provide Jersey with the enviable opportunity to think differently about how to deliver its social work services to children and young people, unfettered by much of the process dictating the UK social work system. It is now time to be brave and innovative about how to tackle the longstanding challenges. The future success of the service lies very much in the hands of corporate and political leaders, who have the motivation, ability, capacity, and power to create an outstanding service that children and all islanders of Jersey rightly deserve.

# Areas for Improvement – Children’s Social Care Service

1. To reframe the negative historical narrative of public and partner organisations of children's social work services to shift perceptions to a more balanced, fair, and evidence based view.
2. The development of an infrastructure and the capacity required to implement the change/reform programme successfully.
3. The development and implementation of an effective quality assurance framework to enable leaders and staff to know the quality of social work practice and understand its impact on children.
4. To improve the stability and sustainability of the workforce at all levels.
5. Focus on the period before legal proceedings commence (Pre-proceedings) to secure early permanence plans and processes to reduce and avoid unnecessary delays and create security for children.
6. Radical review of the missing from home and care processes to ensure information is systematically collected, collated, shared, and analysed effectively to inform the reduction of risk.
7. Children’s Social Care to collaborate with health partners to ensure that review health assessments are timely and initial health assessments are of high-quality when children first become looked after.

## **Area for Improvement – Independent Reviewing Officer Service**

1. There needs to be evidence of sustained improvement in the delivery of the IRO function, with the identified development plan requiring senior leadership oversight to ensure implementation.

# Summary Findings

## **Statement of Purpose: Children’s Social Work Service**

The Statement of Purpose provides the overarching aims and intended outcomes of children’s social work services. This includes the operating model, which details the practice model underpinning social work and how the service is provided through individual core functions.

The process through which to provide feedback or raise a concern or complaint is clear in the Statement of Purpose, as well as the governance of the service. Some of the policies and procedures seen are comprehensive and based on good practice. However, others are lacking such as a Placement Matching Policy or have only recently been implemented, for example, the Permanency Procedure in the last quarter of 2023. Jersey Social Care Services' 'Our Plan' provides an overview of policy; however, some of the more detailed policies and procedures were not evident.

Although there has been a focus on working collaboratively with children and young people, a guide to social care written specifically for children and young people who are looked after and another written for parents and carers were unavailable at the time of the inspection. The information provided to parents/carers and families is currently being revised to act on these findings.

Work has taken place to gather feedback from children, young people, and their families – this was particularly strong during Family Feedback Week, where 75 families were consulted. Of these, only 33% felt involved in the assessment and planning for their child, and just under half felt they knew how to provide feedback to the team.

Children and young people are supported in speaking up when things are not right through a combination of the IRO service and Advocacy Services. In addition, information about how the Children's Commissioner can support children and young people's rights is regularly shared with children looked after. There is a whistleblowing policy and procedure that is Jersey Government-wide for all staff.

### **Statement of Purpose: IRO Service**

The written Statement of Purpose provides the overarching aims and intended outcomes for the IRO service. It outlines its core functions as reviewing plans for children in care and those in need of protection. It has a role in scrutinising, challenging, and monitoring CYPES corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities. The Children First practice framework is cited as the primary model of care. Good practice in terms of timescales is detailed in the model, but linkages across advocacy and the IRO service need to be better detailed in terms of their role and responsibilities. This fragmentation was echoed in the partner conversations as an area for development. In addition, the IRO's scrutiny and challenge role in the context of the broader quality Assurance framework is unclear.

### **The Service is well-managed and effectively led**

Leaders have a sound understanding of the further work needed to support practice improvement. The self-evaluation is comprehensive and shows that leaders have reflected on their strengths and areas for development. However, it would benefit from improved analysis and a greater focus on impact. It provides evidence that the service has improved in many areas since the previous inspection, for example, the introduction of the new practice model, the establishment of the new Corporate Parenting Board, the creation of the on-island training programme for social workers, improved child, and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) offer, amongst many others.

There is now government-wide support for the vision for improvement across the service, which has helped to drive wider system changes, including creating new legislation and the Government of Jersey's ownership of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Some of the corporate and political weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. Political leaders are now more united on the need to prioritise children's services.

Ministerial leadership is strong. The Minister for Children and Education is beginning to develop a clearer understanding across Government departments about what corporate parenting should look like in Jersey and to shape the work of the Corporate Parenting Board. However, not all work has progressed at the pace needed; it has been stalled by the pandemic and changes in political leadership, leading to a loss of traction in some areas.

