



Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Children and Housing

Friday, 22nd May 2020

Panel:

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair)

Deputy R.E. Huelin of St. Peter

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier

Witnesses:

Senator S.Y. Mézec, The Minister for Children and Housing

Mr. M. Rogers, Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills

Ms. S. Devlin, Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills

Mr. M. Owers, Director, Safeguarding and Care

[10:05]

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier (Chair):

Good morning and welcome to the quarterly public hearing of the Minister for Children. We are about to start the questioning. I will just get everyone to briefly introduce themselves, but when people speak for the first time I will get them to introduce themselves again so we are certain as to who they are. I am Deputy Robert Ward and I chair the panel. Would the panel like to start first?

Deputy R.E. Huelin of St. Peter:

Deputy Rowland Huelin.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Deputy Trevor Pointon, whose microphone seems to be off, so I will introduce him for us.

Deputy T. Pointon of St. John:

Deputy of St. John, Trevor Pointon.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I always get that wrong.

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier

Deputy Mike Higgins, St. Helier.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Senator Sam Mézec, Minister for Children.

Director General, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Mark Rogers, Director General for Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Susan Devlin, Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning within C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills).

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

Mark Owers, Director of Safeguarding and Care.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think that is everybody who may speak in the meeting. If we start with the questions, first of all we have heard a lot about the Children and Families Hub that has been started. Minister, can you explain the different types of support that are being offered by the Children and Families Hub?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The Children and Families Hub services are what will be the first point of contact for people who are wanting to get in touch with us. From there they can access various different parts of the service, various different parts of government, and that can be directed to them, depending on what is most appropriate for their circumstance. The largest number of reports that have come through to that hub have resulted in purely words of advice being offered to those who have got in contact. People will get in touch, they might be unsure about something and just want a few words of clarification, which is quite understandable given how much information is being put out to the public and often

how that information will change as we go through different stages of lockdown. But then if some more active support is required, based on what is said to the hub, that can be support that is facilitated through early help and at the other end of the scale it can be the M.A.S.H. (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) process, which you will be familiar with as well. They, of course, also have contact with different agencies that people can be directed to that are able to provide support that those getting in touch might not have been aware of, for example Family Nursing, Brighter Futures. I think the point of it is that it can lead to whatever support is required and it is an easier way to go about securing it rather than having to run around contacting various different helplines or departments that might have existed before.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I have got a question about the communication of those services but I think what I will do first is just ask you a little bit more about the services that are involved in delivering that support. There seems to be quite a wide range. Who are those services and who is responsible for the operational oversight of that wide gamut of services out there?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Well, ministerially it falls within my remit and operationally it will sit in C.Y.P.E.S. but it will tag on to other services as and when they are appropriate, depending on who calls in. If somebody has a health concern, for example, they will have to go through that but the fact that it is now organised and has this point that it can go through just means it is easier for everyone. When a call comes in it can be directed easier to the right place rather than having to send people off, say: "You have called the wrong number" and have no idea what then ends up happening to that person, whether they get the help they need or not.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think that leads us on to the communication, because it is such a wide range. How is the communication of these services to the general public being undertaken? Are you advertising as a generic service and then trying to sort the direction when people contact? Are you happy with that in terms of everybody ringing about everything and then you just allocate them accordingly?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think our preference is that people call us rather than not call us. We would rather take calls that turn out to not require much action or are just a few words of reassurance rather than have people sat at home doing nothing and not getting in contact. When I have spoken publicly about the role of the hub and asking people to get in touch, I have pretty much just been open and say: "If you have any concerns just contact us. The worst thing that can happen is that we will offer a few words and maybe have to signpost you to another agency. That is the worst thing that can happen." We have

attempted insofar as is possible in this very difficult time and when there is, in many respects, an information overload for the public constantly receiving information and ads about this new service or that new support, et cetera, to try to just make it clear: "It is called the Children and Families Hub. If you are a family, if there are children involved and you have got an issue, this is the place you can come to."

