



Jersey Care
Commission

INSPECTION REPORT

Children's Social Care, Independent
Reviewing Officer Service (IRO),
Fostering and Adoption Services

20 – 25 May 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
Inspectors' Summary	7
Areas for Improvement –	10
Children's Social Care Service	10
Summary Findings	11
Improvement Plan	30

Introduction

Overview and Scope

This was an inspection of Jersey's Children's Social Care Services, including Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) (which encompasses Child Protection Advisor (CPA) services for children in need of protection and for children looked after), as well as Fostering and Adoption services. Children's Social Care 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 of the Children's Social Care Service, oversight, and delivery of its services for children who need support and protection, those in care, and those who have since left the care of the Minister for Children and Families.

Inspection activity focused on highlighting the service's achievements and areas for improvement. Areas for improvement have been established in collaboration with the service during the inspection and will lead to development plans at the conclusion of the process and the publication of this inspection report.

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 in need of protection or every looked after child. However, its findings reflect the overall service, given it draws on a review of casework representative of each area of service inspected.

Many of the Jersey Care Commission's (the Commission) Inspection standards represent best practice, and it would be unusual for any service to meet all 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 20 – 25 May 2024, on-site at Jersey Children's Social Care Services. Off-site examination of performance data and documents took place from 13 – 19 May 2024.

The Inspection Team

The inspection team consisted of five inspectors, three of whom directly viewed children's case records and liaised with social work staff and the senior leadership team. The fourth inspector was responsible for engaging with partner agencies in front-line practice, examining health support for children in care and care leavers, and taking the lead in inspecting quality and requirements in Fostering and Adoption services. The fifth inspector shadowed the inspection process.

The Inspection Standards

The inspection team reviewed practice against the Inspection Standards set out in the handbook under the following areas:

- Child Protection Enquiries are effective in informing decision-making.
- Assessments are thorough, outcome-focused, and evidence-based.
- Child protection Plans with partners effectively protect children and young people from harm.
- Comprehensive records are maintained, and data protection requirements are thoroughly adhered to.
- Placements meet children and young people's needs.
- Care Leavers are thoroughly prepared for leaving care.
- The effectiveness of reviews and the delivery of the IRO service, which includes a CPA function.
- Recruitment, training, support, and management of Fostering and Adoption services.

- The service is well-managed and effectively led.
- Staff recruitment, retention, training, and support.

The Inspection Methodology

The inspection team spent five days on-site in the service following one week of off-site 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 Care and the IRO and Fostering and Adoption services.
- Sampling children's case files.
- Interviews with children, young people, and parents or carers.
- Interviews with partner agencies, including, but not limited to, the Independent Chair and Scrutineer of the children's Safeguarding Partnership Board, the Children's Commissioner, Advocacy Services, Education, Jersey Family Court Advisory Service (JFCAS), and Health.
- Interviews with political and corporate leaders and operational managers.
- Review of the social care, IRO, Fostering and Adoption 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 tools that support practice oversight.

To enable a current evaluation of the services and support provided to children in need of protection, children looked after, and those who have left care, sampling of casework formed the spine of the inspection methodology. This sampling specifically looked at interventions delivered to children and young people in the preceding six-to-twelve-month period.

The Commission's Survey

As with the inspection undertaken in December 2023, this inspection drew on the Commission's Survey results published in August 2023. 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 if they were aged up to 25 years and had used one of the services being evaluated. Parents and carers were eligible if their child had used one of the services being evaluated. Staff were eligible if they worked in one of the services evaluated during the survey. The survey was available online between 3 July 2023 and 25 August 2023 and was widely promoted.

The survey findings were as follows:

- 53% of service users and 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, parents, and carers said that they are / 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 Services and wider agency leaders, this inspection has assessed and commented on progress on areas for improvement identified in the inspection in December 2023. This inspection has also identified three further priority areas for improvement. Where the service clearly demonstrated an accurate analysis of practice and had robust plans in progress, these have been commented on within the body of the report and not identified as a new area for improvement.

Inspectors' Summary

Children's Social Care Services to children in Jersey have continued to improve since the inspections in 2019 and 2023. Concerted efforts by senior leaders have resulted in a more stable, skilled, and experienced workforce that is increasingly committed to providing good-quality help and support to children and families in Jersey.

The way to access the service (the 'front door') is efficient and well-established. Contacts related to information or concerns brought to the front door from professionals or the public are triaged quickly and passed to the appropriate service. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) partners work effectively, and the interface with the Children and Families Hub (CFH) works well. Thresholds for interventions are well understood and applied appropriately in all areas. The co-location of agencies and disciplines, including the CFH, supports good communication with open dialogue between managers.

An accessible and thoughtfully considered Family Group Conference (FGC) service identifies and supports extended family members in efforts to keep children at home when appropriate. The Family Intervention Service (FIS) provides creative, evidence-based support, including facilitating high-quality family contact, life story work, and direct work with children, parents, and carers. This is beginning to improve the consistency of children's plans, outcomes, and experiences. Children with complex needs are well supported.

