

STATES OF JERSEY



DEVELOPMENT OF FOSTERING AND ADOPTION SERVICES IN JERSEY

**Lodged au Greffe on 23rd August 2005
by Senator R.J. Shenton**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to approve, in principle, the grant of additional funding to the Health and Social Services Committee over a period of 3 years to enable more children in need of care to be placed in family-based care instead of residential units, with the sums allocated each year in addition to the proposed cash limit for the Committee being as follows –

2006	£390,000
2007	£330,000
2008	£150,000

- (b) to charge the Finance and Economics Committee to take the necessary steps to include the additional sum required for 2006 in the Budget 2006 proposals.

SENATOR R.J. SHENTON

REPORT

At the last meeting of the States in July 2005, the President of the Health and Social Services Committee stated in answer to a question that there were over 40 children and young people in residential care, i.e. residential units.

I was appalled to learn that so many of our young children were treated in such a manner in our affluent Island. How could we call ourselves a caring community when we are failing to look after the most vulnerable in our society?

I stated at the time that I would come back with a proposition to increase the budget in order that more children could be placed in family-based care, where they could become part of a family unit and learn from that experience.

I will forever remember the comments of a Senator, who gleefully reminded me that any increase would have to come out of the Health budget.

This stupid statement shows how far the States has lost its way in governing our community. As someone who has spent more time in the Renal, Cardiac and Medical departments of the General Hospital over the past year than in the States' Assembly, can I tell members that our medical resources, doctors, nurses and auxiliary workers are over-stretched and under-paid. They cover 24 hours, 7 days a week and their budgets have been cut to make way for the excesses in other parts of the States.

If savings are required, then let us cut back on the army of experts, business consultants and senior Civil Service posts in the Administration sector, where costs have trebled over the past few years.

As an example of States' priorities, examine the comparison between Jersey and London rates for foster parents and tell me if our decision conference exercise is competent.

The savings we can make are considerable in financial terms, but more important is the reward for providing hope and a future to our young people.

We preach about other places in the world: let us turn our attention to our home and open it to those in need.

1. Introduction

In order for Jersey to be able to move from the current position, where over one third of all children and young people in the care of the States of Jersey are living in large residential units, we need to develop and expand our current fostering and adoption services.

The numbers of children in care have not altered significantly over the last 20 or 30 years and it has been proven that it is not realistic to expect ten- or twelve-bedded residential units to provide any sort of reasonable substitute to 'family-based care'.

Foster Care can, and does, provide a sustainable, cost-effective, and family-focused alternative – but it needs to be properly recognised, encouraged, supported and developed in order for it to fully meet its potential and for it to reduce the high numbers in residential care (currently between 30-40 children at any one time).

Being an island community (that has to meet its obligation within a small geographic area with finite resources) means that it is highly unlikely that we will be able to meet every child's needs without at least some form of residential provision – but these should be small, 'family-sized', homes that provide intensive support and assessment as part of a wider process that is trying either: to re-integrate the child or young person back into their own family home; or is supporting the child during a move to a permanent, long-term, alternative with Foster Carers or prospective adopters.

To make this vision a reality will require significant early investment in fostering and adoption services,

with potential savings some years down the road as residential homes reduce their numbers and develop into the smaller, more focused, support services.

2. Background

These services have lacked investment and development for some time. The strong ‘honorary tradition’ in Jersey has meant that people often perceive fostering as the ultimate way of serving your community: by opening your home to children who need your love, care and support. This is undoubtedly true, but we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that we live in a small affluent Island with an extremely high cost of living; where accommodation is limited and very expensive; and where both partners in a relationship often ‘have to work’ in order to pay the weekly bills.

There is a significant difference between ‘paying’ Foster Carers to look after other people’s children and ensuring that sufficient funding is available so that these carers do not have to use their own money for that privilege. Fostering is, and needs to remain, founded on the very best principles of ‘honorary service to the community’, but that service is actually costing our current carers large sums of their own money.

