

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION
BY DEPUTY M.R. HIGGINS OF ST. HELIER
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2021
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2021**

Question

Following the tragic death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes in the U.K. will the Minister advise –

- (a) whether the Island is following the same social and child protection model used by Solihull (the authority that oversaw Arthur’s care) and, if not, would he outline the main differences between the models and where, if at all, Jersey’s model can be considered more robust;
- (b) the turnover of children’s social workers for each of the last five years, together with a breakdown of the average length of employment (weeks, months and years) of each of those who have left the service; and
- (c) the number of full-time, part-time, bank or agency social workers employed for each of the last five years, and the length of time they were employed on a continuous basis of, if their employment was intermittent, the number of times and total duration they were employed over this period?

Answer

(a)

The full facts surrounding Arthur Labinjo-Hughes murder are not yet known, however some information is available at this time. The following was put forward by the Children’s commissioner for England on the BBC on Sunday 5th December 2021:

Dame Rachel Mary de Souza identified that:

- Arthur’s voice appears to have not been heard:
- It appears not to be the systems, but the delivery of social work services that have not worked as they should (visits were undertaken but no safeguarding concerns were raised)
- There was a lack of professional curiosity
- Working with families about their concerns
- Lock down impacting on the closure of schools

Additionally, other enquiries following serious case reviews linked to the death of a child would indicate that the following themes are evident in many cases:

- Intervening at too late a stage
- Hidden adults
- Staffing shortages
- Lack of training
- Professionals not communicating effectively
- Procedures not being followed.

Practice and Professional curiosity

Dame Rachel Mary de Souza highlighted from her visits and discussions with local authorities in England during this recent period, that the way social work is delivered to children and young people by practitioners is more of an issue than the systems. Solihull and Jersey Children’s Social Care do *not* use the same practice model, although the theories and frameworks that sit behind them are similar in nature.

Solihull Children's Social Care uses the Signs of safety practice model within Children's Social Care. This is a strengths-based, safety-orientated approach to supporting children and families designed for use throughout the safeguarding process. The [framework's creators](#) highlight risk assessment and case planning as central features of the Signs of Safety process. The approach aims to stabilise and strengthen families through collaboration to identify and harness their own strengths and resources.

Jersey Children's Social Care practice model is "Jersey's Children First." This is also used by other agencies including health and education.

The framework draws upon "getting it right for every child" (GIRFEC) model. This ensures that the social care approach:

- **is child-focused** - it ensures the child or young person – and their family – is at the centre of decision-making and the support available to them
- **is based on an understanding of the wellbeing of a child in their current situation** - it takes into consideration the wider influences on a child or young person and their developmental needs when thinking about their wellbeing, so that the right support can be offered
- **is based on tackling needs early** - it aims to ensure needs are identified as early as possible to avoid bigger concerns or problems developing
- **requires joined-up working** - it is about children, young people, parents, and the services they need working together in a coordinated way to meet the specific needs and improve their wellbeing

This means at the heart of our work with children and their families that relationships are key to understanding what is happening for that child and how best they can be supported, building upon strengths within the family as well as the support from other services.

Currently, there are 70 children who are subject of a child protection plan in Jersey. The child protection conferences are chaired by the Child Protection Advisors who have independent scrutiny of the planning for children in need of protection. They bring high support and challenge to practitioners with their independent oversight of the case work.

The service also has a quality assurance framework which again is published on the Government website.

As part of the QA cycle, Heads of Service chair performance surgeries each Thursday where practice issues are discussed, and plans drawn up for addressing the issues in a timely manner. Jersey Children's Social Care is supported in detailing this oversight by our specialist informatic team, that collate information about our children and provide this to Social Workers, Team managers, Heads of Service, CPAs, and the Director on a weekly basis. This data is also reviewed at monthly senior leadership meetings with Alistair Gibbons, who is offering additional independent oversight on our improvement journey.

Jersey is able to be more robust because of the nature of geography, being a small community with good communication between agencies to highlight when things are wrong leading to timely risk assessments and interventions.

Working with families and the whole community about concerns raised for children's wellbeing.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. During the COVID 19 period with restrictions on movement, this was a key message that was shared on social media from the government. This encouraged members of the public as well as professionals to report any concerns to the Children and Family hub.

Family Group conferences are offered to children using our service. This service allows children and their families to discuss concerns that have been assessed as impacting on the children. It allows all members of the child and young person's network to come together to develop plans to reduce the risks for the child or young person in a timely manner. This often runs alongside and feeds into formal meetings such as child protection conferences.

In 2020, the service recruited to the post of Quality Assurance officer. This officer's role is to coordinate complaints and feedback to the service, and to support the completion of the learning loop, by reporting back themes and areas for learning and development.

Covid 19 and its impact on schools

During the Covid period, there were several measures that were undertaken to safeguard our most vulnerable children.

Each Social Worker and Team Manager risk assessed the children they had on their caseload. These children were prioritised in terms of school attendance and visits. Social Workers were provided with Personal Protective Equipment to allow them to continue visits to children, and where the family refused a visit or the impact on COVID 19 on the workforce delayed the visits, the child was discussed at a dispensation meeting with Heads of Service to consider alternative ways to ensure the child’s safety, or to agree a small delay where it did not impact on the safety of the child.

All meetings have continued to be held, and for Child Protection Conferences these mostly take place on TEAMS to allow all the safeguarding work to continue.

Education have always worked closely with Children’s social care to identify concerns for children on their roll and have flagged up when children have not been seen. Schools in Jersey worked with services throughout the last year to ensure that vulnerable children were encouraged and supported to attend school, even when the rest of the school was online.

Moving forward

Jersey Children’s Social Care, along with our partners, are in the process of relaunching our practice model and strengthening it further using trauma informed practices. The relaunch will be presented to DLT and ELT in forthcoming months with a request for lead responsibility for the practice framework to sit with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Board. If this is agreed, we will see a whole island commitment to supporting and safeguarding children which all agencies working with children and young people will sign up to. We would welcome the ministers' support with this to move the Jersey’s Children First agenda forward.

Jersey Children’s Social Care would also welcome a visit from any minister who would like to see how the Social Work services support, safeguard and promote children's wellbeing in Jersey Children’s Social Care.

(b)

The following information shows the number of permanent employees who have left the service and their average length of employment in years:

Year	Leavers	Av. Length of Service in years	Av. HC	%
2017	2	8.6	7.3	27.3%
2018	1	25.5	6.8	14.6%
2019	10	10.3	34.2	29.3%
2020	8	3.4	41.8	19.1%
2021	17	2.8	39.4	43.2%
Total	38			

You can see in 2021, 17 front line social workers left the service, the highest ever in the last 5 years. This makes for a turnover of front-line permanent staff of 43.2 % in 2021.

(c)

The following information shows the turnover of agency social work staff up to the end of 2020 within Children's Social Work Services. Data for 2021 has not been available within the short timeframe to report back to the minister but we expect the figures to be similar, if not higher than 2020 in terms of what we know in relation to agency staff leaving.

Year	Agency	Left	Turnover	Length of Service (months)
2016	49	25	51.0%	4.7
2017	76	41	53.9%	6.4
2018	62	35	56.5%	10.3
2019	49	32	65.3%	11.7
2020	49	24	49.0%	15.2
Total		157		8.3