The shortfall in the IRO Service identified in December 2023 has been addressed at pace, and children now benefit from ever improving and effective oversight of their plans. This, in turn, is leading to greater stability and security for children in the care of the Minister, who are better supported and helped to achieve their full potential. Support for children off the Island remains consistently good.

Several changes in key strategic posts, influential in the development and oversight of Children's Social Care Services and across the partnership, are now in place. This brings a refreshed rigour and energy, while maintaining what has been working well.

A new Director for Children's Social Care Services has been appointed, and since their arrival, the development of a robust infrastructure for the planned implementation of the revised Reform Programme has gathered momentum. There is a renewed focus on ensuring that quality assurance and learning and development activities are joined up to drive improvements in practice. Inspectors found the self-evaluation, refreshed for this inspection, to be an honest, transparent, and accurate reflection of the quality of practice.

On taking up their appointment in April 2024, the Director urgently reviewed the response to vulnerable children who regularly go missing or are at risk of exploitation, which were identified as weaknesses in the inspection in 2023. New proposals have been put forward to immediately implement a new way of working, which are supported by police partners. The resulting agreement will establish a more joined-up response to missing and exploitation, and the partnership has committed to progressing the agreed plan at pace. Work is underway to map the pathway and process, to collaboratively support vulnerable teenage children at risk in care and in the community, however this is in its infancy. **Area for improvement 1.**

There is evidence of a more significant commitment to develop the Government of Jersey's Corporate Parenting responsibilities. In particular, the Government must establish a Children in Care and Care Leavers Council to enable children to meaningfully shape and influence the changes needed to services. These plans now need to be progressed quickly. A key priority for corporate parents going forward is to enact the entitlement for children in care and care leavers by identifying and addressing legal barriers, so that the full benefits can be delivered as intended. **Area for improvement 2.**

The department still struggles to resolve some of the longstanding cultural challenges that have impacted Children's Social Care for years. There remains a need to increase structural and organisational support to the directorate of the Children's Social Care Service, particularly support in managing internal and external communications, Human Resources, workforce management, and financial skills and capacity.

This support is essential to the successful implementation of key priorities in the Children's Reform and Improvement Programme, for which a structure for overseeing and monitoring delivery is now in place.

A core aspect of the programme is to improve the sufficiency of fostering households on the Island for a wide range of children and young people, including reviewing current provision, a focus on increasing numbers of foster carers, and the ability to offer children a choice of fostering families to meet their needs. Since January 2024, significant improvements have been made in the Fostering Service following a review in quarter four of 2023. Crucial progress was evidenced in ensuring the service's safety, reducing assessment timescales, enhancing quality, and restructuring the team to improve outcomes. Alongside this, there has been an extensive recruitment programme to secure a wider choice and availability of fostering households, focusing on increasing the number of families who can support teenagers, mothers and babies, and siblings.

The fostering and adoption panels currently lack sufficient operational procedures and essential governance, which compromises the panel service's safety and efficiency. Recognised and identified as an area for development in the Fostering and Adoption improvement plan, accelerated progress is needed to ensure clear procedural and regulatory compliance to respond safely and effectively in recruiting and retaining foster carers and prospective adopters for Jersey's children. **Area for improvement 3.**

Areas for Improvement –

Children’s Social Care Service

1. Progress at pace, strategic and operational multi-agency plans to improve the collaborative approach to vulnerable teenage children, including those who go missing from home or care. This should include robust multi-agency identification of risks and a whole system response to meeting their needs and reduce the likelihood of harm.
2. A priority for Corporate Parents is to enact the new entitlement for children in care and care leavers by identifying and addressing operational and legal barriers that prevent them from fully benefitting from the offer. Expedite the implementation of a Children in Care and Care Leavers Council to enable children to meaningfully shape and influence changes needed.

Fostering and Adoption Services

3. To establish and put in place appropriate governance and operational procedures in relation to the Fostering and Adoption panels which respond safely and effectively in recruiting and retaining foster carers and prospective adopters for Jersey’s children.

Summary Findings

Child Protection Enquiries are effective in informing decision-making.

The front door is efficient and well-established. MASH partners work effectively together, and a stable, experienced, and permanent workforce within MASH supports strong and consistent practice. The CFH assess initial information clearly and confidently, and the interface with early help works well, with thresholds well understood and applied appropriately in all areas. A clear process of referrals to the MASH means those who need to be directed to the Assessment and Support Team (AST) and FIS are managed with minimum delay. The co-location of agencies and disciplines supports good communication, with evidence of open dialogue between managers. Early and timely intervention when a multi-agency strategy meeting or intervention is needed results in risks and needs being effectively identified and met.

