



Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny

Panel

COVID-19 Response: Impact on Children and Young People

Witness: The Chief Minister

Thursday, 3rd February 2022

Panel:

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair)

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour (Vice-Chair)

Witnesses:

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré, The Chief Minister

Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier, The Minister for Children and Education

Mr. R. Sainsbury, Acting Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.

Ms. N. Mulliner, Head of Early Years

Mr. S. O'Regan, Group Director, Education

Mr. M. Owers, Director of Safeguarding and Chief Social Worker

Mr. A. Khaldi, Interim Director of Public Health Policy

Ms. A. Homer, Head of Finance Business Partnering, C.Y.P.E.S.

Ms. E. Walker, Head of Communications, C.Y.P.E.S.

Mr. K. Posner, Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.

[9:50]

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour(Vice-Chair):

Good morning, everybody. This is the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel. This morning we are holding a hearing with the Chief Minister as part of our COVID-19 Response: Impact

on Children and Young People review. My name is Deputy Louise Doublet. I am the vice-chair of the panel leading on this particular review. I will let the rest of the panel introduce themselves, and then we will go to the Chief Minister and his officers.

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair):

Good morning. I am Deputy Rob Ward. I chair the panel but I am very happily supporting Deputy Doublet for this review.

The Chief Minister:

Senator John Le Fondré, Chief Minister.

The Minister for Children and Education:

Deputy Scott Wickenden, Minister for Children and Education.

Acting Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

In the education room is Rob Sainsbury, Acting Director General.

Head of Early Years:

Nicola Mulliner, Head of Early Years.

Group Director, Education

Good morning, Sean O'Regan, Group Director of Education.

Acting Director General:

We also have Mark Owers, who is Director of Safeguarding and Chief Social Worker. He has just popped out at the moment.

Interim Director of Public Health Policy:

Alex Khaldi, Interim Director of Public Health Policy.

Head of Finance Business Partnering, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Anne Homer, Head of Finance Business Partnering for C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills).

Head of Communications, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Elaine Walker, Head of Communications for C.Y.P.E.S.

Head of Office, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Keith Posner, Head of Office for C.Y.P.E.S.

The Chief Minister:

I believe that is everybody. If I have missed anyone please say now or for ever hold your peace.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That is a lot of people, thank you. I am sure my questions will be well answered then. If anyone has noted all of those down - I am assuming somebody is taking notes - could someone pop that in the chat, especially for the ones where we just have lots of people in the room and not names listed, that would be helpful when we are asking our questions. I am going to start by asking about decision-making processes during the early stages of the pandemic in relation to children and how children were factored in. We are looking specifically for these questions at the Council of Ministers, the Competent Authority Ministers and the Emergencies Council; I think I have all of those acronyms correct. Chief Minister, can you just outline initially please how the decision-making processes within these 3 groups took into account the impacts that will be placed on children and young people by the pandemic?

The Chief Minister:

Just before I start, can I just suggest that all mics are closed other than yours and mine because there is a hissing in the background somewhere?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

That sounds wise, yes. I will turn mine off as well while you are answering.

The Chief Minister:

Whoever it is, the hissing has now stopped. In essence, I think if we work from the top, from memory there were not too many decisions that were made at Emergencies Council level that would be relevant to this. This is from memory, I would have to go back to notes, et cetera. I think possibly things like the Nightingale, that did go all the way through to the top. Most decision-making was made, very particularly in the early days, at the competent authorities level and obviously that was informed by officers and by S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell). Obviously we were treating it as a public health emergency. It was a public health emergency and it was very much in the early days basically looking to save lives. That was the fundamental priority and that was the urgency that was attached to it. What I will say though - and it might be appropriate perhaps for Alex/Rob to come in - obviously at the levels that fed into, for example, S.T.A.C. and that then fed into competent authorities, it has always been my understanding and expectation that there was a lot of engagement around children from the very early days. I do not know if either Rob or Alex want to come in on that very briefly.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I just wanted to follow up. I think it is important that you have highlighted then to give us an insight into what the mindset was and what you were dealing with at the time when you said saving lives was the priority. Is it fair to say that it was not always possible to focus in that kind of emergency thinking to completely think about everybody's more rounded needs? Is that fair to say, that that is the situation you found yourself in?

The Chief Minister:

When I am talking about the early days, as I said publicly on a number of occasions, we had Ivan Muscat coming in to me on a Friday basically with a revised modelling. In fact I think the revised modelling came through, it had been toned down from potential initial figures earlier in the week, and that was when they said that if we do nothing 500 people could die in the first wave. Obviously the most vulnerable in terms of death, when I say "vulnerable" mostly it was age-related initially and obviously wider categories as well. So that is what we had to react to very, very swiftly. But interestingly enough, within all that side and in terms of dealing with, as things progressed, we did have some discussions around, for example, off-Island trips by children and what we were having to do with that. Mr. O'Regan was dealing with that side of things. I think we should hear from both him and Alex actually, and Rob in terms of what I call the next levels down. We had students we had to try and get back on to the Island and deal with those. I think even then you were projecting the likely consequences on many cohorts, but obviously including children and including parents, the potential consequences that might come through. Sean, would you like to go first, and then Alex?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Sorry, Chief Minister, I would like to stay with you for a second. With the review generally we are trying to learn lessons in case there are any future pandemics. I think this question for yourself is to help us understand what it was like for you, as the decision-maker, and what the processes were around there. Chief Minister, it is worth very briefly, if you can, just outlining for anybody watching, and for the record, what the actual processes are because of course we have these 3 groups: Council of Ministers, competent authorities and Emergencies Council so how were those groups interacting with each other and at what stages in each of those groups were people thinking about children or was that not something that was possible in that emergency state that you were in at that time?

The Chief Minister:

Making the distinction probably between the first few days, first very early weeks, but, as I think Rob and others can clarify, they were in very, very regular contact with, for example, the Children's

Commissioner on a very regular basis. That is certainly my understanding. Obviously therefore that, as an input, was then feeding through the various levels that were up to us. In terms of where we were, if you recall early March and obviously we had the first positive case that came in - this is memory here, from about 10th March - and the Emergencies Council met a day later I think it was, because essentially the Emergencies Council was scheduled to meet on a particular date. I think the first positive case came in like 24 hours, 48 hours before. We had just felt it was better rather than ... we had a plan of scheduled meetings and to allow officers just to have an extra day or so to get all their ducks into a row. Obviously there were a lot of people in that room. Various briefings, you will possibly recall that in the week before I think, we had done our first briefing to States Members. At that point, that was when we had the earlier indications of potential deaths and, from memory, because I know there was a photograph tweeted at the time, it was 50 or something, it was around.