There is more to do to develop Ministers', leaders', and officers' understanding of their roles as corporate parents. Work has begun to engage children and young people in shaping the board's priorities, but more structure is needed to ensure focus on the things that matter most. The board's work plan would benefit from a thematic approach, which would bring improved focus to priorities.

The Chief Officer for CYPES maintains effective strategic oversight and a connection with the service. He is ambitious to deliver good services for children and families in Jersey. There is a solid commitment to ensuring more joined-up working across the CYPES department and clear thinking regarding the opportunities this creates. A tangible example of the benefits this approach can deliver is seen in the development of wrap-around CAMHS, which delivers much improved mental health and emotional well-being support for children looked after.

Positively, Ministers and officers have secured financial investment for a reform programme through the Government Plan 2023-2026 to support service improvement. The programme is ambitious in seeking change for children but would benefit from a strengthened needs analysis to ensure focus on critical areas.

While it is recognised that there is commitment and drive Ministerially and from the Chief Officer, there is insufficient infrastructure, capacity, or expertise to oversee and ensure the delivery of the ambitious change programme planned. This is an absolute priority for leaders to address. **Area for improvement 2**

Leaders recognise that the programme needs to be refocused and systematically overseen. There is a need to develop more confidence in thinking differently about how to deliver system change, not necessarily trying to overlay practice from the UK. With new and creative ways of thinking, bold leadership, and robust programme management, there is the potential to create outstanding services for children looked after in Jersey.

Having the proper infrastructure in place is critical to the effective development of children's social work services. Fundamental functions like commissioning, analytical capabilities, policy development, and performance intelligence are either insufficiently resourced or underdeveloped. This hampers leaders' ability to be confident in their evaluation of risk and vulnerability or to know how to best target resources and prioritise. There is an urgent need to secure the capacity and capability to generate improved insight from performance data to support critical oversight of practice and analysis.

Shortfalls in capacity also impact the delivery of a robust quality assurance system, which would provide a much-needed line of sight to practice at all levels. A good range of audit activity occurs, including a monthly audit programme supported by dip sampling of children's case records and review. Audit activity demonstrates a growing understanding of the need to focus on closing the feedback loop to ensure that practice shortfalls are identified and responded to. This area lacks sufficient quality assurance capacity and an effective system to ensure that identified actions are followed through. Consequently, shortfalls are not consistently followed up, resulting in continuing practice weaknesses that are not addressed. The lack of an established framework and analytical capacity means there is also an absence of an effective governance structure to promote an effective line of sight to practice and provide the necessary assurance that leaders need.

Challenges in complying with the requirements of audit activity are also evident, with low completion rates impacting the service's ability to form a reliable analysis of practice. Audit templates are extensive, requiring extended periods to complete one audit, hampering compliance by busy managers dealing with front line activity. Challenges are also evident regarding engaging practitioners and consistently seeking feedback from parents and carers, as this also increases completion timeframes. Action to seek feedback through the family feedback week in August 2023 has provided some helpful insight into practice to help mitigate some of the shortfalls in practice.

In the future, it will be essential for the service to review the tools and structure that support audit activity and ensure that they effectively achieve compliance with audit requirements. Creating a robust, effective quality assurance framework with rigorous assurance mechanisms and a line of sight across all layers of the service is an absolute priority for leaders to address. **Area for improvement 3**

### **Partnership Working**

Partners spoken to by inspectors asserted their commitment to improving the outcomes and experiences of children looked after and working together to do this. Numerous examples are evident that demonstrate this commitment, such as the level of support offered to children looked after by the CAMHS, with fast-track referral processes to support timely assessment of need and work to strengthen the strategic approach and oversight of the response to young people at risk of exploitation. Other examples include the pilot group, CLASH, a newly developed multi-agency meeting to ensure the health and education needs of children looked after are met. Professionals discuss the individual children and young people to mitigate the risks of unmet needs.

Some partners report improvements in being able to provide professional challenge due to increased stability in the children's services leadership team, but this is not a universal view. There remains a strong sense of anxiety within social work services for children about getting things wrong and that any challenge might lead to unfounded criticism and extensive scrutiny of the service.

While scrutiny and oversight are essential in building confidence across the system, it is also vital that the social work services for children are given the space to grow and develop.

