

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE
MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND HOUSING
ON TUESDAY 10th DECEMBER 2019**

**‘Making a Difference; Driving Improvement – An Inspection of
The Government of Jersey Children’s Social Work Service – A follow-up report’**

Last week the Jersey Care Commission published a report on the follow-up inspection of our Children’s Services carried out by Ofsted. As a Government, we welcome this report’s findings and recommendations. In particular, I am pleased with the finding that children in need of help and protection are now better supported than they were at the time of the last inspection.

However, there is still more to do to ensure a fully joined up response to children’s needs, and the report rightly highlighted the lack of progress made in some areas. As Minister, I will provide a full response in due course.

Today I wish to provide States Members and the public with an update on the progress that has been made since the inspection took place and what progress we are now able to make as a result of the Government Plan being passed last week. I would like to thank members for their support in passing the Plan, which enables us to quicken the pace in delivering on many of the improvements which are needed.

This report and those which preceded it have repeatedly told us of the problems there were with recruitment and retention of staff in children’s services. I am pleased to say that since the Ofsted inspection took place at the end of September, we have made several permanent appointments to stabilise the workforce at all levels, so that children experience less turnover and change. We now have a senior leadership team, of five permanent staff including a new Director of Children’s Safeguarding and Care who are committed to take the children’s service forward. This is the first time that there has been stability in the leadership team for many years and puts us on a sound footing to proceed with developing a Service Development Plan that directly responds to Ofsted and the Care Inquiry, as well as instilling a relentless focus on the quality of practice and performance management to improve outcomes for children and families.

The report found that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub has been strengthened, which is a particularly welcome finding, given the report from the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry earlier this year. They also found that there had been improvements in the fostering and adoption service, and a better response to children at risk of exploitation.

In its recommendations, the report states that we need to “Implement and embed the wider system changes, such as new legislation and improved corporate infrastructure, with comprehensive political commitment.” The Government Plan allocates funding for this important policy work, and we have just launched a consultation on wide ranging amendments to the Children’s (Jersey) Law 2002, which includes corporate parenting.

The report also recommended that we “improve the quality of services and support provided to care leavers and to children in private fostering arrangements.” As corporate parents, we must improve the way we support care leavers, and work has been undertaken to prepare an entitlement offer for care leavers which will provide extra help and support. Just last week the Corporate Parenting Board, which I chair, met to discuss this, and the Government Plan now gives us the funding to

deliver on this in the New Year. I have also just signed a contract with Jersey Cares to enable them to provide independent advocacy for care leavers.

The report recommended we “rapidly develop and implement an early help offer so that children’s needs are responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity.” Through the Government Plan we will put in place a new initiative namely ‘Right Help, Right Time’ which is an early intervention service for families. This is a significant piece of partnership work to develop support to children and families to strengthen and build their capacity and to reduce the numbers of children entering statutory systems.

The Ofsted report recognised that there has been a significant shift in corporate and political support for children’s services as well as greater recognition of the need to strengthen the support provided for children. They recognised our commitment in the Common Strategic Policy, the Children’s Plan and our Pledge to Children and Young People.

The pledge to Put Children First has recently been launched with support from the Chief Minister, myself, the Chief Executive and Government of Jersey departments and colleagues. It’s been great to see businesses, organisations, charities, and individual Islanders help to positively promote this awareness campaign. The logo and campaign were designed by Children in collaboration with the Jersey’s School Council Network.

This campaign is to encourage Islanders and businesses to sign up as part of our commitment in responding to the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry recommendations to raise awareness of the need for everyone to take responsibility for putting children first and make Jersey the best place to grow up.

The Independent Jersey Care Inquiry Panel said in their two-year progress report: “We believe Jersey has the potential to learn from its past in order to put in place truly world-class services for children. Some long-held approaches will need to be relinquished to allow new ones to develop to ensure a better future for the Island’s children. We are reminded that almost everyone who had suffered maltreatment in the Island’s care system told us that the purpose of sharing their experiences was to ensure that, in the future, children in Jersey had safer, more fulfilling and happier childhoods. Delivering that future honours their past.”

Putting Children First means that all children and young people will grow up safely, learn and achieve, live a healthy life and are valued and involved in everyday decisions that affect their lives.

The campaign to support the Pledge is about raising awareness of the need for everyone to take responsibility for putting children first, which is a necessary first step to changing those “long held approaches” that enabled child abuse to persist for so long.

There is still a long way to go on this journey, but I wish to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in Children’s Services for facilitating the Ofsted inspection. I know that the Service comes under intense scrutiny from the public, media and within Government itself, but I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the staff whether they are interims or permanent employees as they all have a vital role to play in making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children and young people in Jersey.