The need to assess and communicate risks concerning sexual, criminal, digital, and community-based exploitation of children, and those who go missing from care or home, are not well understood or managed, and this limits the small window of opportunity to put in place effective plans to reduce risk and mitigate harm. There has been an inconsistent response to children who go missing and are at risk of exploitation on the Island. A lack of consensus within and between individual agencies regarding responsibility and accountability results in separate disjointed priorities and approaches. This hampers an effective response for this group of children. A collective purposeful approach involving all key partner agencies is urgently needed to establish cohesive oversight of their circumstances to enable children and young people to be safe so that they can live fulfilling and purposeful lives into adulthood. **Area for improvement 1.**

Despite having a child exploitation strategy and pathway, including the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel and front door referrals, the approach does not extend to other risks outside the home. There is currently no consistent process in place to address different forms of exploitation.

Partners have been unable to agree on the approach to managing child criminal exploitation, with differing views regarding the approach. There is an urgent need for all partners to agree and adopt a single point of contact and a clear, joined up and practised pathway for all aspects of exploitation and harm, and when children go missing, to ensure a consistent and safe system is in place.

Upon arrival in the service in April 2024, the new Director reviewed the response when children go missing or there is a risk of exploitation and put forward proposals to urgently implement a new way of working, which is supported by police partners. The accountable officer's group for Government services endorsed this during the inspection period. This agreement establishes a more joined-up response, with all concerns progressing through the front door and MASH. The partnership has fully signed up to progressing the agreed plan at pace, however the timeframe is yet to be established. The plan is to map the pathway and process to collaboratively support vulnerable teenage children at risk in care and in the community.

Assessments are thorough, outcome-focused, and evidence-based.

In most cases, assessments of children and family's needs are timely and comprehensive and lead to an appropriate plan commensurate with risk and need. Social care staff routinely seek to involve parents and wider family members, and their views and the wishes of children inform conclusions and next steps. Children are seen quickly and often during assessment. This can be at home, school, or in the community, and are completed within a timescale appropriate to presenting needs and risks. In most cases, social care staff demonstrate professional curiosity in their analysis and recommendations.

Child and Family assessments are consistently updated at least annually or because of a significant event. Pathway plans for young people or care leavers are reviewed regularly, and where these updates fell outside best practice timescales, appropriate context was provided.

Safety plans and risk assessments are not consistently noted in children's and young people's records where significant risk has been identified.

Where risk assessments and safety plans were present, these did not always contribute to more successful outcomes for children and young people. As part of the revised strategy regarding vulnerable children and young people at risk of exploitation and those that go missing, it is essential that they have the appropriate safety plans which are clearly set out, properly shared with multi-agency partners, and implemented to protect those children at risk.

Child protection Plans with partners effectively protect children and young people from harm.

The quality of plans and planning for children in need and those in need of protection is too variable.

Historically, some children have been on child in need and child protection plans for too long, without their circumstances changing over time. Too many are subject to repeat plans concerned with the same risks. Supervision, management oversight, and challenge by team managers and Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) do not consistently identify and address this shortcoming as a matter of routine.

While the restorative social work practice approach builds positive relationships with some resistant families, the child-to-adult focus needs to be more balanced because it loses sight of the risk and the impact on the child in too many cases. Mis-placed over-optimism that this approach will eventually improve parenting means the impact of longstanding neglect is missed, not specifically identified, or tolerated for too long. Some children need to come into the care of the Minister sooner. Senior leaders recognise this and are currently reviewing their practice model approach.

Children's plans benefit from consistent contribution and attendance from partners as part of core groups and reviews.

An area for improvement identified in the inspection undertaken in December 2023 was about the decision to initiate legal proceedings. This is now guided by children's circumstances, and managers are beginning to take more decisive action in respect to thresholds for pre-proceedings.

An accessible and thoughtfully considered Family Group Conference Service identifies and supports extended family members to keep children safely at home or within their wider family when it is appropriate.

For children who have Child in Need or protection plans, the FIS provides creative evidenced-based support, including high-quality facilitation of family time, life story work, and direct work with children and parents. This is beginning to improve the consistency of children's plans, outcomes, and experiences. The inspection team saw examples of excellent direct work with children who are well supported in understanding their circumstances and expressing their wishes.

The process of establishing and tracking permanence plans for children, which set out how a child will be cared for throughout their childhood is in its infancy. The process oversees all cases of children and young people where permanency needs to be achieved. This process is now beginning to effectively monitor permanency plans for children and young people currently going through proceedings and where decisions have been made for alternative care arrangements. That said, some permanency decisions need to be ratified retrospectively for children and young people who have previously been placed in alternative care. This will give all children and young people clarity about the long-term decisions made for them and where they will live into adulthood.

Children with complex needs are well supported. Social work intervention in this team is strong and delivered by an experienced team of social workers and senior practitioners. The team is well-led, and there were examples of children and young people having improved outcomes because of good-quality planning.