Cross-directorate partners and arm's length bodies would benefit from working together to develop alternative approaches to learning when things do not go well. This should lead to a more solution focused approach to considering the issues while seeking assurance that children's needs are met, and their rights and entitlements are ensured. There is a need to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of wider scrutiny arrangements do not create duplication, whether this is the activity of the Children's Commissioner, Safeguarding Board, Corporate Parenting Board, the regulator, or the Ministerial Safeguarding Group.

Partnership working is better developed in some areas than others, with differing opinions between the police and children's social work service regarding responsibilities for children missing from care. It is critical that this is viewed as a partnership issue as it is well evidenced that this cohort of children is more vulnerable to harm and exploitation. Work must be proactive and coordinated across the relevant partners to target places and spaces and disrupt potential risk areas, including more targeted work from youth support services. Extensive support is available across the youth offer, but this is not fully defined, and eligibility is confusing. Together, agencies should focus their attention on designing a coherent, joined up preventative approach to protect children at risk of exploitation (sexual and criminal) and missing, to divert more children away from being drawn into criminality or care.

### **Staff recruitment, retention, training, and support**

Leaders have been persistent in trying to stabilise the workforce through an ambitious workforce strategy. This has delivered some improvements, with 67% of the qualified children's workforce now permanent. There needs to be a considered and evaluative approach to using agency staff that better supports business delivery. Positively, agency staff are staying six months longer in the service compared to 18 months ago, which was just eight and half months.



Recruitment to permanent posts now includes consideration of internal progression pathways to enable current staff to train as social workers through an on-island degree course. Staff feedback has supported leaders to understand why staff leave, and concerted work has taken place to respond to this, with a range of incentives now in place to promote retention.

These are tangible improvements that the service should be proud of, given the challenges of recruiting for qualified social work posts over recent years.

However, there is more to do as changes of managers and leaders at all levels continue to create fragility and hampers improvement. This fragility is mirrored across the wider workforce, with too many social workers not staying long enough when they come to work in Jersey. Factors impacting retention include access to affordable housing, living costs, and maintaining family life at a distance. There is also a highly competitive market for qualified social work practitioners.

Consequently, staff don't stay, leading to too many changes in social workers for some children, making it difficult for them to build relationships and trust.

Ensuring improved stability across the workforce is one of the most critical areas for development and an absolute priority for leaders to address. **Area for**

#### **improvement 4**

Leaders need to consider new creative ways of thinking in response to the continuing challenge of workforce instability on an island with a small population in a highly competitive specialist area. Key to this is the need to continue to ensure that the workforce offer remains competitive, alongside promoting good conditions for those who commit to living in Jersey. Leaders have rightly accepted that part of the workforce plan will be relying on hybrid and agency models to create sustainability.

Staff feedback is sought annually through the 'Be Heard' and SWORD surveys, with some positive messages in the most recent surveys, such as workers feeling more appreciated and more secure in their work. However, some low satisfaction levels are evident regarding the experience of working in Jersey, work-life balance, and some concern about how well change is managed.

Of interest to the organisation should be the lowest scoring dimension, that staff do not see the service as a 'learning organisation.'

There has been a strong focus on supporting staff development, with an extensive rollout of the Children First Practice Framework and restorative training for all staff. Restorative training provides staff with the skills to build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties, and repair harm where there has been conflict. This is supported by an extensive training programme and conference events. The service also holds regular practice weeks, which help to bring focus to practice development.

Leaders have worked hard to create improved conditions to support staff to practice competently in Jersey. As well as improving pay and conditions, increased social work capacity means staff have manageable caseloads. Caseloads are low in comparison with most UK local authorities across the whole service, enabling social workers to do good work.

Over the last twelve months, the service has focused on strengthening supervision and management oversight. Supervision takes place regularly in most cases and is much more embedded throughout the service's work. Management oversight is visible on children's case files, providing clear guidance to social workers as risks change.

### **Children and young people share their views and are listened to**

Most children are seen regularly by their social workers and, where appropriate, seen alone. The inspection team saw many examples of good work across the service to engage with children looked after and to gain their views and feedback. Many children and young people spoken to by inspectors talked with warmth about their positive experiences of living in care, with some stating that their best times had been when they were "living in a foster family" or describing their social worker as 'brilliant.'

