



Patron, Lady Dalton

Deputy I Gardiner
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Scrutiny Office
States Greffe
Morier House
St Helier
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3rd December 2021

Dear Deputy Gardiner

PAC Review of Government of Jersey Performance Management

Thank you for your letter dated 5th November 2021 seeking input from the Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT) in relation to the above Public Accounts Committee review.

We found your questions, designed as a guide, very helpful and will therefore answer them directly.

1. Please explain how you work with the Government of Jersey to support your organisation?

Annual Grant and Service Level Agreement - Up until 2022, the JCCT will have received an annual grant together with a Service Level Agreement from the department for Education, now Children, Young People, Education and Skills (CYPES) since its first full year of operation in 1998. This grant has reduced over the years from £122,000 in 1998 to a proposed figure of £103,800 in 2022 (£133,800 in 2021) with our charitable income budgeted at £667,200 in 2022 (£526,244 in 2021).

One key role of our charity is its delivery of specialist support for babies and pre-school aged children with disabilities to enable them to attend mainstream private nurseries through our Special Needs Inclusion Programme. This programme is entirely funded by charitable donations and it is experiencing unprecedented levels of need for its services. Our October's month end accounts are already at 97% of budgeted expenses

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in 2021. There is no Government Support or funding for these services in Jersey for children with disabilities, unlike many other jurisdictions¹.

Commissioned Based Agreement – The JCCT, in partnership with Jersey Youth Service enables access to out of school activities in the community for school aged children with disabilities. Connecting with over 50 organisations that provide play care, activity and social clubs for children, we provide this service on behalf of the Government of Jersey under a commissioned based agreement.

2. Do you feel supported by the Government of Jersey?

The JCCT is a charity that works hard to be that reliable and trusted partner striving for accessible, good quality services for children. We have been hindered in being able to make any plans longer term than one year at a time because, despite the Government moving to a three yearly budgeting process, this has not been applied to us. CYPES have maintained an annual grant making process in the allocation and payment of our grant. We are keen to move towards a commissioned based relationship creating clear expectations and outcomes, focused on meeting the specific and known needs of children and families. We understand that we will be working closely with colleagues in Children, Young People, Education and Skills (CYPES) to achieve this for 2023.

3. What would improve both your relationship, and the level of support you receive?

A commissioned based model would enable us to develop a more mature relationship with government. It would create a clarity for both parties around the services that we could deliver on behalf of government and the funding breakdown to deliver those services. It would create three year funding opportunities that would in turn enable us to plan more successfully to meet the needs of children and families.

We work hard to establish and maintain good relationships with all of our partners. Governmental relationships have been the most challenging to maintain over the past few years because of a high turnover of government staff. We have seen the loss of many experienced, highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals who have left government roles to work in the charitable and private sectors or take early retirement. As a result of losing these relationships, it has been more difficult for us to navigate 'the system' and structure of government, which itself has changed significantly in recent times. We know the difference that working in partnership can have on our collective impact on children and families and we know that our collective potential has not been realised during these past few years.

¹ <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/guide-childcare-children-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-england#02---what-the-law-says>.
<https://www.ogretmenplatform.org/subOutputs/altCikti3.pdf> P.13 outlines the legal right for *all* children in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden to ECEC.

4. Have you noticed any changes to your relationship with the Government of Jersey since the introduction of Target Operating Models and/or the Jersey Performance Framework in 2018?

Please see answer 3. We have found it often challenging to keep up to date with the changes to organisational structure and to the location of governmental colleagues. The loss of many knowledgeable, skilled, respected, experienced and well-qualified individuals, as a result of the changes with the Target Operating Models, has had a tremendous impact on our ability to have our best impact on children and families.

5. If you had any complaints or issues, how did you raise it, what was the outcome, and were you satisfied?

Our preferred mode of dealing with any issues is with discussions, face to face meetings or phone conversations to resolve matters and relationships are key to the success of this. Illustrating points 3 and 4 above we have two examples to demonstrate our perspective.

During the first lockdown, nannies were not included in any Governmental communications or directives. Despite our emails to relevant Ministers and officers explicitly raising our concerns this took over three to four months to resolve. This contributed to some difficult situations for employers and nannies. As the body that accredits qualified nannies, we regularly receive enquiries about employing or being a nanny. As a result of the omission of nannies within any government communications over several months, our charity dealt with over 70 individual, and many complex, enquiries from employers and nannies.

Second example; we raised our concerns over some serious breaches to Covid regulations, jeopardising the safety of children and adults. Despite notifying the relevant authorities, there appeared confusion within Government around which department should be acting on the information. Consequently we saw no action over several days. Due to our effective professional relationship with the Director of Education, we were able to escalate this matter to ensure action was forthcoming, particularly highlighting the value of good relationships.

6. How could that service be improved?

We are not aware of a complaints process within Government departments. It may well be useful for those organisations that either receive a grant or are being commissioned to deliver services by Government receive this as part of their Service Level Agreement. That said, we would always prefer to speak directly to colleagues, to work together to resolve difficulties at the earliest stage.

7. Please can you provide an indication of your level of confidence in the department that supports you, and tell us how that could be improved?

Our confidence is low and this is mainly due to the department experiencing funding cuts from wider Government. This is not a reflection of our confidence in individual officers, but more in the governmental systems, political, financial, procedural and structural, that they operate within.

An example which illustrates this was the recent introduction to 30 free hours of Nursery Education Funding – a decision made by the then Education Minister, against officer recommendation that appeared to be taken in absolute isolation. This decision directly affects our charity increasing the number of children in private settings needing support from our Special Needs Inclusion Programme. It also means that, for example, the known needs of many 2 – 3 year olds living in adverse circumstances, continue to not be addressed by government due to budgetary constraints caused by the NEF extension.

We also still see the ‘use it or lose it’ practice of a system that encourages the quick spending of residual budgets before the year-end or else they are ‘lost’ back to Treasury. The alternative is evident within our charity; every penny is accountably spent, when and where needed.

We see funding cuts directly impact vulnerable children and families that Jersey should be prioritising. We do, however, see some aspects of potential positive change, despite this. There is a developing clarity of focus in services for children and families in the early years and associated mechanisms to drive the change such as the Best Start Partnership, The Education Reform Programme and the Covid Recovery Programme. With 80% of our brain development completing before the age of 3 years, this governmental focus on investing in the early years is crucial. It is where we will see the best return on our investment, but over generations, requiring a long-term political and governmental focus.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fvacher".

Fiona Vacher
Executive Director