The local ‘boarding out’ rates paid to Foster Carers (to reimburse them for the costs associated with looking after someone else’s child in your own home) have fallen way behind even the national ‘average’, let alone the higher rates paid to carers in comparable ‘high cost of living’ areas like London. There are only limited ‘additional allowances’ available to cover costs like: activity expenses; activity clothing; costs of flights on and off the Island (even before you contemplate going anywhere else); professional fees for doctors, dentists, opticians; and many more.

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>National Minimum Rate</i> £	<i>London Rate</i> £	<i>Current Local Rate</i> £
0-4 years	112.07	131.52	103.81
5-10 years	127.66	149.94	115.64
11-15 years	158.92	186.71	143.50
16 years plus	193.28	226.75	185.85

Table 1: Comparisons of National, London and Jersey Rates.

3. Future investment

To address the current issues, and begin to develop a range of appropriate services, will require a financial commitment over a number of years. Even with access to unlimited funds, we couldn’t change the current system overnight. We need to correct the current situation and ensure that existing carers are properly recognised and recompensed for the service they provide. We need to fund imaginative developments that would enable us to offer ‘enhanced rates’ (of 1.5, 2 or even 3 times the normal boarding-out rate) to those that will consider opening their homes to ‘difficult to place’ children and young people who may have special needs, developmental delay, or emotional and behavioural difficulties and will require additional commitment from their carers to attend many more meetings and appointments with supporting professionals.

Once these changes are underway, we can then seek to recruit a small, highly specialised, group of ‘professional’ carers. These would be individuals and/or couples who could offer specific skills, in defined areas – Emergency Carers, Remand Carers and Therapeutic Carers. We would pay these people a ‘fee’, alongside the normal boarding-out rates, for providing a specific service in support of our most damaged and needy children. We would expect them to be available during the daytime to attend meetings and appointments; to support the child or young person in school, if necessary; to work with other professionals in ensuring that all the child’s needs are addressed and met. They would support those children in their care over short, intensive, periods and would work with the mainstream carers to move children on into more permanent placements, or return them home.

4. The costs

- Paying our existing carers at the ‘National Minimum Rate’ will require an additional £125K per annum;
- paying an additional ‘Jersey’ allowance, that recognises the high local cost of living, will cost £145K per annum;
- funding a range of ‘additional allowances’ will cost £60K per annum;
- the availability of ‘enhanced rates’ for difficult to place children, will cost £150K per annum;
- ‘Professional Carers’ will cost £20K per placement and we are hoping to recruit 12 placements – total £240K;
- additional staffing and resource costs to support all the above initiatives will cost £150K.

The total cost of all these initiatives is £870K, but it is proposed that this investment will be spread over the 3 years of development.

Development	2006 £	2007 £	2008 £	Total £
Staffing	125,000			125,000
Recruitment	10,000			10,000
Training	10,000			10,000
Insurance	5,000			5,000
Minimum Rate	125,000			125,000
Enhanced Rates	75,000	75,000		150,000
Jersey Allowance		75,000	70,000	145,000
Additional Allowances		80,000		80,000
Professional Carers	40,000	120,000	80,000	240,000
Totals:	390,000	330,000	150,000	870,000

Table 2: Summary of Development Costs 2006-2008

5. Conclusion

The costs involved in making these significant changes are high, but this has to be balanced against the known costs of any alternative –

- a single bed in one of our existing residential units costs £48K per annum;
- that same bed, if the unit was to meet developing ‘national standards’, would cost £80K per annum in the future;
- a bed in one of our two smaller residential units currently costs £80K per annum;
- a specialist ‘private agency’ foster placement in the U.K. costs between £60-80K minimum;

- a bed in a specialist residential unit in the U.K. can cost anything from £200K per annum upwards.

These proposals are the most realistic, sustainable, option if the Island is truly committed to moving away from residential care and into a far more focused 'family-based care' model that will better meet the needs of the Island's children well into the future.