Children's records include detailed summaries, which provide a sense of the child and help new workers to understand their experiences. Some records are warmly written to children and young people and capture their voices, bringing them to life through observations of their presentation and behaviour. The inclusion of residential daily records helps social workers understand their lived experiences in this setting. The Mind of My Own (MOMO) app is increasingly used by children and young people and is beginning to capture more feedback about their views.

Inspectors saw examples of creative direct work with children, which helps them to understand why they are in care and what is happening to them, but direct work still needs to be consistently embedded in practice. Workers speak with pride and passion about the children they work with, and many build meaningful relationships. Examples were seen where social workers have fostered trusting relationships with some children over many years, evidencing the huge benefits that will follow from achieving a stable workforce. Relationship building is limited for some children who have experienced too many social worker changes, impacting their ability to trust. The case for change in securing greater workforce stability is well demonstrated here, making this an absolute priority for leaders to address.

Children's participation and influence have improved significantly since the last inspection. Children's voices are heard and do, on occasion, influence practice changes, but the work in this area is not sufficiently developed. The uptake of advocacy remains low, though regularly promoted by social workers in recording and practice. There are plans in place to improve this.

Advocacy partners have worked hard as a partnership themselves to ensure the voices of children and young people are amplified on a whole service level. There is now a lot of material setting out the views of children looked after on the case files viewed. However, work is less developed concerning evidencing the impact of what difference this makes. There is less evidence of activity that closes the loop in response to the issues raised by children and young people or in evidencing how the feedback informs planning and service development.

The CYPES department commission advocacy services for Jersey's children looked after through Jersey Cares advocacy service. During 2023 to date, Jersey Cares has supported a total of 24 children looked after, 18 of whom had been referred into the service by their social workers. Due to challenges in capacity in Jersey Cares, Barnardo's has also been commissioned to provide additional advocacy support for 15 children looked after during quarter three of 2023.

The previous Children in Care Council is no longer operating, but it is exciting that plans are now underway to ensure this is reintroduced so children and young people's voices can be heard. The Corporate Parenting Board has already begun to strengthen how corporate parents can support children and young people's engagement to help shape service and practice development.

### **The effectiveness of assessment, intervention, and planning**

Timely and well considered decisions are made for most children and young people when they need to come into care. Decisions are carefully considered based on child-centred, multi-agency assessments, which explore the child's needs and parental capacity to care.

When risks increase, and children can no longer live safely at home, statutory powers are used appropriately to safeguard and protect them. Pre-proceedings are used to support planning when concerns increase, but there is insufficient oversight of these by managers, and they are not always reviewed regularly to avoid drift and delay. This is an essential area for the service to tackle, as it has the potential to create unnecessary delays for children, reducing their chance of early permanence and family life. **Area for improvement 5**

Assessments and plans for children looked after are routinely updated to reflect changes in children's circumstances. They are insightful regarding risks and barriers to progress. Care plans are variable in quality. In stronger examples, they are clearly informed by children's views. In many children's cases, a child's ethnicity and first language are given due consideration, enabling them to be actively engaged in their care planning. There are good examples of the child's voice being considered at critical decision-making points.

Sometimes, work could be more tenacious in promoting children's engagement in various activities, whether that's return home interviews or the take-up of advocacy.

Arrangements for spending time with birth families are sensitively considered and timely. Inspectors saw some lovely examples of creative ways to improve the quality of the time that children spend with their families. Creative practice in using Portuguese family support workers to communicate with Portuguese families is helping parents maintain effective links with their children. Practice is determined, with social workers going to real lengths to support children and placing great weight on the importance of family connections. These connections help many children to be supported within their wider family network.

The quality and timeliness of care proceedings for children are not yet consistently good. Delays are evident in some court proceedings, with some pressures on court availability. The JFCAS service reports a variable picture of practice. Inspectors saw examples of high-quality work with children subject to court proceedings, but leaders recognise this as a practice area needing ongoing improvement.

Despite service improvements, there remain shortfalls in ensuring timely permanence decisions for children. Progress in this area was initially hampered by the pandemic and then later due to leadership changes. More recent practice is starting to show improvements towards more timely and effective permanence planning when children initially come into the care of the Minister, especially for younger children.

Recently developed and implemented measures to strengthen oversight and monitoring of permanence arrangements are helping to reduce delays for children. However, it is too soon to measure the impact on several children who wait to have the security of a permanence plan.