[10:00]

Obviously, as I said, and I am talking from memory, I would have to go back and check, that went up under the modelling that came through to 500 if we did nothing. In terms of moving very swiftly, we had a combination of things. There was a lot of legislation just generally that had to be put in place. I am sure Alex or somebody can remind us to the exact numbers that we put through. But you will remember the emergency sittings of the Assembly. You will remember us clearing the decks and requesting anybody and everybody to basically, if they were prepared to, withdraw all non-essential propositions, which all Members did very well. I remember, as I said, in those very early days, possibly even before the positive case, meeting with Russell Labey as chair of P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) at the time and with the Bailiff just to discuss those kind of operational matters. Just to explain the various bodies. The Council of Ministers speaks for itself but under the emergency legislation there is a structure, which is referred to as Competent Authority Ministers and, in essence, the key Ministers are 6 Ministers who are essentially a subset of the Council of Ministers and it is designed to allow speedy decision-making. The legislation lays out the composition of the Emergencies Council and then defines what they call Competent Authority Ministers. We essentially operated it as if we were operating under that because if a declaration of emergency was declared, which never actually happened, those would have been the structures we would then automatically fall into under the legislation. Obviously the whole legal set-up can be clarified, if you need to, by the relevant people. The difference between the Emergencies Council and the Competent Authority Ministers is basically that the Governor, the Bailiff, and the head of the Comité des Connétables attend as well, in terms of non-Ministers. But in essence, in terms of speed, we operated between Emergencies Council and the competent authorities generally and it depended on the nature of the decisions as to which level they were pitched at in those early days. Once the rhythm established itself, in general terms, most decisions were made at competent

authorities level and particularly around health matters, but all significant decisions were obviously discussed and notified to the Council of Ministers generally before they were enacted.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just jump in there? I just want to refocus back on to children. You are explaining to us about the competent authorities and the Emergencies Council, and the panel notes that the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children at the time were not part of those, which obviously those were the established groupings that were their own law, and we understand they were later invited to attend. But at those early stages, was there anybody who had that role of raising issues for children or because of those processes not having that Minister there, was that something that was lacking perhaps in our processes that we have in place for emergencies, in those early stages?

The Chief Minister:

Thank you for picking up on one matter. Although I said there were 6 defined Ministers, additionally the Minister for Treasury and Resources always attended and I was certainly going to say, from my memory, the Minister for Education attended almost all the time. Whether she was there at the very beginning I would have to go back and check.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

She was not there at the very beginning.

The Chief Minister:

I think the only one I am aware of, off the top of my head, was that she may not have been present at the very first Emergencies Council meeting. I think afterwards she then came in. But I would have to check the records. My recollection is that she was invited to all of the other meetings and all the C.A.M. (Competent Authority Ministers) meetings. That would have been pretty swiftly thereafter.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So you put that in place. Do you think that is something that should be changed in terms of the legislation and the policies? Do you think that the Minister for Children and the Minister for Education should be automatically members of those decision-making bodies?

The Chief Minister:

But obviously it did have the director generals of both C.Y.P.E.S. and Education present, who obviously then did, at operational level, speak for children as well. The difficulty is, and this is one of the problems I think trying to look ahead and predict what a future emergency looks like, because an emergency, particularly under the Emergencies Council, could range from a cataclysmic, some

form of disaster - an explosion at the fuel farm, for the sake of argument, something huge - versus at the extreme end of what we have had, which has been a global crisis but one that has now lasted near enough 2 years or, depending which point of reference you use, longer than 2 years. The short answer is it depends for the particular thing that you are having to deal with as to who should be present and on the circumstances. Because it may well be that if speed and lives are the most critical one, that you have to act accordingly, if that makes sense, versus if you have a longer scenario or one that directly affects different cohorts and how they should be represented. I agree with the principle that you are suggesting. The issues that we have faced a lot is obviously the more people you have round the table the longer sometimes it takes to get to the decisions purely because of human nature. There have been times when speed has been very important. Equally, you asked to give a flavour of those early days. I do recall - I could not give you the dates yet - we had a number of very late-night meetings. One I seemed to recall finished at 1.00 a.m. I know there have been a couple of times when meals were sent out for in those early days. It was very long days, very long evenings and getting those decisions in place and then try to get them communicated out. I will stop there because it is quite a long answer.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think Deputy Ward would like to come in.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you. One of the things we are trying to do in the review is to get a real understanding of how interactions between those with specific roles around children happen so that we can make constructive recommendations as to what we see has happened, particularly yourself. Sorry, can I just confirm, did you say that the Children's Commissioner was at competent authorities or was invited to which meetings? I did not quite get ...

The Chief Minister:

No, I said the Minister for Education I believe missed or, I am not sure, was not present shall we say, at the first Emergencies Council but my understanding is that she was invited to all others and to all C.A.M. meetings. Whether she was able to attend every one is a slightly different thing, but that is my understanding. What I did say is that the Children's Commissioner, or certainly her office, were engaged by the relevant departments and that is why I was inviting, if you recall, either Rob Sainsbury or Alex or Sean to come in to clarify. My understanding is they were on a very regular basis and indeed in terms of considering the impact on children, I think Sean and his team produced the first Children's Rights Impact Assessment back in something like May 2020. If you wish to hear from them it might be helpful because it might give you a slight flavour to what was happening.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was just going to confirm that. Chair, do you want to hear that because I am conscious of time?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, we should perhaps move on. Is there anything else that you would like to comment, specifically in terms of your leadership and the leadership of the other Ministers during those early stages of the pandemic? In terms of your thinking and the culture, I perhaps would like just to press a bit further on your own thinking processes. When did you first start to realise the wide impact of this and can you remember the first time you realised: "Oh this is how this might impact on children"? What was that moment of realisation for you?

The Chief Minister:

It started slowly and accelerated very rapidly. It was interesting that ... in fact if you recall, at the end of half term in February 2020 I got fogbound and got a lot of grief for being a day out because of the way the flights had arrived and the date we could come back. That was the area of concern. When I was stuck in Gatwick Airport, it was very late on Sunday night, it was when my daughter actually said, whose friend I think was in northern Italy at the time, that they had just started to shut down the entire north part of Italy. I think it is probably there that the reality started to come through that this was going to get rather interesting. Obviously when we came back in and the dust had settled around my ... anyway the delays I had inadvertently not been able to do anything about - that is the point I was looking for - we then were going through those early processes of getting States Members informed and, as I said, that was the briefings we had in that first week of March. But I think when things started to come through was, if you call, we started doing some briefings to Members an hour or so before the emergency sessions we did, and that was at my instigation, which was to allow Members to hear directly from officials. You will recall somewhere in there ... I will rephrase that. I remember standing up and it was the first time I had used the word "death" in one of my answers and it was probably at that point, just even saying that, suddenly brings it home as to what you were potentially dealing with. I can remember further on, and as I said I think it would have been around that time that we had this forecast of 500 people dying if we did nothing. Then beyond that ... in fact I also remember the chief of police asking how I was doing because he said whenever he had been in emergencies you are always worried about how everybody else is doing and no one actually asks how you are doing. I think I said that was my one concern, is what it would be like when the first person died. Even then that is probably the hardest point of what we have had to deal with.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just to refocus on children. So obviously this is a specific area.