Comprehensive records are maintained, and data protection requirements are thoroughly adhered to.

During the inspection, children's case records were examined and assessed. They were generally child-centred, appropriate, and comprehensive. For some children, historical information about a child's circumstances is not consistently updated or detailed enough to gain a complete understanding of their experiences.

Children's views, however, are routinely gathered, securely and clearly recorded, and, in most cases, inform assessments and plans.

Placements meet children and young people's needs.

Extensive work has taken place to understand projected sufficiency needs for children in care and those leaving care, as well as considering what the residential estate should look like to best meet children's needs. Work is well underway to extend the fostering offer, which has involved considerable work to improve fees and support to foster carers. There is a plan to build a 'mockingbird' type offer. This model links carers together to provide respite arrangements with carers known to the children. The residential estate is to be reshaped to move away from the pattern of opening high-cost homes in response to individual children's needs towards creating a more sustainable offer, including a cluster of homes on a specialist site. This is a critical part of the reform work plan to ensure proper sufficiency is in place for children in care with more specialist needs. When children's needs become specialist and their needs are met off-Island, a well procured off-Island placement offer, tightly quality assured and overseen must be in place.

In the December 2023 inspection, we examined the experiences and outcomes of children in care. However, this inspection viewed children's experiences in care through a different lens for those in residential homes, those placed at home with parents, those with complex needs, and those living off the Island.

For those children in residential care, their individual experiences are not consistently good. Some of these children are the most vulnerable in relation to going missing and at risk of exploitation. A lack of choice and sufficiency impacts their experiences. Children living in enduring long-term foster care are increasingly more stable. This enables them to feel more secure in their homes and supports them to progress well in their education. For all children in care their progress at school is overseen and championed by the Virtual School head teacher, who advocates well on their behalf about their aspirations and outcomes.

Those on a care order placed with parents receive, in the main, good support that enables them to remain safely within their birth family with appropriate help. Since December 2023, the IRO Service for children in care has significantly improved. Children now benefit from in-person reviews, which result in more meaningful engagements. IROs now advocate effectively and challenge on behalf of these children to ensure their outcomes improve. This is now a more consistent service on and off the Island.

Peer mentoring is provided by care experienced adults. This enables children in care and care leavers to receive empathy and understanding of the challenges they face. They build a trusted relationship, which enables them to have additional support in their transition to adulthood.

The service needs to be satisfied that there is a ratified joint process between Health and Community Services, Family Nursing and Homecare and Children's Social Care Services for initial and review health assessments for children in care. Delays in assessing and meeting their health needs result from poor joint working and a lack of integrated systems. This was an area for improvement in the last inspection, and it needs to be more prominent in plans and progressed at pace.

Care Leavers are thoroughly prepared for leaving care.

The Leaving Care team has developed significantly over the last few years, reflecting the increased number of care leavers and those young people aged 14-18 years old. Of those care leavers not in education, employment, or training (NEET), there is a good understanding of their individual circumstances, the barriers to better outcomes, and evidence of regularly updated pathway plans where their support needs are identified. The team is well-led, with seven Personal Advisors (PAs) who are experienced practitioners. There is evidence of some excellent support provided to young people through strong, purposeful, and respectful relationships between the young adults and their PA.

As part of regular pathway planning for young people, options are explored regarding their wishes and preferences for when they leave care, including accommodation. One accommodation option is a 'living together' (known as staying put in the UK) arrangement with their foster carer when they reach adulthood.

A small number of these arrangements exist within the Fostering Service, and there is evidence of good outcomes for these care leavers.

Care leavers have access to an allocated PA from the age of 14 years old, where relationship building and getting to know the young person's needs and strengths are prioritised. There is evidence of good engagement, led by care leaver wishes, and purposeful and respectful relationships where their confidentiality and independence are respected. When engaging with care leavers proves challenging, PAs consistently demonstrate their ongoing efforts to connect with them.

Care leavers health is not sufficiently prioritised among the multi-agency partners. An example of this is adult mental health services, which do not consider expediting care leavers into the mental health system even when they are transitioning from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Long waiting times for care leavers to have initial assessments with the adult mental health team means they do not access appropriate mental health support in a timely way. This must be addressed to ensure care leavers access appropriate support to live independently, well, and safely.

The 'Offer' for children in care and care leavers sets out the support available to young people. It focuses on increasing aspirations and attainment levels for all young people who have been in care and commits to ensuring that they are supported in accessing a choice of education and training pathways.

The Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2022, enacted in 2024 has enshrined 'care leavers' in law, and the accompanying guidance sets out the responsibilities of the service and wider partners as part of corporate parenting responsibilities.

This includes the issue of 'entitled status', which relates to whether a care leaver should be granted early entitled status on hardship grounds to enable them to access appropriate accommodation. This issue is impacted by the Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) law 2012, as young people do not get entitled status unless they have been in Jersey for over ten years.