Concerted efforts are made by social workers to support parents in looking after their children, enabling many children to remain at home rather than coming into the care of the State, where it is not possible for them to remain at home; every effort is made to keep children within their extended families. Decisions to reunify children with their parents are well considered and supported.

When children looked after go missing, purposeful work takes place to understand the risks they might be exposed to. Return home interviews are offered but rarely completed, limiting the opportunity to gain intelligence to inform risk assessment and intervention. Current return home practice lacks focus and would benefit from a radical rethink to ensure that processes effectively reduce children's risk. **Area for improvement 6**

The leadership team has been working purposefully on trying to drive practice improvement. This has successfully brought some positive changes for children looked after, like work on chronologies, updated assessments, and supervision, which are becoming increasingly better quality.

The Virtual School has undergone significant change over the last two years, increasing its capacity so that every child looked after has a consistent education case worker. There is still more to be done to ensure attendance and that educational attainment for children looked after is in line with their peers. Limited performance management data hampers analysis in this area.

Information sharing with health partners responsible for initial and review health assessments remains a challenge due to the different systems in place, which can impact on the ease and timeliness of assessments. There are significant shortfalls in the timeliness of assessing children's initial health needs. This means that when many children first come into care, their health needs are not quickly understood. While work has taken place to understand the challenges and some improvement is evidenced, gaps remain in carrying out timely initial health assessments. **Area for improvement 7**

The arrangement within CAMHS to fast-track referrals for children looked after is commendable. Nearly all children looked after receive an intervention through CAMHS, demonstrating a real commitment to prioritise work with children and young people who will have experienced disruption in their family attachments.

### **Placements meet children and young people's needs**

The vast majority of children looked after live in homes or with families who meet their needs, and most make good progress in care. The lack of suitable options on the island presents significant challenges in matching children with long-term loving homes. An ambitious reform programme is focused on increasing the number of foster families and children's homes so there is greater choice and sufficiency.

The programme has made tangible progress in some areas, with two new children's homes opened over the last year, making a total of eleven children's homes now on island. For some children currently living in children's homes, their outcomes would be better promoted by living in family settings, but the lack of foster homes prevents this. It is critical that the reform programme is successful and there is effective leadership oversight to increase foster homes for children, which mirror family life rather than institutional living.

Extensive work has taken place to review foster carer pay, increase the number and range of foster homes, and to create an intensive fostering offer. Sadly, the programme has not been effective in delivering the increase in foster families needed, with a net reduction in foster families over the last two years. This part of the reform programme needs to be reinvigorated to create a targeted campaign focused on promoting fostering as a vocation in Jersey. The service has the potential to help create an effective multi-agency wrap-around support system, including a joined-up CAMHS, virtual school, and youth service offer, which could make fostering a more viable option for many children. Done effectively, this could create a much more sustainable plan for caring for vulnerable children in the States' care.

Certain children requiring highly specialist provision, can only access these services off island. This is a situation mirrored in the health economy in Jersey when highly specialist provision is required. In the children's cases reviewed, inspectors observed that children's needs are well met when they are placed off island, at a distance from their friends and family. Some children live with foster families and are making good progress. Others are accessing more specialist help and support through high quality care packages, including mental health and education. All children reviewed are making good progress and their outcomes are improved. Their connections to their friends and family are promoted through creative ways of supporting family time. Social workers go above and beyond to promote children's connections, taking them back to Jersey for extended periods and enabling families to visit.

The appointment of a social worker based in the UK helps to ensure consistency and stability for children. This is a creative approach to tackling the challenges with workforce sufficiency, which should be promoted and built on, as it means greater stability for children.

When a child enters the care system, priority is given to placing with family and friends (connected persons), ensuring the preservation of their cultural and familial ties. The assessment process for connected carers has shown improvement, with the various teams involved understanding their roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, the facilitation of family group conferences has proven more effective, enabling the early identification of potential connected persons should a child become looked after.

The overall impact of social work intervention and care planning about connected person carers has been predominantly positive. As a result, the outcomes for the vast majority of children placed with connected persons have been improved. Positively, the use of Residence Orders also provides a positive contribution to allowing children to leave the care system and live within a family.



Children and young people living in long-term foster care arrangements are generally provided with high-quality care and in homes that meet their needs. The provision of contact with birth family members is always considered as part of care planning. Inspectors were impressed by the level of support provided by children's social care and partner agencies, particularly for those children and young people placed off-island.

