



Children's Commissioner for Jersey Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights

Child Tax Allowance and Childcare Tax Allowance Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

Poverty represents the biggest threat to children's rights, and as such it is vital that all available levers to eliminate child poverty in Jersey are considered.

I thank the Panel for seeking my views on this matter and indeed for highlighting that there has not been an increase in the child tax allowance or childcare tax allowance. In particular, I note that the additional child allowance available to single parents is £4,500 and has not been increased since 2011.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was extended to Jersey in 2014, an important step forward in protecting children's rights in Jersey but also providing a robust framework for decision making. While all rights are universal and interdependent, four general principles have emerged in aiding the interpretation of the Convention. These are:

- Non-Discrimination.
- Best interests of the child.
- The right to survival and development.
- The views of the child.

Children in Jersey should be supported to thrive, no matter who they are or where they are from, and their best interests should guide decision making. Good quality support to facilitate the child's development is crucial, and the UNCRC is clear that while parents and carers have primary responsibility here, the state must provide support:

"States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities"¹ and "take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible."²

This is echoed in Article 27:

"The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development."

States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing."

Jersey is a wealthy island, yet there are children and young people growing up in poverty. Data from 2015 showed that more than a quarter (29%) of children were living in relative

¹ Article 18 (2)

² Article 18 (3)

low-income households³. The Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Report 2017⁴ revealed that 1 in 7 households were materially deprived, with 1 in 10 households in severe material deprivation. While around 25% of households had difficulty coping financially, this rose to 44% of single parent families and 23% of households with children that had gone without new clothing for their child over the last year.

Notably, more than a third (36%) of households reported that their finances had deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with half (50%) of households living in non-qualified rental accommodation reporting a deterioration in their household finances. Further, when asked, more than a quarter (27%) of households expected their financial situation to get worse over the next 12 months.⁵

Poverty threatens the most basic rights protections, including access to nutritious food. A report in 2016⁶ showed that more than a quarter of people accessing foodbanks had dependent children, and that 89% of people accessing food banks were either born in Jersey or had lived in the island long enough to gain an 'entitled' status for work and housing qualifications. Recent reports have shown that food bank usage has risen during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, a collection of food banks in Jersey made more than 3,000 deliveries to 600 people between March and August this year.⁷

Children have expressed concern to us that some of their peers are growing up in poverty. As one child said:

"Make sure families have enough money to buy good food for there children. I've heard some children have had less food in there lunch boxes nearer the end of the month."

Child tax allowance or childcare tax allowance levels alone will not address the entrenched inequalities highlighted in this paper, however any lever available which may combat child poverty should be explored to better protect, respect and fulfil children's rights in Jersey.

³ Jersey Household Income Distribution 2014/15, Statistics Jersey:

<https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/R%20Income%20Distribution%20Survey%20Report%202014-15%2020151112%20SU.pdf>

⁴ Chapter 1, Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Report 2017, Statistics Jersey:

<https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/R%20Opinions%20and%20Lifestyle%20Survey%202017%20report%2020171130%20SU.pdf>

⁵ Page 7, Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Report 2020, Statistics Jersey:

<https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/R%20Opinions%20and%20Lifestyle%20Survey%202020%20Report%2020200903%20SJ.pdf>

⁶ Food banks in Jersey 2016 Usage Report: <https://statesassembly.gov.je/AssemblyReports/2016/R.114-2016.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.itv.com/news/channel/2020-08-30/jersey-food-bank-supported-600-people-per-week-during-the-pandemic>