For example, some children in care have come to Jersey in later childhood and when they leave care, they may still need to build up the required years.

Ministers decided in 2023 that these young people's cases would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Currently, care leavers are assessed individually instead of following a consistent policy regarding their entitlements. This approach disadvantages some, particularly those who wish to stay on the island but do not meet the required residency duration. This has the potential to legally disadvantage young people who have been in the care of the Minister and lived on the Island, from remaining here. A priority as Corporate Parents is to identify and address any legal and financial barriers that prevent care leavers from fully benefitting from this entitled status. **Area for improvement 2.**

The effectiveness of reviews and the delivery of the IRO and CPA function.

Since the December 2023 inspection outcome, CPAs and IROs practice has significantly improved. There is evidence of more rigour, challenge, professional curiosity, and a focus on the impact and outcomes for children. There is a greater understanding of the importance of early permanency planning to reduce drift and delay. The voice of the child is amplified, and there is greater recognition of the corporate parenting role on and off the Island. Where there are gaps in practice, CPAs and IROs are more confident about appropriate professional challenge.

An inspector observed a review child protection case conference. This was skilfully chaired to enable a mother with learning difficulties to understand the process and actively contribute. The child was always considered at the center of thinking, and the professionals at the meeting worked effectively together around the needs of the child. The strength-based approach supported the mother to see the changes already made and what more needed to be done to safeguard the child.

Recruitment, training, support, and management of Fostering and Adoption Services.

Fostering and Adoption are integrated services within the broader Children's Social Care Service. They share a head of service and a team manager. However, the Adoption Service has its own dedicated team that focuses solely on delivering adoption-related services.

Since January 2024, intensive improvements have been underway following a whole service review in 2023. Safety concerns, including incomplete foster care reviews, home safety checks, and a lack of unannounced visits, were prioritised and promptly addressed. Significant progress has been made in ensuring the service's safety, reducing assessment timescales, enhancing quality, strengthening the recruitment drive, and restructuring the team to improve outcomes.

Although some improvement targets are still pending and will require more time to fully implement and integrate, the emphasis on safety is expected to ensure that the foster care service meets safety standards.

The service recognised that a restructure was necessary, which has been implemented. The service now consists of four teams, each with a specific focus. This allows for streamlined workflows, leading to improved individual, team, and overall service performance. Carers who provided feedback reported noticing a significant difference, particularly when they needed support with certain aspects of fostering. They are directed to a specific team member specialising in the identified area, resulting in quicker, more targeted, and efficient support.

In 2021, the service introduced an out-of-hours support system for foster carers to provide reassurance, advice, and guidance during challenging times outside of office hours, to prevent destabilisation or breakdown of the fostering home. A recent review highlighted the need for an improved handover process to ensure that information received during out-of-hours support is effectively communicated to the team to ensure follow-up and consistency for the foster carers.

During the inspection process, a foster carer reported experiencing 'positive changes' within the service and emphasised the crucial role of out-of-hours support. They confirmed receiving high-quality advice and guidance from the service. They reported the fostering and adoption team went above and beyond to support foster carers in maintaining homes for children and young people, particularly those facing significant challenges, with the out-of-hours service contributing significantly to this support.

The service is currently reviewing its fostering model. In 2019, an 'intensive fostering' programme was introduced alongside an existing graded tier system based on skills and experience. However, upon evaluation, the service concluded that the intensive fostering model had not been as successful as anticipated. The current review includes consideration of restructuring the existing tier system. Once in place, this will give more clarity, equity, and opportunities for existing foster carers and those new to the service.

The service has historically struggled with recruiting foster carers, resulting in a small pool of carers that have been unable to meet the demand or match the diversity requirements of children who need stable loving homes in Jersey. The service has recognised this as one of its biggest challenges. In the absence of any previous recruitment and marketing strategies, there has been an urgent review of this area of the service. As a result, an intensive programme of raising awareness aimed at widening the choice of foster households available, and a specific focus on increasing sufficiency of families who can support teenagers, mothers and babies, and sibling groups.

A new sufficiency strategy with a multi-channel approach is ongoing, featuring active campaigns throughout the year, targeted efforts, and continued word-of-mouth promotion. The team is working hard to understand their target audiences, improve the offer to foster families, promote the support offered, provide year-round recruitment activities, and build intelligence to inform a mid to long-term strategy. A recently focused campaign was successful in generating a significant amount of interest, and initial home visits to those family groups are underway.

The team has collaborated extensively with the CYPES Informatics Team to develop a performance dashboard for the Fostering Service. This has enabled better performance management oversight and enhanced data collection and analysis. Development in this area is ongoing, and as data collection is extended and strengthened, it will help identify and inform targeted areas for improvement within the service. A performance dashboard has not yet been developed for the Adoption Service. However, there are plans to progress with this in the coming months.

The service has recently recruited for the role of Foster Carer Reviewing Officer. This role is essential role in improving oversight and quality assurance of the annual review process.