Care planning and social work intervention for children and young people with complex needs who are looked after is robust. Person-centred care plans were in place for the children's cases viewed by inspectors, which resulted in good outcomes for these children and young people.

While the majority of children looked after are living in homes that meet their needs; however, a growing number of children have experienced several placement moves during their time in care. This is an area that the service is mindful of, although it is recognised that some of the moves were due to promoting children's long-term permanence outcomes.

On rare occasions, the lack of suitable emergency placements for children has led to them being placed in unregistered settings, such as rented accommodation or hotels. Procedures have very recently been developed to provide guidance and a practice framework to support safe practice in such situations, but it is too early to evidence impact. It will be essential to ensure that these procedures are embedded across the service so that staff are clear on what to do when making such arrangements.

### **The effectiveness of reviews, and the delivery of the IRO function**

The IRO Service has a primary role to accurately assess and assure the quality of the care planning and review process for children looked after, which includes their health, education, and family time. Its responsibility also extends to ensuring that the current wishes and feelings of the child are thoroughly acknowledged and given full consideration in the decision-making and care-planning procedures.

The IRO service self-evaluation provides an honest narrative of the challenges the service has experienced over the last 12 to 18 months, including poor staffing sufficiency and a lack of oversight of its IRO function. Shortfalls in practice and management oversight are clearly evident, impacted by shortfalls in capacity. The IRO footprint is not well evidenced in plans or children's casework, and there has been a lack of challenge to ensure children's plans are progressed. For some children, the impact was that they did not achieve permanence at the pace they should have. In addition, the implementation of service development plans was not carried out effectively, so practice did not improve as anticipated.

Although most children and young people have benefited from having their care arrangements reviewed regularly, some reviews have taken place outside of timescales, which would usually be expected every six months. IROs have not been ensuring robust oversight of care plans, resulting in drift and delay in care planning for some children. Visits and mid-way reviews were not always being carried out to seek children's views. This has impacted the IRO service's ability to build meaningful relationships with children. **Area for improvement 1 (IRO service)**

Very recently, there have been significant changes in the IRO service, with a new manager appointed and a more stable, experienced staff team has been established. Alongside this, better performance data structures and more rigorous oversight and tracking are now in place, enabling managers to understand better what needs improvement. An improvement plan has been developed, which prioritises getting the basic processes correct before further identified development can take place.

While it is too soon to evidence sustained improvement, good practice was noted in several children's files sampled by the inspectors. This included fewer reviews being out of timescales, children and young people being seen before their review (including those placed in the UK), and examples where review minutes are written in the form of a letter directly to the child or young person.

With a team of experienced staff and a development plan in place, the IRO service in Jersey has the capability to perform its function at the highest standard.

This would ensure that the care plans for children and young people are effectively aligned with their needs, or where they are not implemented, action is taken to bring this to the attention of managers and leaders responsible for delivering these care plans.

# Improvement Plan

There were 8 areas for improvement identified during this inspection. The table below is the Registered Provider’s response to the inspection findings.

## Areas for Improvement – Children’s Social Care Service

<p><b>Area for Improvement 1</b></p>	<p>To reframe the negative historical narrative of public and partner organisations of children’s social work services to shift perceptions to a more balanced, fair and evidence based view.</p>
<p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 2</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>Clarity in partnership making, derived from joint policies and practice quality standard.</p> <p>Joint panels that address roles and responsibilities when working with the children in our care. E.g., reconfiguration of the Corporate Parenting Board with the following reports and lead professional.</p> <p>The Accountable Officers Group will focus on system partnership improvement, working closely with the Safeguarding Partnership Board Chair.</p>

<p><b>Area for Improvement 2</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 2</p>	<p>The development of an infrastructure and the capacity required to successfully implement the change/reform programme.</p>
<p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>A dedicated Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) function will be established under the formal process of Corporate Programme Management for the Government of Jersey. The SRO will be supported by a dedicated change and programme delivery team.</p> <p>The structure in CSC to be reviewed, noting the change in demand in 2024, evidenced by data and performance.</p> <p>A strategic and operational plan will be developed that is organic and smart to oversee the changes and development of, for example, the new Children’s Therapeutic Home, and the recruitment and retention of a workforce that is not only permanent, but where interim staff receive the incentives to stay in Jersey.</p> <p>Clarity regarding the vision and offer to children, young people, and families in Jersey.</p> <p>Draw on the existing skills and expertise in the organisation and sourcing help when required.</p>