The Chief Minister:

You said overall how we were doing things. The other bit, which was probably the hardest, which is applying to everyone, it also includes children, is what we call the ethical framework. The ethical framework is in fact a triage system that if you have one ventilator left and you have 2 people who need it how do you make those decisions, and what is the framework you put around it. Those were really hard decisions. I cannot turn round and say that ... somebody else will probably have to remind me, I think we did consider those types of scenarios because what do you do if you have a 10 year-old healthy child needing a ventilator, if that makes sense, and an 87 year-old grandparent. Those were the type of decisions we were having to deal with in those early days. I hope that gives an indication of the kind of thought process we were having to deal with on very long days and dealing with very hard-working teams. Getting everything to the right place.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Very difficult, thank you for giving us an insight into that. Chief Minister, just to go back to your thought processes at the time: what were you worried about in terms of children? When you thought of what you understood and the level that you were at, the information that you had about the pandemic and the potential impact of it, what were your main concerns and worries for the children of the Island?

The Chief Minister:

As things progressed, when we started getting into things like lockdown and issues around the potential consequences of domestic abuse, of hidden abuse, if you like. Obviously that goes through 2020 and you will recall ... in fact, it is slightly ironic if you look with the 2 members on the panel, you will recall we had the debate at the end of 2020 around closing schools. Obviously Deputy Ward brought the proposition; Deputy Doublet, you did not support it.

[10:15]

But the point is it gives different perspectives and we were very focused on the educational outcomes of children and the consequential long-term outcomes on children. I think, Deputy Ward, you were obviously very concerned around teachers. We had those very clear discussions from the medical professionals at the time saying what those consequences were. If you like, that illustrates the kind of dilemmas that ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry to interrupt you but I must take issue of the fact that there may be a notion that I was not interested in the welfare of children. I do not like that juxtaposition you put there. But I understand the situation. The situation was wider than that. It was about the well-being of children to go back

to school in the new term, and subsequently did turn out that schools were closed in the new term. But let us not go back over old ground.

The Chief Minister:

What I was doing was giving an example because obviously the medical people at the time were very clear that they felt that minimising the amount of time closed was by far the best for children. What I was using there, that is an illustration of the thought processes that we were going through. Further down the line, and more now, is things like the mental health impact of all ... the mental health impact has been going on across the board, but particularly in children and particularly with C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and then obviously in the wider context as well.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

These worries that you mentioned mainly about children not being able to attend school and the mental health impacts of children; I think you mentioned hidden abuse during lockdown. If we take those 3 issues - and I am grateful that you have raised them - when were these issues first discussed and by which body were they first discussed and addressed by?

The Chief Minister:

I would have to go back to notes and come back to you on that, I am afraid, to get some detail on that. But certainly my understanding from the point of view of S.T.A.C., for example, as I said, there was a lot of input coming through anyway at those operational levels, which then fed up through into that process and how we put the policies together.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

For each of those 3 issues, what would you change, if there was another pandemic at this high level you are at, in terms of leadership and processes to prevent the impact of school closures and mental health impacts and hidden abuse with children?

The Chief Minister:

I think at this stage it is still too early. As you know, we have the COVID review coming up, which will go into a lot of the detail and hopefully come back with lessons learned and recommendations. I am sure there will be detailed points and detailed improvements that we could have done but I think, in the round, dealing with all the cohorts and all the elements of the population we have to deal with but obviously relevant to this review in terms of children, I think we have done pretty well. It is always very difficult and, bear in mind we are still coming out of matters, and we still obviously even now have a very challenging different scenario, but still a very challenging time, in terms of things like schools and generally across the Island, which would be disruption. It would be more

disruption and far less at the moment around health risk, if you see what I mean. I think it is right to have a more focused group than the full Council of Ministers when you are dealing with a pandemic. I do not think I would change that. Whether one has something slightly more dynamic and how we deal about that might be something that one would want to look at quite calmly. But what we have tried to do, certainly as matters evolve, is kept what I will call generally health matters at competent authorities and then sometimes the wide matters went up to the Council of Ministers; for example, some of the economic support and things like that. But that is not relevant to the review today.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I would quite like to pass over to Deputy Ward. Thank you for your answers there. I am just looking at part (b) of question 5; I wonder if you might like to follow up with that.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I do not have part (b). I just have question 5 split up. One of the things I was going to ask and I think. Deputy, if you do not mind, if I start with that bit. I see where you are getting to now. One of the key commitments of the Council of Ministers has been putting children first. What steps were taken to ensure this priority. I think what I was going to ask, as you were answering there, was there are the visible effects of schools but there are, with some of the submissions we have had, the notions of the hidden threats, if you like, which might be the wrong word, or impact of safeguarding of children who suddenly have lost contact with a lot of professionals, for example. In terms of the Government having this priority of putting children first, how would you say that they have been? How would you characterise a way in which your Council of Ministers has put children first during this pandemic? Particularly in your initial response.

The Chief Minister:

I think there is quite a lot in there. As we said, the big focus was on doing everything we possibly could to keep the schools open for longer. That is your fundamental principle. I will say, and we said it previously, to date I think we have probably done the best, certainly in the British Isles of any jurisdiction, and compare very favourably, I would suggest, to many European jurisdictions. If you go all the way through, so schools remained open for vulnerable children. We reopened schools as well for critical workers. We put 2 schemes in to ensure effectively digital access; that included provision of laptops for people who did not have access to them. We had processes in place to ensure vulnerable children and families were safeguarded and basically risk-assessed all children and young people known to Children's Services. We had things like the Children's Hub. We have put £1.3 million to help students disadvantaged by the pandemic. I am just going down my rather long list. More recently we have reorganised C.A.M.H.S. There is a significant investment that has gone into it. We did the Children and Families Hub. Obviously very particularly a lot of focus on care leavers. That is just to give a flavour and also, I think depending on the circumstances, we had

free internet provision provided by telecoms providers. That gives a flavour of a lot of the measures we put in place.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I was going to ask you about what you considered to be the successes in your response. I assume that is what you are detailing there. One of the things therefore we lead on to is what is the greatest challenges, from your perspective, in terms of putting children first throughout the pandemic and what you may have done differently?