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think that leads on to the uptake of the services. What has the uptake been like? I think it was initially quite low, was it not? Has that been improving?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

At the start the take-up was not where we wanted it to be because we want people contacting and asking for help when they need it so we can be reassured that we are providing for the people who we serve. In a sense, that was not surprising, not just because it is a new thing but also because in lockdown people's behaviour is very different and if people are staying at home and, as it was in the early days, very limited in how much time they could spend outside the home, I think that probably mentally has an impact on you as well to stay in the home, for some people possibly anyway. The uptake has increased since then. The notes I have got say that in the last 3 weeks we have been averaging 96.7 contacts a week. Obviously you do not get a .7 in a week. So that is higher than where it was beforehand. I think for the few weeks before that it was 67 contacts a week. So that is going up and that is a good thing. We want that to happen. In terms of a breakdown of why people are contacting, the largest number of those who are contacting are just for general queries, which is fine. The next biggest group is for people who are requesting support, and again that is good because that front door is the right place to then try to facilitate that support where it is appropriate. The next biggest group is for people with safeguarding concerns and again it is important that they get in touch and that a front door can operate to then start the next steps for how we would usually deal with safeguarding concerns.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

This has been brought forward sooner than expected. Do you think you have had to compromise on any aspects of the intended operation of the hub in order to bring it forward sooner?

[10:15]

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I would not look at it that way in that we have had a situation thrust upon our entire community that for most people was unexpected and nobody really knew what impact it was going to have, not just on the wider community but how, as a Government, we provide services. A lot of quick thinking has

had to be done and quick action. How we would have implemented this had the pandemic never occurred would obviously have been a very different process and perhaps things may have been different in their application, but bringing it forward because of the crisis was the right thing to do. I do not feel like there has been any mistakes or things that I am not happy about how it has been delivered in this. I think that given the difficult circumstances, the fact that we were able to expedite this means we are in a very lucky position. Imagine if there had not been any sort of thinking about this service beforehand through the Government Plan. We would not have been able to do this anywhere near as well as we have been able to do. So I think we are in a very lucky position because of the fact it was going to happen at some point in the future. A lot of the thinking had already been done.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

How are you monitoring how effective it is? You would have had a monitoring process over a longer term application of the new service. Is that monitoring process in place and working at the speed at which you have had to implement, which obviously is a lot quicker?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

In terms of the contacts that are coming through to us and then keeping track of what action is taken as a result of that, that system has had to be created to match this new hub and how it is working. We have briefed you with our dashboard I think a few times now, showing what is coming to us and how it is being dealt with. I do not know if Mark Owers wants to add anything to that about how things then get followed up.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Susan Devlin, Group Director. I have senior operational oversight of the hub. We have not got the monitoring perfect yet because obviously we have accelerated things so the system we had hoped to use has not been quite ready so we have had to do a work-around. That mainly is a quantitative monitoring at the moment although we have started to do some qualitative follow-up with the team manager. There have been a few phone calls to children and families, in the main families that we have known, just to talk to them about, in general terms, what their experience has been.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry to interrupt. I know it is difficult in this format, so forgive me. I am trying not to be rude. When you say quantitative and qualitative, just for the people listening, what I see as quantitative is monitoring of the number of calls, the response times, the number of people who are dealt with.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

The qualitative is how well they were dealt with, which would have been an integral part of monitoring of a longer-term system but perhaps that has not happened as much at the moment because of the speed of operation.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Yes. Thank you, Chair. My apologies for that use of jargon. That is far better explained than me and much more succinctly, so thank you for that. That is exactly right. One of the team managers who has picked up the hub and picked up some of the triage has been doing a few follow-up calls to families to get their experiences, to check that they have been satisfied that they got what they were looking for and what they needed. It is a work in progress though and it is by no means perfect, but that has been because of the accelerated pace of the activities that we have been involved in.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