A high staff turnover within the adoption and Fostering Service has created instability. The reliance on a high proportion of agency staff, who can leave at short notice, has placed the service at risk of unfinished assessments and inconsistent support for both prospective and existing foster carers and adopters. To address this, the service has an ongoing recruitment campaign to attract permanent supervising social workers to join the team.

Feedback from carers during the inspection process was optimistic about the existing staff members: they reported that they had recognised skills and experience in the team that had been invaluable to them when requesting support.

The service has implemented a supervision model for staff members that incorporates both case management and personal support. This model prioritises staff well-being with a strengths-based approach. Clear actions are formulated during each supervision session and are reviewed in the next and subsequent sessions.

During the inspection, the inspector spoke to team members, who confirmed that they received monthly supervision that they found to be of good quality with actions and outcomes. Some team members described their supervision experience as being 'effective, open, and accessible.' Compliance with supervision requirements is monitored through the data dashboard.

New staff members complete the Government of Jersey corporate induction process. In addition, the service has designed its own fostering and adoption induction pack, which has been in place since January 2024. An improvement working group continues to focus on enhancing the overall service induction process.

Feedback from staff members who had worked in the service for more than six months indicated that they had not been given protected time for a full induction. Their induction consisted of one week of training, after which there was no structured programme. However, they acknowledged that they are aware there have been improvements in the induction process since their experience.

The team has developed and implemented a schedule of foster carer support groups that feature guest speakers who may be foster carers with additional skills to share. The groups provide shared learning and tools to enhance foster carer support to children and young people in their care, as well as additional training in areas pertinent to their roles.

The inspector observed one of the monthly scheduled support groups. These sessions provide a valuable opportunity for foster carers and fostering and adoption team members to network, collaborate, and engage in shared learning and development.

The fostering and adoption panels currently lack operational procedures and essential governance, which compromises the service's safety and efficiency. This recognised governance deficiency has been identified as an area for development in the Fostering and Adoption improvement plan. However, there are immediate procedural concerns that require urgent attention. **Area for improvement 3.**

The learning and development offer for the staff team is of high quality. The Fostering and Adoption Service was instrumental in introducing a trauma-informed practice model for the staff team and foster carers. The Trauma Recovery Model is now utilised by the whole of the Children's Social Care system as a basis for trauma-informed practice.

Team members reported positively about their experiences of training and development opportunities. They are offered a variety of learning experiences, including bite-size events, formal accredited courses, and support to access individually identified specialist training. Unprompted, one staff member described the service as having a 'learning culture.'

The Fostering and Adoption Service recognises a gap in essential policies to support its work. However, the service-initiated work intended to develop, enhance, and implement policies. The Adoption Team has been advocating for an early focus on permanence by participating in care planning meetings early in the children's care processes. This approach is supported by a Permanence Procedure policy and is crucial to establishing this as a core practice approach.

Foster-to-adopt practice has advanced, with significantly more current adopters registered as prospective foster-to-adopt parents. This approach, if successful will result in fewer placement moves for children, providing them with earlier opportunities to develop attachment.

Adopters are waiting significant lengths of time to be matched with children. The team has introduced a new keeping-in-touch process for waiting for adopters. Contact is made at regular three-monthly intervals, where updates can be shared. The team is developing a support group for adopters.

Due to the lack of opportunities to adopt children on the Island, the service has inquired about joining a UK-based database of adopters and children in need of adoption. This would expand the range of options for children and young people in the UK awaiting adoption, allowing them to be matched with approved adopters in Jersey, however this would require a change to legislation.

Consequently, families in Jersey looking to adopt may have a higher chance of being matched with a child due to the number of children with plans for adoption in the UK.

The team would like to extend their post-adoption support to the birth parents of children and young people who have been adopted, including access to additional budget resources to support the expansion. This is currently an area that is being reviewed for development by the Fostering and Adoption Service.

The Adoption Team regularly convenes for peer supervision focused on case discussions. This often includes inviting the adoption and fostering clinical psychologist to provide psychological insights and support to the consultations.

The Fostering and Adoption Services recognises the need to improve life story work to help process past trauma and understand their life journey for children and young people placed outside their family homes. It has been acknowledged that not all children and young people currently have collaborative life story work underway. Within the Adoption Team, a family support worker has successfully completed several life story books for adopted children. The success is down to the shared work of the entire service, with additional support provided by the FIS. Family support workers have assisted birth families, foster families, children, and young people in contributing to life story work, collaborating to produce outstanding documented accounts of childhood journeys.

The team has undertaken initiatives to raise awareness and encourage the early collection of important memories throughout a child's journey when placed outside their family home. Life story training has become mandatory across the broader service to ensure that workers within Children's Social Care who work directly with children in care understand the significance of early facilitation of life story work.

