

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE
MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND HOUSING
ON TUESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 2018**

For too long Jersey has been failing children. One year ago, the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry exposed how, for decades, Jersey failed many of the children and young people who were in our care or otherwise needed our support. The Panel concluded that, in the light of the evidence that they heard, they considered that children could still be still at risk in Jersey.

Under the previous government, work began to implement the Inquiry's recommendations, including recommendation 3, which was that Jersey should establish truly independent inspection arrangements for our children's services.

In June of this year, in conjunction with the Jersey Care Commission, Ofsted were invited to review our services and give us an external assessment of progress. The early feedback from this review made clear that, although it did not identify that any children are still at risk in Jersey, we had not done enough to improve since the Care Inquiry published its report, and that we are still failing children.

Last Thursday, the Jersey Care Commission published a report about that Ofsted Inspection. The report is both challenging and helpful. It describes the significant improvement challenges that we face, while also setting out what it considers the government (not just children's services) needs to do to place children's services on a strong footing into the long term.

I urge all States Members to read this report.

Included in the summary of the inspections findings are:

- That vulnerable children have not been a priority for the States.
- That progress has been too slow.
- That information held about children is not managed effectively to help identify the correct support they require.
- That recruitment and retention of social workers remains a huge challenge, and that children feel the consequences of this.
- That whole-system change is required.

Ofsted made 20 recommendations which fall under the headings of: Corporate Leadership, Children and Young People's Experiences, Infrastructure and Governance, and Operational and Delivery. The Jersey Care Commission made two further recommendations on future arrangements for independent inspections. The Council of Ministers met on Wednesday and agreed to accept all these recommendations.

As well as highlighting failures, Ofsted stated that "there are green shoots" and acknowledged that some progress has been made, including the substantial financial investment made last year to increase the numbers of social work posts.

Since June this year, the government has not sat still waiting for this report to present a way forward, but instead used the early feedback provided by Ofsted to inspire actions over the summer, including the approval of a new Improvement Plan. The Strategic Board, which is co-chaired by

myself and the Chief Minister, will meet later this month to review, challenge and scrutinise progress made in the first three months.

Work is also going on to update and modernise our legislation to ensure it is fit for purpose to meet the needs of children and young people. This will include our corporate parenting statutory framework.

But I recognise that to achieve the whole-system change we need to ensure we always put the well-being of children at the forefront of all we do, we will need to do more than just update our legislation. We will have to win hearts and minds.

That is why we have decided to launch a Pledge to Jersey's Children and Young People, which we are asking Ministers, States Members and the executive leadership of the public service to sign up to.

This Pledge is not a knee-jerk reaction to the report and it is not a substitute for a full corporate parenting strategy and legislation. It is a statement of our commitment to speed up the pace of change for the care and protection of children in Jersey, and an acknowledgement that children are the responsibility of all of us, not just of children's services.

This Island should not and cannot have any more damning reports that say we are failing children.

We must create an environment where all our children and young people in Jersey are safe and can flourish. That means that we must work together – as the public service, government and States Assembly – to develop outstanding services for children and families. Children must be at the heart of everything we do.

These eight Pledges are more than 'nice words' – this is how we are going to hold ourselves to account. It sets a standard which we can hold one another to, to ensure we are delivering on our commitment to put Jersey's children first, irrespective of what our specific role is in the governance of this Island.

Everyone has a role to play in the care and protection of children in this island, from politicians to police, teachers and civil servants, to family, friends and neighbours. Children are everyone's responsibility.

The Jersey Care Commission report stated that we need a "system-wide endeavour to strengthen services for vulnerable children". This pledge is an important statement of long term intent: that children and young people will be uppermost in all our minds as we go about the business of government today, tomorrow and into the future.

I invite members to show that commitment by signing this Pledge today.