A question just to finish off, which is a really key one, I think. Given the historical context of children's services over a long, long time, how can you reassure people to use this facility that sounds very positive but who may be very wary of government in general and perhaps will need help as well? What are you doing to try to reassure that this new element of government help will be successful for them? It has not been perhaps in the past.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, and the lack of trust in the system is obviously something that I come across fairly often and as constituency representatives I am sure you do from time to time as well. Building up trust in the system will be something that takes a long time and for some people will never be able to be achieved, and sometimes for perfectly understandable reasons. I hope that with the clear focus that there is on this as an issue and as an area it demonstrates that the commitment to putting children first, both on the civil service side and the political side, is genuine and that it comes from a place from having learnt the lessons of the past. The fact that we have not, throughout this crisis, just sat on our hands and thought: "Not important, does not matter, people can just manage by themselves", the fact that we have done the opposite and attempted to do something, even though we are perfectly likely to make mistakes along the way or not do things as well as we might have done with hindsight, I hope over time the fact that that commitment has been made and there are at least some tangible actions that demonstrate that that commitment was genuine, that people will start to feel

that the service is not purely there to punish families for not doing the right thing. It is there to help people. It is there to offer you help and support in the early stages of an issue you might be facing as your friend, as something that is supportive and wants to be there for you rather than the focus purely being at the other end of the scale. It will take a while for that to embed itself in the community's understanding but when that is complete it will be a much more positive thing because of it.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Rowland, did you want to ask a question now?

The Deputy of St. Peter:

It is part of this really. The Chairman described it very well. You are bringing together a gamut of services, I think the way that was put, which is a very complicated thing to do. One thing I would like to understand is do you have the necessary I.T. (information technology) strategy and budget in order to ensure that you are bringing together so that you see as a bigger picture service a single version or a single view of the truth?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Is that one for Susan?

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Thank you, Minister. I think it is a work in progress. We are very keen that we link in with the Mosaic I.T. system that the Children's Service has had in use now for a couple of years. There will be a separate model, if you like, but what we will have is on a permissions basis people will be able, who are involved with children and families, to contribute to that case management and recording system. Our practice model does work with teams around the child, so the team around the child will be able to progress those matters. The lead worker who acts as a co-ordinator will have the responsibility for viewing all the information and making sure that that held is one place. We are not quite there yet but that has been one of the priorities for the development of Mosaic and for the development of our early help services, as we describe them. The collaboration with other third sector and other government bodies has been probably 18 months in the planning, so there has been a lot of collaboration where people are absolutely signed up to this, which I think did help us accelerate things. The Mosaic system will be the basis for the I.T. communication and case recording. There is resource in the Government Plan to make sure that happens. We are pursuing that but, as I say, we are on a work-around just now, which necessitates people speaking to each other and that is happening quite well. There are lots of teams around the child evolving in children and families,

even on a virtual basis, that are still happening just now. There is lots of good work going on and people are sorting out the work-around for that, so it is a work in progress.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

I understand works in progress and I understand work-arounds. However, in the short term work-arounds are dangerous because ultimately you are bringing together data from multiple different sources that will be inconsistent. Inconsistent data in a central location against which you are making decisions ultimately means, through no fault of your own, by the way, you will be given data against which you will make decisions that could be poor decisions, which could affect lives. So my question is, I understand you have to get to the destination but do you clearly have the destination mapped out as far as the I.T. strategy is concerned to ensure that nobody slips through the net and if poor advice is given poor decisions are made because of I.T. systems?

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Minister, shall I take that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Sure. I can follow up though.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Okay, certainly. We do, at the moment, have one vulnerable child's list, which is being checked on a regular basis. It is being tested and verified with all partner agencies. In relation to the road map, the road map is in place and that is being overseen by the Mosaic programme board, which Mark Owers, who is the director, oversees. So we do have quite a good work-around, if I can use that term, which I do not want to use as an undermining, there is a vulnerable children's list and then we do have the longer-term road map in place.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

I understand the work-around and I understand you started with some legacy systems and some silos and I really like where you are going and the direction you are going. I am just concerned that you are not getting the necessary support to ensure that you get the full integrated systems at the end of the day. The difference between ... there is integrated systems and grabbing data from different areas and putting them into a system. That fundamental data management means poor decisions can be made. That is just what I would like to be assured of, that you are getting the support to get to where I know you want to go, because you are quite clear about it. It is to make

sure you are getting the support to get there, because poor decisions affect the lives of children and adults that we serve.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a good point and it is true ultimately for all government departments if we are not working on a sound system that integrates well with other departments and if it is not invested in properly there can be real issues. Those of us who served in the last term in the States Assembly I think were very frustrated at what we saw was the lack of progress on e-gov and everything that goes with that. What I will say is that the Children's Service is in, I would say, an advantageous position in that we had a system before the Mosaic system that was introduced that was not as good as the current system and certainly from my conversations with social workers who worked under the old system, they much prefer the new. That experience of not liking a system and then moving to a good one means that, at least from the perspective of the people we are working with, they will understand the implications of not having a system that is as user friendly and fit for purpose as possible because then they will see the knock-on effect that that has on the children. So at least we are in a department where I think the people working there understand the issue very well and hopefully will not be too scared to communicate that to us if they are seeing issues that need to be resolved.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Minister, I am just putting this into the public forum, my support, but you really have got to get the support to get it absolutely right. That is what I am trying to convey. I understand the importance of it. I will back down on that one and thank you.

