

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
BY THE DEPUTY OF ST. OUEN  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2017**

**Question**

With reference to the finding at paragraph 3.19 of the Executive Summary of the Report of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry (R.59/2017) that “*there has been insufficient clarity about assessment or thresholds for intervention with the result that some children may still come into care unnecessarily and others may remain in harmful environments*”, what actions, if any, has the Minister taken following the release of the report to improve the clarity surrounding assessment processes and to establish clear thresholds for intervention? What further actions, if any, will the Minister be taking in these areas and within what timescale?

**Answer**

Final evidence was submitted to the Jersey Care Inquiry in the spring of 2016. The previous interim Director of Children’s Services (J Olsson) gave evidence based on her assessment of the Service up to the point when she left the States of Jersey in August 2015. Ms Olsson was not in a position to comment on the Service beyond that date. Some of the improvements that have taken place over the last two years are summarised in this response.

In August 2016, services working with children in Jersey adopted the *Continuum of Need Guidance* (multi-agency) which replaced the previous *children’s threshold guidance*. This guidance has been endorsed after consultation by the Safeguarding Partnership Board and is the guidance used by all agencies when determining the threshold for levels of intervention, from universal services through to statutory intervention from children’s social work services ie this guidance helps bring a consistency of approach to determining the right level of support for a child and identifies the appropriate supporting agency or organisation.

<https://safeguarding.je/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Continuum-of-Need.pdf>

The framework provides all agencies with clear direction in terms of what to do and how to respond if a family appears to be in need of extra help and support. The guidance gives indicators and examples of levels of need across the continuum.

In relation to thresholds for care proceedings, there is currently a *Pre-proceedings Process* in place (similar to the Public Law Order process in England) which seeks to agree the facts of the case with parents/carers in advance of an application for a care order. This process can minimise delay and reduce drag and trauma of protracted adversarial legal proceedings. Legal planning meetings are in place chaired by the Children’s Social Work Head of Service and attended by staff from children’s social work and the Law Officers’ Department. These meetings take place when the service is considering an application for legal measures (applying for a care order), with the meeting focussing on concerns about a child’s circumstances, thresholds for intervention, legal options and evidence available. The meetings are convened at short notice (often the same day) to ensure there is no delay in applying to the court. The Head of Service is involved to ensure sufficient management oversight of a child’s situation.

These developments have led to improvements in the identification and response to children who may be in need or at risk, as well as closer working relationships with children’s social work and the law officers with increased positive feedback on the quality of evidence presented from the court, partner agencies, advocates and guardians. The issue of appropriate legislation is currently being considered by the

Community and Constitutional Affairs Department and the Law Officers' Department and will be part of the developments that are being discussed and implemented in response to the Care Inquiry Report.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) provides a shared information gathering and analysis and decision-making point for children who require support. The service reprioritised resources earlier this year to meet the increasing demand for children's social work; this was to ensure the circumstances of children who may have been in need or at risk would be assessed by an appropriate professional without delay.

Jersey has not had early help provision until recently. This has had an impact on statutory services and sometimes on children and families themselves as children have come into statutory services who should have had a more preventative approach to the support. This is a growing area in Jersey with an initial pilot led by an early help co-ordinator and support offered in a 'team around the child' model. This has now received increased resources and a number of family support workers have been employed to develop the service. This should be an increasing area of development. The governance of early help support is currently through the Safeguarding Partnership Board.

The Jersey Practice Model is currently in the development and implementation stage. It is a multi-agency framework to work with children who may need support. Agencies have developed and planned the implementation of a model of working to support the child, young person and their family – from universal services through to statutory intervention. Practice guidance and documents have been developed that can be used at any point of intervention throughout the child/young person's involvement with services. The model will support the early intervention of agencies and help to identify the appropriate service for the child and young person whilst driving consistency in the gathering and sharing of information that may be crucial to planning next steps and providing the appropriate intervention to support and empower the family.

A number of permanent staff have been recruited to key positions within children's social work. This has brought stability and experienced management and leadership to the service. This includes a Director of Children's Social Work and Heads of Children's Safeguarding and Looked After Children. Experienced officers are filling the other two Heads of Children's Services roles on an interim basis. These staff have considerable professional experience in senior roles in other jurisdictions. However, recruitment across the full range of professional roles in children's social care remains a significant challenge. The department continues to pursue various approaches to deal with this issue.

The Service has not waited for the Jersey Care Inquiry to report before initiating improvements, although there remains more to do. The Service is reporting to the Improvement Board chaired by the Chief Minister and there is also an Inquiry Response Group that is planning and responding to the recommendations of the Jersey Care Inquiry report.