The recent introduction of enhanced record-keeping templates for foster carers is helping to compile essential details of a child's daily life, recognising milestones and significant events, which are documented for the child to reflect on in the future.

The inspectors were told that the service has plans to commission 'virtual memory boxes' for children and young people in foster care. This initiative would create a life story narrative, with the option to include filmed footage and recordings. The virtual storage method offers unlimited capacity and helps mitigate the risk of information being misplaced or lost over time due to physical storage challenges.

Staff recruitment, retention, training, and support.

Despite improved stability in the social care workforce, children are still negatively impacted by too many changes of workers and managers. We saw more robust practice in areas where staff stability is increasing. This was an area for improvement in the inspection in December 2023.

Work continues to drive down vacancies and improve the ratio of permanent staff in the service, and workers employed via an agency are staying for longer. This is starting to bring much-needed continuity for some children.

The frequency, quality, and effectiveness of staff supervision have improved since the inspections in 2019 and 2023. However, they are not yet consistently supporting timely positive outcomes for all children due to too many changes in practitioners and managers. This leads to a lack of continuity and a loss of momentum, which causes delays in progressing plans.

In recognition of an underdeveloped induction process, a reviewed and redesigned offer is beginning to bring a more consistent approach for new staff. More recently, staff have reported improvements in their introduction to the service. The training schedule for staff is ambitious. It addresses the outcomes of audit findings to underpin the quality of practice going forward, as well as a rolling programme on restorative practice. Staff report that the same training offer is available to both agency and permanent staff and is comprehensive. The take-up of training is improving by offering flexible models, including 'bite-sized' modules, and a range of external trainers and facilitators to encourage greater attendance. Newly qualified workers and those in their assessed year in supported employment (AYSEs) spoke about how well they are supported in practice and through the training and development they are offered.

The service is well-managed and effectively led.

Since the inspection in December 2023, several changes have occurred in key strategic posts that are influential in the development and oversight of Children's Social Care Services and across the partnership.

A new Director for Children's Social Care Services has been appointed and brings a wealth of experience and a positive track record in achieving and sustaining good outcomes for children.

Since their arrival, and with the full support of the Chief Officer for CYPES and the development of a robust infrastructure, the planned implementation of the Reform Programme has gathered momentum. Inspectors found the self-evaluation refreshed for this inspection to be an honest, transparent, and accurate reflection of the quality of practice. A new senior leadership structure has been established, and recruitment to these key posts is underway. These posts are on a two-year fixed-term basis and will bring much-needed stability to the leadership of the service compared to the instability created by the large volume of interim arrangements that were in place in the service at the time of the inspection in December 2023.

The Chief Officer has worked politically, corporately, and collaboratively with key partners to establish greater confidence within and about the Children's Social Care Services. The negative narrative, so prevalent in the December 2023 inspection, is now slowly beginning to change.

The Government of Jersey is still struggling to respond to some of the longstanding cultural challenges that have impacted Children's Social Care for years. There remains a need to increase structural and organisational support to the directorate, particularly support in managing internal and external communications, Human Resources, workforce management, and financial skills and capacity.

The Children's Social Care Service is due to move to a new government headquarters, allowing the service to be co-located with other corporate functions. This is the first-time services will have operated from within a central government building. This will bring a new opportunity, with careful planning, it has the potential to make and sustain the required cultural and operational changes.

It is important contextually, to recognise that there has been significant political change in Jersey, with the recent changes in Ministers and the separation of ministerial portfolios, has resulted in the department experiencing four Ministerial changes over the past three years.

The split Ministerial portfolio for Children, Young People, Education and Skills, needs a clear process to ensure that the quality of services, safeguarding and standards are not negatively impacted. The Minister for Children recognises the need to progress at pace, alongside enacting their duties as Corporate Parents and keeping a sharp focus on Jersey's most vulnerable children. Given the efficiency savings required for 2024 and 2025, the need to develop a Quality Impact Assessment for proposed areas of efficiency will require careful consideration by the Children's Social Care Service, particularly regarding the department's budget and planning.

A newly appointed Children's Commissioner for Jersey has been in post since the inspection in December 2023. The Commissioner's job is to promote and protect the rights of children and young people in Jersey and to understand how decisions made by organisations in Jersey, including the Government, affect their rights. They are committed to finding the right balance between upholding the laws that affect children and their rights and the need to build positive relationships that find resolutions with organisations and bring about improvements.

Over the years, the Safeguarding Partnership Board (SPB) work has become increasingly unwieldy, influenced to some degree by the negative narrative that has been sustained across the partnership. A new Independent Chair and Scrutineer of the SPB has been appointed, bringing a wealth of experience working with partner agencies in children and adult services.

The SPB has previously been tasked with the strategic and operational development of plans to address inherent issues across the partnership, specifically those children who go missing and are at risk of child exploitation.

