

STATES OF JERSEY



DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2015 – 2018 (P.27/2015): FOURTH AMENDMENT (P.27/2015 Amd.(4)) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 27th April 2015
by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Council of Ministers strongly recommends that this Amendment be rejected.

In the Strategic Plan, the Council of Ministers made clear its commitment to the '1001 Critical Days' initiative, stating –

“Our focus must extend beyond the education system to encompass the critical early years of our children’s lives. The ‘1001 Critical Days’ initiative recognises that the early years of life are a crucial period and key to brain development. The way in which we care for and treat children during these formative years shapes their lives. We need to review the services provided by different agencies, particularly for children in vulnerable families, identifying any gaps and finding solutions.”.

The Strategic Plan, as drafted, then identified a Key Area of Focus under 2.4 to –

“Support children and families during critical pre-school years”.

The Council has accepted Amendment 8, which explicitly references 1,001 Days and beyond, which would substitute the original wording under 2.4 to read as follows –

“Support children and families from conception, through the critical pre-school years (as outlined in the 1,001 Days Initiative), and beyond”.

Later in the Strategic Plan, this is reinforced by the commitment to this agenda in 5.1 to –

“Reduce demand on services by investing in early interventions, such as promoting healthier lifestyles and the 1001 Days initiative.”.

The Council of Ministers firmly believes in this agenda, and does not believe that it should be pre-empted by the amendment of Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier. In his Amendment, Deputy Southern refers to a report commissioned by the UBS Optimus Foundation which states –

“The States now have a firm commitment to the ‘First 1001 Days’ agenda and the impending establishment of an Early Years Taskforce is an important development.”

This is correct. The Early Years Taskforce is being established to support the direction provided in the Strategic Plan and to support the development of detailed delivery plans. This allows for the development of co-ordinated, properly researched actions that deliver the best possible return on investment.

This Amendment undermines that Taskforce from the outset by pre-supposing that the 3 specific, detailed actions are the best, most effective options for the future.

No consideration is given as to whether better alternatives may exist. The UBS Optimus report – the key reference point for this Amendment – presents a far greater range of recommendations including, for example: potential extension of children’s centres; a focus on early years literacy; increasing the quality of childcare provision; improved data sharing and communication.

As recently as July 2014, the Assembly noted that the actuarial review of the Social Security Fund identified that the annual cost of benefits and pensions paid out would exceed the contribution income received into the Fund within the next 2 years, and rejected a proposition by the Deputy that the period for which a maternity allowance is payable should be increased from 18 weeks to 26 weeks, at a cost of £1.5 million. This proposal goes even further, by asking the States to commit to extending statutory maternity leave to 26 weeks paid out of Social Security contributions, which would substantially increase the additional cost to the Fund.

With regard to parental leave – which is not a key recommendation of the UBS Optimus report, although it is raised as an issue – the Assembly will recall that the Minister for Social Security has already committed to undertake a review of the periods of statutory maternity and parental leave one year after they are introduced via the Employment (Jersey) Law 2003.

The correct way forward is to give the Early Years Taskforce proper scope to develop an evidence-based plan of action that will deliver the best possible outcomes.

The Council of Ministers strongly recommends that this Amendment be rejected.