The Chief Minister:

I think this is the point, if we get into a detail level, that would be the purpose of the COVID review that comes out. I think we have covered the challenges but the biggest one was how we did the minimal disruption to education and educational outcomes because I do recall the discussion, I could not tell you when, when the long-term impact of loss of educational days on children spirals along. The bigger impacts you have, I am definitely preaching to the wrong people here, but the longer delays you have the worse the outcomes are and the potential of very long-term negative consequences you have. But as I said, mental health has been ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask you then, do you feel that we have not had those consequences then because you feel the schools have been open?

The Chief Minister:

What I would say is that I think we have had thus far less consequences than many other jurisdictions. It is not saying there have not been the consequences but we have put steps in place, so we have got funding in place, which is to catch up those who particularly were affected in terms of extra lessons and things. We are recognising and, as I said, we have put money into various recovery functions, such as what we call the health and social recovery fund, which is then dealing with anything from children and dental health to generally people with long COVID. But a number of measures will be announced in due course that relate to C.Y.P.E.S. as a whole.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I asked you the question partly because obviously we are seeing ... I noted that a year 10 group in one school is at home today because of COVID so there are still impacts.

The Chief Minister:

That is the challenge.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The panel has received evidence from several sources, and this is the key thing about what the panel was doing to gather evidence and can gather views, and that includes the Children's Commissioner, that says that the Government has failed to put children first throughout the pandemic response so far. What is your response to that? What improvements do you believe may be required to tackle that or, if you believe so, the perception of that. Because perception is very important as well.

The Chief Minister:

This is why I think it would be helpful to hear from a couple of the officials because obviously they were dealing on a very regular basis with the office of the Children's Commissioner. If I use the Children's Commissioner as an example, there was a lot of work, as I understand it, happening at an official level on a very regular basis but perhaps, if you wish, they can give some further information. We did a learning at home website launched on 30th April 2020 and indeed we launched a children and young people COVID survey, which was launched just 5 weeks after the schools were closed back in 2020.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask you, in regards to that statement, I think this is a key thing because we have received evidence and people have that perception, do you feel then that the notion that the Government has failed to put children first is wrong or do you deny that? What would you say to those people therefore who have voiced that concern? What would your succinct reply be to that, if I may put it that way?

The Chief Minister:

We have tried to work as closely as we can - I can see Scott has just put his camera on as well - to ensure the best overall outcomes for all Islanders. Then in particular with children, we have made sure that the right voices have been heard, I think, at the right times, at the right decision-making level. But, as I said, in terms of the operational side there has been direct contact and regular contact, as I have understood matters, with the Children's Commissioner from very early days on this. Scott, do you want to add anything?

The Minister for Children and Education:

It was opinion rather than evidence, I would have to say. The evidence is that you ask somebody their opinion and their opinion was that they did not feel that the Government had fully put children first. I would say that we have met constantly with the unions to make sure that they are happy with what is going on in schools. C.Y.P.E.S. officials meet almost daily with heads and in communication about schools and children and what are the best outcomes there. We meet with home learners,

and I have had lots of meetings with them, with nurseries, with Highlands. C.Y.P.E.S., and as a Government, we have been constantly in communication with all of the charities and organisations that deal with children to make sure that we know what is happening on the ground and can make informed decisions.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I just ask and push you on that then? Are you saying that the evidence we received is purely opinion because we have had a number of submissions and, without giving away the outcome of the report - because you do not want to do that when you do scrutiny, you want something nice to come out that people read - including our advisers, have picked out specific areas where it is believed children have not been considered in the way that you are saying? We are not saying that any response would be perfect to a pandemic. We are absolutely aware, we were in it too in terms of the response about what would you do. When we look back we would all do things differently. But do you think it is more than just opinion and if so, what would your response be to take on board that criticism, that evidence, to move forward in terms of the response to children? I hope that is clear.

The Minister for Children and Education:

I would say that hopefully, in your submissions, you also have a lot of things that show that we did lots of things right as well as things that people have challenged. I look forward to reading the report when it comes out. I would say that we have engaged, as I was trying to say, with all the people that are in touch with children in their services to try and make the best-informed decisions. Did we get it 100 per cent right, 100 per cent of the time? Absolutely not, and I do not think anyone has. But we did not ignore these organisations and, when it is the idea of putting children first, we have been trying to improve our mental health services.

[10:30]

We have been looking at educational outcomes and making sure that schools are open and that children continue to be educated and that there are safety measures in place. I would say that I think we have done really well and that we did put children, in all aspects of the decisions that we made, about how it affected them during a pandemic, about going outdoors, about what it looks like. We have tried to ascertain, in the broader sense of the term, from the people that deal with children directly in their services what the best decision will be made so that we can make the best-informed decisions. You cannot deal with every single aspect and not all children act exactly the same way, not all families are exactly the same. But we have tried to do the best outcomes. I think we have put children first. I think from being on the ground, and I have only been the Minister for under a year now, but I know I meet with the Children's Commissioner every 2 weeks, but she is very

welcoming, so that we can discuss what is going on within children. Have we got it 100 per cent right all the time? No, but I do not think anyone has. I think we should be proud of what we have done and I am, and I will leave it there, I think.

The Chief Minister:

Can I just add, the problem is that ... one difficulty sometimes is when someone makes what I call a more general assertion, what one needs to understand is what they mean by that and what is the actual detail behind it. Because then you can go down and challenge the evidence, if that makes sense. There is sometimes a difference between a wide assertion on something and when you break down the detail on whether that is factual or not. I make 2 further points, because I note Senator Mézec has made a submission. Obviously because he was the Minister for Children at the time. He did make a comment around: "Of those who I spent the most time with during this part of the pandemic (the director general of C.Y.P.E.S., the senior directors, our communications officer and my private secretary) none of them ever gave me any cause for concern that they did not have the best interests of children at the forefront of their minds at all times." The C. and A.G. (Comptroller and Auditor General) has made a note around identifying the dialogue that was going on and I think, as a matter of public record, they have said that the public health and C.Y.P.E.S. have kept a running dialogue with and sought informed advice from the Children's Commissioner in planning key policy areas impacting children and young people and that included several safe travel policy, return to school in June 2020, consideration of school closures December 2020, to give an example. That is what I would call an objective assessment of, in practical terms, the actions that were taking place at the time.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you for your answers, Chief Minister. Just to refocus on children. I think Deputy Ward made an excellent point when he said nobody is ever going to get this 100 per cent right. We are not looking for a defence of we did get this 100 per cent right. What we do want is to pick up on anything in terms of the processes and the thinking that could be improved. You understand Scrutiny processes, this is for the good of the people that we represent and for children, so we want to be able to have some honesty about specific things that could be improved. I think perhaps it might help just to reflect on the people that we are talking about today, on children, and without giving away the findings of the report, we did hear from many children in focus groups and through other means that they did not feel themselves, as children, that they had been put first. What we would like to hear is perhaps a message directly to those children to validate those feelings that some children have, and of course it will not be all children that feel like that. But some validation of those feelings and then a reflection on what could be done differently if this ever occurs again. Could you speak to those points please?