A child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) strategy launched in 2021 included the development of an extensive multi-agency action plan with 15 workstreams. The Commission considers this to be disproportionate and creates too much focus on child sexual abuse alone. Some workstreams have struggled to progress, with a pathway in place for only child sexual exploitation and no pathway for managing other forms of exploitation and risk outside the home, such as criminal, digital, and community-based exploitation.

The SPB Chair has recognised that it is now time for the Board to streamline some of the processes and reduce the volume of workstreams and subgroups to enable the partnership to focus on critical areas of priority.

Statutory services, with partners, need to ensure that the core functions of services are focussed on addressing missing and exploitation activity as a matter of urgency, as highlighted in this report.

A quality assurance framework was developed in 2021 and updated in 2024 after being identified as an area for improvement in the Commission's December 2023 inspection. There was evidence that progress had been made regarding integrating quality assurance activities with learning and development initiatives to drive improvements in practice.

In this inspection, we looked at several cases that the service had audited and agreed with the service evaluation of the selected audits, that overall, the quality of audits does not meet 'good'. We concur that in some audits, there is evidence of reflection, analysis, and actions to improve work with children and their experiences. However, many of the audit's findings were, we have assessed, overly optimistic and not supported by evidence. Too many lack sufficient detail and challenge to help leaders be assured about the quality of practice.

Audit moderation has not been consistently undertaken. A new panel process for moderation established in March 2024 is starting to demonstrate greater consistency of audit outcomes.

A continued focus on 'closing the loop' will help to demonstrate how actions identified in audits improve practice and give a more assured line of sight.

Performance data, provided by the informatics team to understand and assess the quality of practice, is more readily available and effectively used. Managers use daily live data dashboards to bring greater focus on practice areas for improvement and their priorities.

Improvement Plan

There were three 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>Area for Improvement 1</p> <p>Ref: Standard 7 and 8</p> <p>To be completed by: 25 February 2025 (nine months from the date of the inspection)</p>	<p>The Registered Provider must progress at pace, strategic and operational multi-agency plans to improve the collaborative approach to vulnerable teenage children, including those who go missing from home or care.</p> <p>This should include robust multi-agency identification of risks and a whole system response to meeting their needs and reducing the likelihood of harm.</p> <p>Response of Registered Provider:</p> <p>Action will be taken to create a multi-agency strategic action plan to improve the response to missing and exploitation in Jersey, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing daily multi agency missing meetings to ensure greater join up and intelligence gathering to respond to risks. • Mapping of new pathways to ensure effective referral and response. • Enhanced data collection and dashboard to ensure senior leaders have accurate oversight. • Increased focus and purpose of activity within residential setting when children are missing from care. • Increased out of hours activity to support children to return to family care.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular strategic multi agency meetings to consider the activity, disruption, information sharing and prevention each agency can deliver.
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<p>Area for Improvement 2</p> <p>Ref: Standard 2</p> <p>To be completed by: 25 November 2024 (six months from the date of the inspection)</p>	<p>A priority as Corporate Parents is to enact the new entitlement for children in care and care leavers by identifying and addressing legal barriers that prevent them from fully benefitting from this offer.</p> <p>The Registered Provider must expedite the implementation of a children in care and care leavers council to enable children to meaningfully shape and influence changes needed.</p>
	<p>Response of Registered Provider:</p> <p>Work will need to take place cross government to respond to this recommendation as the issues sit within other directorates, particularly the issue about housing entitlements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A housing workstream will be set up to consider how to progress this recommendation and will be chaired by the Director of Children’s services. Work will also take place with housing providers to consider how to strengthen the housing offer for care leavers and smooth the pathway. <p>Work will commence to strengthen the relationship, reporting and accountability with the current advocacy provider in delivering the CICC which has been contracted for delivery by them.</p>

Areas for Improvement – Fostering and Adoption

<p>Area for Improvement 3</p> <p>Ref: Standard 14 (Fostering Standards) and 16 (Adoption Standards)</p> <p>To be completed by: 25 November 2025 (six months from the date of the inspection)</p>	<p>To establish and put in place appropriate governance and operational procedures in relation to the Fostering and Adoption panels which respond safely and effectively in recruiting and retaining foster carers and prospective adopters for Jersey’s children.</p> <hr/> <p>Response of Registered Provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New IT equipment will be purchased for panel members to ensure the safe access and storage of panel papers. • Review will take place of recruitment and remuneration of fostering panel members including update of current panel members ensuring safer recruitment and checks are adhered to. • Training and development of panel members to take place, commencing with first panel development day, followed by scheduled training throughout the year. • Appraisal system for panel members to be designed to identify development needs annually. <p>Terms of reference to be reviewed and updated for the fostering and adoption panels, underway alongside whole service review of procedures.</p>
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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.



Jersey Care Commission
1st Floor, Capital House
8 Church Street
Jersey JE2 3NN

Tel: 01534 445801

Website: www.carecommission.je

Enquiries: enquiries@carecommission.je