	A business support and enablement function will be developed.
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<p><b>Area for Improvement 3</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 2</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>The development and implementation of an effective quality assurance framework to enable leaders and staff to know the quality of social work practice and understand its impact for children.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>A new Q.A Framework will be created and in place to understand the work for years 1, 2, and 3.</p> <p>Audits that are collaborative and themed will be embedded to be the eyes and ears of the organisation.</p> <p>From audits, we will identify and address gaps in training, interventions, skills and the Whole Practice Model (including partners).</p> <p>Supervision template has been reviewed.</p> <p>Reports that will address all areas of practice and produced at the Improvement Board, Performance Oversight Group and Corporate Parenting Board.</p>

<p><b>Area for Improvement 4</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 2</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>To improve the stability and sustainability of the workforce at all levels.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>Positive communications that are on and off-Island, to encourage recruitment and retention.</p> <p>The way in which staff in Social Care can access places to live and stability is being considered. A wider lens when viewing recruitment and retention, given context, so that agency staff are encouraged to stay and made attractive through a revised offer of contracts.</p> <p>Staff wellbeing, experience and support will be a key focus.</p>

<p><b>Area for Improvement 5</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 6</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>Focusing on the period before legal proceedings commence (Pre-proceedings), to secure early permanence plans and processes to reduce and avoid unnecessary delays and create security for children.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>Pre-proceedings work is now embedding within supervision, case management review panel, audits, and child protection reviews.</p>

	<p>Permanency planning meetings are across the service with Heads of Service from safeguarding and permanence to chair fortnightly meetings. Early identification of potential care proceedings to be addressed within early identification of risk and need.</p>
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<p><b>Area for Improvement 6</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 1</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>Radical review of the missing from home and care processes to ensure information is systematically collected, collated, shared and analysed effectively to inform the reduction of risk.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>A Serious Incident Notification (SIN) process has been established with SIN's to come to the attention of senior managers to address.</p> <p>Plans that address the children, and circumstances that produce a plan that identifies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reasons why</li> <li>2. Risks, including contextual</li> <li>3. Mapping of involvement with others</li> <li>4. Areas of interest</li> <li>5. People of interest</li> <li>6. Partners working together to review the next steps</li> <li>7. Feedback from children</li> </ol>



	<p>Heads of Service Safeguarding to take over this role through greater accountability oversight.</p> <p>Children in Care Council / Participation involvement to help shape the intelligence and feedback from children.</p>
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<p><b>Area for Improvement 7</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 9</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>Children’s Social Care to collaborate with health partners to ensure that review health assessments are timely and initial health assessments are of high-quality when children first become looked after.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>Social Care to work closely with Children in our Care Health Professionals. A Royal College of Paediatricians assessment will be undertaken in April 2024. Health providers will work with the department to develop a sustainable plan for health assessment delivery.</p> <p>Initial Health Assessments to be collated on the data and reported weekly. The Corporate Parenting Board will have formal oversight of delivery along with the Accountable Officers Group.</p>

## Area for Improvement – Independent Reviewing Officer Service

<p><b>Area for Improvement 1</b></p> <p><b>Ref:</b> Standard 2</p> <p><b>To be completed by:</b> 12 months from the date of inspection.</p>	<p>There needs to be evidence of sustained improvement in the delivery of the IRO function, with the identified development plan requiring senior leadership oversight to ensure implementation.</p>
	<p><b>Response of Registered Provider:</b></p> <p>IRO report coming to Corporate Parenting Board on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Development is underway of IRO data set to evidence the Quality Assurance Framework.</p> <p>Voice of the Child in feedback forms from February 1<sup>st</sup> 2024.</p> <p>Information packs are being developed for children, young people, then separately for partners, colleagues, and foster carers. This will fully explain the service.</p> <p>Audits concluded by IROs to understand practice and training needs.</p> <p>Development of the outcomes of the Childcare Reviews that will form the analysis of the work of the IRO.</p>

It should be noted that this inspection report should not be regarded as a comprehensive review of all strengths and areas for improvement that exist in the service. The findings reported on are those which came to the attention of the Care Commission during the course of this inspection. The findings contained within this report do not exempt the service from their responsibility for maintaining compliance with legislation, Standards and best practice.



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