The Chief Minister:

I think I would like to just listen or understand the comments that came out of focus groups because sometimes it is trying to understand the context and the cohort. I do accept that for children in all circumstances there has been a lot of stress and uncertainty caused by the overall pandemic. Obviously, as a parent, I can understand some of those areas where uncertainty creates difficulties but it will depend of course, if we look at our own personal circumstances, on what our own experiences are. Mine are in the ages of getting ready for exams and things like that, where obviously because of decisions that were taken beyond our control, obviously in the United Kingdom, a lot of the G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education) year cohort ended up in assessments, which of course causes great uncertainty and stress at various times. I think if one wants to try and address children, it is very difficult as a whole because of the wide age range and the difference in perspective that they will have. But to say I am sorry it has been hard for you but equally I hope you will understand it has been hard for a lot of people, including those of us trying to make the decisions. What we have had to do is we have tried to look after children, we have tried to look after their parents and we have tried to look after their grandparents, and that is what we have been trying to do our absolute best for. Although this has been really difficult, and this has been something that has never happened in any of our lifetimes before, I do think although it has been tough and there will be things we could have done better, I am sure, we have done our absolute very best for you and the future. To go to perhaps more positive stuff, we do know, and it is something that is consistent across the entire organisation, a whole range of areas it is about improving data. It is about getting proper data. For example, we always know we need more data. Even C.A.M.H.S. has some data, but that can always be improved, understanding children's voice, getting data on mental health, and that is a challenge across the entire organisation, which we are putting a lot of investment into, to try to improve. As we have said, and if you listen to Deputy Huelin on population, if he does not say 2 sentences without using the word "data" I will be amazed. That is something that goes across the entire organisation. It is something we recognised in very early days, and we have taken steps to do a lot of improvement, but there is a long way to go on that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

So just to clarify what you have said, there is nothing that you would do differently?

The Chief Minister:

I did not say that. I said that at this stage there will be things I am sure that could be improved but given the situation we faced at the time, the timescales that we had to react and the resources and information we had available, I think we did the very best we could.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In any future pandemics, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently to ensure that children feel that they are being put first?

The Chief Minister:

As I said, it will depend on what the nature of that pandemic looks like. I know that sounds a bit of cop out, but ...

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Let us say it is another virus, a very similar pandemic. What would you do differently?

The Chief Minister:

I do not think right at this stage I could specifically say: "We would do X versus Y differently" because it will very much depend on the circumstances and what the data is coming in for. What I would hope is that we would be in a better position from the point of view of having better certainty of data, which then allows you to make even better decisions, for example.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Deputy Ward, would you like to come in?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. Perhaps one of the themes that is emerging from what we are doing, and I would predict for any COVID response, is what this has done has laid bare some of the inequalities and the divisions in our society, particularly in terms of poverty and those living at the bottom of the income scale on our Island. Chief Minister, do you think there is anything that you have learned from this pandemic that would mean that you would address that issue differently? I point to some of the times that we have had to the increased use of foodbanks and reliance on charity through the pandemic for many families. One of the things is approximately 30 families a week accessing foodbanks, for example. Do you think there is a learning to be taken from that in response to the pandemic, in terms of the structures that we have in place on our Island? I am putting children at the centre of that because it is children who suffer the most from those things. Sorry, Minister, you have disappeared from the screen.

The Chief Minister:

I apologise, I was trying to grab an appropriate piece of paper that I had in terms of looking at income inequality as an example. There are 2 areas. The issue around foodbanks I do not think we have bottomed out in terms of data, and I will probably have to go back to that because again it is trying to understand the position. This is an observation, it is more difficult in the U.K. (United Kingdom) as the access to foodbanks is quite restricted and quite controlled, I believe, and I cannot remember

the period, but it is for a very limited number of days under certain circumstances. Over here we do not do that at all, and it is done through the charitable side. For example, if I have understood matters correctly, and I might be wrong here because it is about timing, the only report that we have ever released, as far as I can see, or the most recent one, is back in 2017, which for example cites Grace Trust specifically. It gives the number of food bags provided, around 300-odd, from one quarter to the other, and the number of individual people visiting is around 180. Whereas, if I have understood it correctly, the more recent notice that was put out was referring to, I think, 129 people/visits, which is notionally less - please note the word "notionally" - but also significantly more bags given, which is an interesting change. It implies that in overall terms fewer people were accessing it, but they were accessing it more, if that is a valid comparison, and I do not know; I have not gone into the detail on that. Just to re-emphasise that I think we need to understand a lot more about the situation. I touched partially on how we dealt with people who were at the lower end of the income spectrum, for example, in dealing with access to I.T. (information technology) and things like that, which was part of dealing with the issues we were faced with. I suppose if I give a different example when we did part of the fiscal stimulus on the Spend Local card that went to every individual in every household, on top of that people who were on income support, and I think it was certain pension measures were also given an additional £100. Those at the bottom end were given more of that particular cash than people in middle class upwards. There are a whole range of other measures that have been done either through the pandemic, we had the C.R.E.S.S. (COVID-19 Related Emergency Support Scheme) that came through, all those types of things, and there is quite a long list, which I will not give now, versus the other measures that, yes, I think we would always have wanted to do more, but it does not mean that we have done nothing. We have done the things around access to G.P. (general practitioner) visits for 12,000 people, we have done things around dental care for children ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Chief Minister, sorry, I think we are getting into black and white here. We are not suggesting nothing has been done.

The Chief Minister:

You asked what else we have done around income support in supporting people.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. I think the question is what have we learned from the pandemic that highlighted families having to use foodbanks, some really inadequate accommodation that children were in, no space to access education at home on their own, families sharing a phone to access education? There is lots of evidence coming through that these things were happening. Perhaps the light that has been shone on that, because of the pandemic, is a strange positive so now we are much more aware of what is

happening in our society. I ask the question: why are children having to access foodbanks if we are putting our children first? It is a simple question, and what have we learned from the pandemic to address that and the accommodation, given that there is an emphasis, and I fully support the emphasis of putting children first?