[10:30]

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can I just follow through on some of the things? First of all, you have mentioned about the systems you are bringing in but a big concern, which has been illustrated, I think, by Ofsted - I have raised it and other Members have raised it as well - is the quality of your records. We know that a lot of the children's records are inaccurate. There are statements in them that ... I have given the example in the past of a woman who, according to her records, had a child in one particular year and there was no way she had a child, there is no record of it. We have had others where defamatory statements have been made about people. What is being done to upgrade your records, not so much the system, because it is the usual thing, if it is garbage in you get garbage out?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Mike, I think you said something with the microphone muted at the end there, sorry.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I was just saying that basically if your record keeping historically has been bad, what steps are you doing to correct the errors that are in them, otherwise the same mistakes will follow in the future?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Is that one for Mark Owers?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Mark can do it or whoever. I just want an answer.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

Thank you, Deputy. It is recognised that the quality of recording has not been as consistent and as high quality as it should have been in the past. We are in the process of implementing a new quality assurance framework, new practice standards and new audit, so we are able to both dip sample at random as well as able to look on a monthly basis at case records. There is an element now in staff supervision, reflective supervision, where we are looking at the relationship between what social workers think and are seeing and the way in which they are able to write that. We have got new case recording training, which is about treating case records as life stories, as life histories. There has not, in the past, been sufficient consideration of these records being things that people, when they leave care at the age of 18, can read with compassion and with sensitivity. Too often social workers in the past have cut and pasted emails in, possibly cut the wrong emails into the wrong records, and so there is a considerable amount of work as part of our improvement plan going into to ensuring much better quality assurance. We are also developing closer relationships with data management with our colleagues in Health in terms of the way in which subject access reviews work. But also we recognise that there will be legacy issues where young people who are now care leavers and who will be care leavers will see records that are from the past. So we are also putting in place counselling services to be able to support young people to access their records and come to terms with the way in which things might not have been written the way they should have been, but also to enable them to come to terms with the trauma that they have experienced as part of their history of abuse.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Are you going to involve, for example, the parents of the children or the children themselves before they become care leavers? In other words, if records are there, are you going to allow them to see their records periodically so they can point out if there are errors or they disagree fundamentally with something that has been put down?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

If I may, Minister. In terms of, for example, case reviews and conferences within the child protection process and the reviews of children looked after, after each meeting then we have a responsibility to share those minutes. There are minute-takers at each of these meetings and we ask for accuracy checks against those records. Also young people and their parents can ask, with notice, to see their records at any time and, of course, we can then share them with them appropriately with our system. We are not sharing third-party information, which includes not sharing information sometimes with birth families, depending on the status of the children and young people in relation to court orders. But there is no doubt, Deputy, that we need to check more regularly together with children and families and other users and there needs to be more transparency and accountability for the way in which we are writing about these people's lives.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thank you for that. I am just following up on something Susan said earlier and she mentioned about the qualitative sort of checks, which although rudimentary, you have done some. Can you be more open, in one sense, about the nature of the feedback you have? Has it always been favourable, have there been criticisms or what?

