

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION
BY DEPUTY M.R. HIGGINS OF ST. HELIER
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 7th FEBRUARY 2022
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 14th FEBRUARY 2022**

Question

“Further to his answer to [Written Question 10/2022](#), will the Minister explain why he and his department (in light of their responsibilities for the wellbeing of children) have not specifically researched child poverty and why they do not lead the Government’s response in this area and coordinate the work of other Government departments and agencies; and furthermore in light of that answer, will the Minister explain how he and his department ensure that the commitment to ‘Putting Children First’ represents more than a strapline and is implemented in practice?”

Answer

As explained previously in my answer to [Written Question 10/2022](#) child poverty is a socioeconomic issue that crosses the boundaries of all Government Departments and work has started on an overarching poverty strategy. Child poverty will never be an issue where it is one Minister’s responsibility, as any child poverty will be linked to a family in poverty.

The UK based Child Poverty Action Group refers to what it sees as the factors driving recent trends in child poverty. It says that child income poverty is rarely the product of any single cause and that “rising living costs, low pay, lack of work, and inadequate social security benefits” combine to leave some families in poverty. I suspect there will be similar causes in Jersey, some of which may be more acute, and while I am committed to improving the lives and education of all children, I do not have the answers and remit to solve any issues of high living costs, low pay, lack of work or inadequate benefits.

The commitment to “Put Children First” as laid out in the Common Strategic Policy is a shared priority across government and many departments have delivered on this priority. Reviewing what the CSP said against what we have delivered, clearly demonstrates that ‘Putting Children First’ has been implemented in practice.

We said we will bring “forward plans to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).” I have just signed the Ministerial decision to lodge the draft law for debate at the end of March.

We said this would include training and guidance. UNCRC training was launched across Government last year.

We said we would bring in legislative developments. The Assembly passed the draft Children and Young People law in the Assembly last week and will soon debate the UNCRC law too.

We said we would extend the legal powers and functions of the Children’s Commissioner and the Care Commission, we are doing this too.

We said we would build capacity for foster carers. We launched the intensive fostering service to achieve this aim.

We said we would develop and work to a common approach to early help across government. The Children and Families Hub and expanded Early Help offer were launched in 2020 during the early days of the pandemic.

We said we would focus on Mental Health and Wellbeing. We have launched the new strategy last week and made numerous other improvements before that such as Kooth online counselling, reduction in waiting times for CAMHS and neuro developmental assessment.

We said we would have an Early Years Policy Development Board. We did, and one outcome already delivered is a 50% increase in the funded hours offered to children.

We said we would work to narrow education attainment gaps. The Independent School Funding Review was the basis of the £11.9 million additional funding per year going into the education system with targeted funds for low prior attainment, English as an additional language and Jersey Premium.

We have also recently published the Inclusion Review which gives more insight in to the challenges and sets out a road map to deliver further improvements for learning, educational outcomes and future prospects for children.

It is quite clear from the above evidenced delivery, much of it during a pandemic, that to 'Put Children First' is much more than a strapline.