[10:45]

I signed a pledge and am more than happy to do that and I think it means a lot to some Members that that is a really important key point. I suppose that is what we are asking. We are asking for the positives, what has been learned from the pandemic and the response that we can take forward? As Deputy Doublet said, in case something happens again, because we are not out of this yet.

The Chief Minister:

No. As I said, before I comment specifically on things like foodbanks and so on, I really do want to know more about that, just to understand. If there is an inherent issue then obviously we do need to address it, but equally as a society we do have measures in place, the fundamental ones around income support and all those types of stuff, and improvements have been made even during the pandemic. In terms of access to health we have done improvements again, as I said, around things like dental care. There will be an announcement shortly on further measures we are doing to remedy dental healthcare in children. Scott and Judy have been very much working on that in the time and I am hoping we will do a formal announcement in due course. There are measures that have been taken to deal with those sorts of things. Things like, as you will know and I did support that and in fact we have done it twice now, we have frozen, for example, Andium rents. Straight off the top of my head we put protections in place around tenants, particularly during the pandemic, which was making sure they could not be evicted, and again there was guidance put in place about managing arrears. We also put measures in place for those who were seasonal workers here who either had been caught out and had to stay here, or were trying to get back to their home countries, just doing very high-level stuff. One thing I am just very cautious about is not catastrophising what for individual people is a very difficult circumstance, no question on it, but we also have got to make sure and understand the exact circumstances and whether there are systems in place that they are not aware of that would help them, or whether there is something we are missing and what those circumstances are.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you, Chief Minister. To go back to foodbanks and children accessing foodbanks, if any child is having to access a foodbank can we truly say that we are putting children first?

The Chief Minister:

Can I just check? Again, do we have evidence of children accessing foodbanks or is it of families?
There is a distinction.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think families including children so, yes, I think that is ... I am sorry, Deputy Doublet, I assume that is what you mean?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

It is, yes.

The Chief Minister:

As I said, what I do need to understand is what those circumstances are, because we do have measures in place that support people in terms of income support. We have been rolling out, for example, schemes involving school meals and things like that. So measures are there and they are there to try to help, so again that is why I think we just need to understand exactly what the problem is, and that is not really appropriate necessarily for me as a politician to do but for someone usually at an official level to go into the individual circumstances, to understand those circumstances and then come back to us. The reason I say that is that it is about privacy and the right of that individual to have their privacy respected, but I do think there is a piece of work that we need to understand around what the circumstances are that means that someone is going to a foodbank and not accessing the systems that we have in place. However, in the Island generally, we have and always have had a very strong charitable sector as part of our overall community response.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is it your aim that no family should be accessing foodbanks?

The Chief Minister:

As I have said, I want to understand what the circumstances are and why. For example, in the past I have helped out with the Christmas appeal and the Christmas hampers, for want of a better expression, that people like Round Table distribute. They go to very particular people who have difficult circumstances and there have been times when somebody has said: "It was really welcome last year. This year I do not need it" so it is just understanding exactly the circumstances and what is not being met by the systems that we have in place already.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Deputy Ward, do you have anything else to follow up on that?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

No, I am conscious of time and I know we have got some questions regarding recovery later that might come up again.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes. I would quite like to ask about the Corporate Parenting Board, please, and what involvement have you had with it throughout the pandemic in relation to strategies and policy development, with a specific focus on children and young people in care?

The Chief Minister:

The reality has been that with the overall demands of the pandemic the Corporate Parenting Board was essentially left with the Minister for Children and Education, it was delegated down to the Minister for Children and Education. That was the reality because that meant it could have been given the absolute proper focus, rather than essentially from my perspective becoming one of, I will say hundreds, but many tens of items that were coming across the desk at the time.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In terms of corporate parenting and what it looks like, Chief Minister, what does a good or successful corporate parent look like to you in terms of the daily, weekly or monthly actions that you as a corporate parent might take?

The Chief Minister:

The whole point of the corporate parenting side, and Scott can add a lot more on to this, is about treating children that are under our care as if we were a parent. That means anything from making sure we look after them properly in the same way as a parent even up to the level of university and all those types of things, and indeed from memory I read a compelling social media post from one of the people in our charge from that perspective who was very complimentary, certainly at that point, on everything that they had received, and how they had been looked after. Scott, I think you can talk further on that.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Just to stay with you, Chief Minister, and to revisit the original question, what does that look like, so that people watching can gain an understanding of the specific actions that you are taking on a daily, weekly or monthly basis in your role as a corporate parent?

The Chief Minister:

The whole point of this is how the systems that we have put in place make sure that children under our care are treated as you would treat one of your own children, basically. That is the fundamental

principle. In other words, it is not just somebody who is a number in the system; it is that they are properly looked after and guided in the same way as we would one of our own children.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can you give some examples of how you personally have done that throughout the pandemic, Chief Minister?

The Chief Minister:

As I said, the whole principle in terms of looking at the Corporate Parenting Board, in fact I am reminded it was always chaired by the Minister for Children and Education, so it is not directly one that lands on me, apart from as a fundamental principle it is something that we, as an organisation, have very much put in place because it is absolutely the right thing to do.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you for your answer. In any future pandemics would you ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board did continue to meet?

The Chief Minister:

Apologies, my wi-fi broke up briefly. Could you repeat the question?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

In any future pandemics or emergency situations would you ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board continued to meet?

The Chief Minister:

Yes. I was not aware that they had not met during the pandemic, if that is what you are suggesting. I think the other point is that again with the corporate parenting packages even today I think there are some further announcements coming out about the experiences and what that means, so it is something that is ongoing. Again, it is something that is continuing to be put through the organisation at an operational and senior management level.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

You mentioned you were not aware that the board was not meeting. In terms of any future pandemics or emergency situations, what processes would you put in place to ensure that you, as Chief Minister, have oversight of these important matters?

The Chief Minister:

The short answer is that I was not aware they had not met. I understand on reflection it might have been after September 2020 due to the changes that took place in the Ministers over the period of time, but I absolutely want to make sure that oversight continues. However, what I would seek to check is even if the overall board may not have met, and I would need to check the dates, the overall principles behind the board and those people who are directly involved operationally, for want of a better expression, and it is a word that I do not like using in this context, that would continue. I want to check the dates as to when the board met and how they deliberated and so on, but my understanding, particularly knowing all the officials involved and also given some of the public comments made, officials have always been very focused on looking after people in our care, particularly during the pandemic and even going further. Even now there are further measures coming through that we are seeing; for example the fact that all care leavers should they wish are guaranteed access into the apprenticeship scheme and the positive consequences that come out beyond that. That is taking them through those further steps. Scott, do you want to come in?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think Deputy Ward wanted to follow up. Did you have a follow-up on that specific question, Deputy Ward?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Chief Minister, when you were acting as Minister for Children and Education were you not approached regarding the Corporate Parenting Board then? I would have thought that was a real key feature at the time, given the importance of corporate parenting.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Did the board meet during your time when you had oversight as Minister for Children and Education?

The Chief Minister:

What I was going to say is that the time when I was in position as Minister for Children and Education many of the functions were delegated to the relevant Assistant Ministers, of which Scott was at one point. He can remind me the exact dates of the things that all took place. While I was there for the very high-level areas, and some did come across my desk, the system worked well and the relevant Assistant Ministers were able to basically take up all the measures, and I am not aware of any issues that arose as a result. In other words, they all looked after those responsibilities and carried out those responsibilities very well. I will say that in my experience everyone has always taken those responsibilities very seriously.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think Deputy Ward has some questions on communications.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes. I know we are conscious of time. I was just looking because we changed the time as to how long we have got.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

We have 15 minutes remaining so I think we should just move on and have brief questions on the communications.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Of course. Chief Minister, shortly after October half-term in 2020 in response to an increasing second wave you made a statement directly to address young people as one of the reasons for an increased spread of COVID at the time. Can you explain why the decision was taken to put out this message, given that there was quite a negative backlash received in response to it?

The Chief Minister:

You are testing memory now. Did you say October 2020 or October 2021?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

October half-term 2020, we believe it was. It was the first or second wave. One of the waves.

The Chief Minister:

You are now testing my memory on something of more than a year ago. I have to say although I think there was evidence, as I recall at the time, that was coming through contact tracing, that a number of the spreads were coming through outside of the educational sphere but were occurring within young people, essentially it was trying to reinforce the importance of acting appropriately.

[11:00]

It was interesting, you are right, there were some people who did not like the message. I will say that there were others who felt the message was appropriate and I had feedback from both sides.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

One of the panel's advisers' key findings was that the pandemic has created a significant divide between young and old within the community. They recommend that community building initiatives should be developed to address this issue. What is your view on this finding and how do you think this can be addressed going forward?

The Chief Minister:

Apologies, whose finding was it?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

It was our panel advisers' findings who have done quite ...

The Chief Minister:

Oh, I see. I have obviously not seen the advisers' report yet, so I think I would like to understand the context. Just to clarify from memory, particularly on the October 2020 half-term, there probably would have been parties that were coming out for Halloween and Bonfire Night and also from memory because the second wave, I think it was at that point, kicked off roughly at the end of November 2020. The reason I am now starting to remember it is that we thought it had stabilised and it went down to something like 150 and then went very rapidly over the next few days to 180, 200 and then went north fast. I think the point was that the evidence when you track back, and I think if you allow 14 to 18 days, you land pretty well on the end of Bonfire Night as potentially a start. I think the message that we put out was because some of the contact tracing was already showing some evidence of things like Halloween parties, so the message was put out as a precursor. This is an opinion but if you do the numbers and track back on those days that is roughly where the increase seemed to come from. Some of these you can never directly prove unless you go back all the way through the contact tracing data.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

As has been said by you, Minister, we have to be careful of opinion. Deputy Doublet, do you want ...

The Chief Minister:

I expressed an opinion there rather than fact, but that is something that one looks at, and part of that was based around advice that we received, and usually that is based on some of the evidence that we have seen from things like contact tracing. You will recall in some of the briefings we gave to States Members there were I think in those days some diagrams with differing sizes of circles on a timeline and usually the early part of the timeline was the smaller circle, indicating a smaller cluster, and then as the timeline went along the clusters got bigger and then started to merge. So some of those clusters we could identify straight back to individual events, and that was the level of data that we were carrying at the time. It would have been based on the advice we were given.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am sorry, Chief Minister, I am checking the time and there are some question areas that I feel we should cover before the end of the hearing, so I am going to move on. I would like to ask you, and

this is from your overview as Chief Minister of all departments, which departments and areas serving children were hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic? I am specifically thinking about things like staff being redeployed.

The Chief Minister:

That would be a directly operational question and I do not know if anybody on the call could answer that, or whether we would have to go back to do an analysis.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I am happy for you to go to officers if that is appropriate for this one.

The Chief Minister:

The trouble is, if it is across, somebody like Sean or Rob might give some indications because obviously Rob comes from the health side and has come into education, if that makes sense. Maybe they might be one of the better ones, or perhaps Alex, who may have the overarching position. Shall we start with Rob unless he wants to send it to someone else, and then perhaps Alex?

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

As brief as possible please, if we are aiming for an 11.15 a.m. finish.

Acting Director General, C.Y.P.E.S.:

Thank you. I do not have the breakdown for where staff were redeployed. Obviously from a health perspective we benefited from a lot of staff from Broad Street and administrative functions that came to support us. I am not sure in terms of the C.Y.P.E.S. and education and wider service, I think all front line services were impacted in terms of the process and the strategic co-ordinating group, led by Julian Blazeby at that time, was responsible for that response. Sean, I am not sure if there is anything you would want to add.

Group Director, Education:

It really felt like a whole system response. In terms of education, getting schools and nursery provision reopened for the children of critical workers was blind of departments. It was across the piece and internally to us. The impact was different on different schools and settings. For example, when the Jersey Youth Service were not open for youth club provision their staff were redeployed effectively at Mont à l'Alabbé School and some of the mainstream schools, so there were internal transfers to prop up but it really felt that, on our part, we were helping all front line services across all departments stay open and operational whether it was health, the emergency services or others. The impact internal to us was variable by school and setting.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

How did you make those decisions? I think that was Sean speaking there. Whether it was yourself, Sean, or others, I think you said it was Julian Blazeby at the time. I am not sure what his title at the time was but that particular officer. How were those decisions assessed in terms of which offices and which resources to redirect? Were any Child Rights Impact Assessments made? How was the impact on children considered in making those decisions?

Group Director, Education:

If I may, we have talked earlier about the excellent Children and Families Hub that was brought forward in COVID but we had a separate hub which we called the C.Y.P.E.S. Hub that met daily, and its purpose was to assess the lists of children of critical workers and those categories changed over time. We had reallocations so when Julian Blazeby said to the hub that we represent: "Could you release any staff?", often C.Y.P.E.S. or the education function within C.Y.P.E.S. responded saying: "No, we cannot. We are at full tilt." We use that daily meeting to reallocate staff between schools, between services and facilitate the discussions with the private voluntary sector nursery. So we had our one prioritisation piece and we would have to look at individual cases of off-duty police officers dropping off, picking up and even some disputes at the school gates because it was mission critical getting the right numbers of both vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. So we stood up that hub from nothing in a matter of days but it became quite sophisticated in analysing daily the data of impact and where schools could spare people and where they could not. We did prioritise children throughout obviously. That was the whole *raison d'être* of every decision was what was best for children.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, thank you, and we appreciate all the work done in terms of children in those areas. The panel has heard of some areas that are still facing severe backlogs such as C.A.M.H.S. Sean, what would you say are the major areas in your department that are still facing backlogs and perhaps might need to catch up still?

Group Director, Education:

If I may, Deputy Doublet, I will refer to colleagues who are on the C.A.M.H.S. backlog who have the up-to-date information. For ourselves, we are about to produce our second report. It is not yet ready to go to the Minister but will be very shortly on the Jersey education recovery, so when you say "catch-up", we know there is significant learning loss. We feel there are some unknowns as yet about the full impact of mental health but there is a great deal of international and national research as well as local work. We did stand up a range of catch-up programmes to address the genuine learning loss. We delivered over 12,000 hours of individual and small group tutoring under the tutoring programme. Over 30 per cent of Jersey's children in the non-fee-paying government

schools benefited from tutoring and we have been successful in the social recovery bid. There is very significant investment in 2022 and 2023 because it is very significant, so when you talk about catch-up we have defined programmes about teacher education, new recovery expansion, a mass recovery programme and Jersey tutoring; so 4 strong elements. We have just analysed the impact in 2021 and will make that report available once it has been through due process to the Minister, as indeed we did the previous report of the School Improvement Advisory Service on the impact of learning at home. So we are getting better and better data of the impact of learning and wider developmental care loss. We know the damage in the youngest years of not being able to socialise or the impact of communication skills but we have significant investment because we know it is a long-term solution to address these lags. I will hand over to colleagues on the C.A.M.H.S. piece specifically that you asked about.

Director of Safeguarding and Chief Social Worker:

Thank you, Sean. Very quickly, given the time, we recognised early that children and young people's mental health and well-being was going to be challenged by the pandemic in 2022. We have put an additional £300,000 in to bring in extra staff to help with the backlog and to support staff resilience. In 2021, we brought in another £955,000. We did see a significant increase in referrals. Approximately 850. That is the highest ever and significantly more than previous years but C.A.M.H.S. waiting times last year were kept to pre-pandemic levels. For example, autism assessment times were reduced from 22 months to 3 months so, while the service has seen unprecedented demand, the way in which we have been able to meet that demand has been better than previous years.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Deputy Ward, I do have some more questions on this but did you want to ask about the last section?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am conscious of the time and there are some key questions we have not asked, if that is okay. Chief Minister, what action has the Government taken to tackle poverty and support families who do not qualify for income support but have been severely impacted by the COVID pandemic; specifically young people between the ages of 16 to 25 who do not qualify in their own right?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, thank you. I am just referring to my notes, so if you give me 2 minutes. So that is a detailed point because I know the Minister for Social Security did take some action in dealing with people who are not entitled to income support in those days. I do not have that information directly to hand. I will get back to you as to exactly what we did but we did not ignore anybody who was on Island

and was basically stuck here as a result of the pandemic. One obvious one is that we put a scheme in place which was to deal with particularly people who had only been here for a very, very short period of time, so action was taken. I would have to come back to you to give you the details.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am thinking of those 16 to 25 year-olds who do not qualify for income support who may have been working and the pandemic affected that. What has been done because we are focusing on the COVID response on children? There is a section in our community that really has been hit and they are young people. Do you think more could be done, are you aware of that, and how aware are you as to where it has come from?

The Chief Minister:

Just for my information, just to get it into context, do we know roughly how many children you are talking about in the 16 to 25 year group that are basically not entitled?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

No, I was hoping that you would know that as Chief Minister or your department would be aware of it.

The Chief Minister:

Well, I would have to say, for me, that would be a matter for Social Security. But the reason I raise that is because that is why I just need to understand the context. I assumed, on the basis that you are asking, that you had evidence or details around the nature and the magnitude of the problem we were dealing with.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We may well produce something in a report but certainly we have heard - and there is growing evidence but obviously I am going to try and avoid an opinion - there are 16 to 25 year-olds who do not qualify for income support. You must recognise that there is a section there that does not have that income support backing that you emphasised earlier and we just wondered whether you are aware of any effects of the pandemic on those young people. The worst-case scenario is it could be a hidden effect that none of us know about and it is happening anyway.

The Chief Minister:

That is why what would be helpful to know from you is how many people you think are affected and the evidence you have on that front. That is quite important because obviously, for the sake of argument, if there are 200 people involved and there is a real issue there versus if it was 5, then obviously one would want to know the context because there are different approaches required in

terms of the different scale. I am very happy to go back to Social Security and get you a more formal answer but obviously I do not ...

Deputy R.J. Ward:

By definition, they will not be in the Social Security system so that might not be where your data is.

The Chief Minister:

I will switch between Social Security and C.Y.P.E.S. and I am sure we can put an answer in place for you.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Deputy Doublet, do you want to ...

[11:15]

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, thank you for those and we would be interested to hear the figures on that as well. Chief Minister, thank you for your answers today and thank you to your officers as well. I think we do have some further information that we would be seeking specifically around some of the things that Sean was talking about and - forgive me, the name escapes me - the gentleman who was talking about C.A.M.H.S. so we might follow that up in writing. Could you just summarise please for children what you would say to the children of the Island in terms of what you have learnt by going through this pandemic, anything that you would do differently, and what you have learnt about what they need?

The Chief Minister:

As I said earlier, what we have been doing when we have been going through the pandemic is this balance of risks, balance of harms, and that is about dealing with lives and livelihoods and, from a child's perspective, that is how it impacts on them. It could be, depending on the age of the child, how it has impacted them in their schooling, how it has impacted on who looks after them but, equally, it can be how it has impacted on their families, their parents and their grandparents. In the context of when we first started, the very real concern was about the loss of life to any of those and obviously, as the data improved, to those parts of society. In terms of one thing we teach I think in all the schools is resilience, and all I will say is as a community this has been the biggest test of resilience that we have ever had to face since the Second World War in a civil context.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Thank you. Deputy Ward, do you want to ask any final questions? I think we are out of time though really.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think we are out of time. I just want to thank everyone for everyone's involvement today.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Yes, thanks to everybody who has attended.

The Chief Minister:

If I could just say, certainly for the officials, there is a lot of data out of there. We got a taste of it at the very end there, which I hope would help inform your review because on an operational and evidential basis that will give you very much what was taking place. So we very much welcome your written queries and we will get officials to respond accordingly.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I think we are very close to report writing at the moment but I think we would really like to perhaps have a briefing or a meeting about that report.

[11:17]