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I do not have all the detail for that, Deputy, so apologies for that. It is a starter for 10 that we have had. I think in general terms people have been quite pleased that they have known where to contact and I think that is because of some of the communication work that has been done in particular around social media so people have known where to contact. I think they have found it helpful. They have found it helpful to be able to get advice during this very strange time, I think. Has anybody found it unhelpful? I am not sure. I can try to get some more information on that. It is early stages and it is low numbers just now though.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just following from the Chairman's comments earlier about how it is perceived by users, you all know that we have all experienced - Deputy Carina Alves, myself and others - that there are people who see the Children's Service as the enemy. By the enemy, I mean that they see them as all they want to do is take the children away from their parents. How are you going to try and counteract that perception that people have, a genuine perception? It could be Mark Owers, the Minister or whatever. I would just like to know how you are going to deal with this perception that people have that the service is not there to help. It is more to take their children away.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

One of the difficulties is the fact that there are inevitably in this line of work occasionally cases which are extremely complex and often extremely upsetting where, whether the end result is the right one or not, getting through it and to the end of it will be a traumatic experience that will often leave people not feeling happy or satisfied irrespective of what the outcome is. That is absolutely understandable because of some of the sad reasons there sometimes are for people coming into the service. That is always going to be the case no matter what the quality of the work being done is. I go back to what I said in answer to an earlier question, that with an increased focus now on early help and trying to help families at the earlier stages of issues they may be encountering to try to help them so that those issues do not escalate will hopefully eventually lead to a reduced amount of people who hit those really difficult situations where sometimes drastic action is unfortunately necessary. So I think that by an increased amount of communication between families and the service that is at those earlier stages and is quite clearly intentionally there to help people and hopefully is successful in helping them and avoiding those worst situations, eventually we want to be in a position where out there in the community people are able to say when they are speaking to other families who might have an issue: "I used to have that problem but I just went to the service and they helped me out with it. You should try that as well" and end up being in a situation where people can positively and proactively want to encourage people to engage because of what it is able to offer there. The greater focus that we have on that the more likely we are able to get to that position and end up with the reputation that we want to have. But it is sadly always going to be the case that no matter how hard we try there will sometimes be some really upsetting cases that still come our way, which even when they are dealt with absolutely appropriately and rightly will still leave people feeling very upset. What we have to do in those situations is put the child first and make sure that we meet our obligations to keep children safe and do not ever return to what has happened in the past, where quite clearly that was not the main motivation for some people who made poor decisions that people suffered the consequences from.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Deputy Higgins raised a really good point and I think his mic went a bit mute when he made, which is the old I.T. adage or mantra, garbage in, garbage out. I am sorry to go back a bit but what specific measures or actions or projects do you have to ensure that we go through a process of cleansing and validating all the data before it ultimately gets into this critical data source that is going to be the decision tool for families and children, et cetera, alike in this Island?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that has been touched upon. I do not know if Susan or Mark want to add anything to that.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

It was touched upon but it absolutely should be a focus.

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

Just to add that I think it is good practice when you are working with families that when anyone is contributing to an assessment and bringing an assessment together in the form a report, that at that stage it is good practice to talk through with the child, depending on, of course, their age and stage and level of understanding, and the parents what you are putting in the report. In our templates now for report there is a section that says: "I agree or disagree that this is factually accurate" or "I agree or disagree with the assessment." Factual accuracy is one thing; somebody's professional assessment may be very different from someone else's opinion. It is important to differentiate those 2 bits, but those forms and assessments have a section where we can record quite clearly at the point of completing it whether the family and the child agrees with that. That just builds on the other things that Mark Owers talked about earlier in the hearing about quality assurance, good supervision, good management oversight. These are all the things that will go to ensuring that the quality is good and accurate. That does not mean to say that everyone will always agree with the conclusions and the assessment but it should go quite a distance to ensuring the quality and accuracy of the information.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

That is work in progress. What about the legacy data?

Group Director, Integrated Services and Commissioning, Children, Young People, Education and Skills:

I think as those things, we become aware of them, people need to go through that. They need to check that and if there is information that is inaccurate there needs to be a note inserted in the file as is the data quality in practice, and certainly I know that has happened within the service. It is kept then as part of the record to make sure the correction is clear.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Thank you very much.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

This does link to this because we talk about early intervention and early help, perhaps hopefully not leading to the sort of situations we have had in the past, which I think is good. Have you established a parenting advice line and, if you have, how many calls have you received so far?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

A parent advice line, as in how is that distinct to the Children and Families Hub line?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I thought there was a specific place for parents who may be struggling during the lockdown, an advice line that was quite specific to parenting advice, or is that one part of the family hub?

[10:45]

The Minister for Children and Housing:

There are other agencies out there that provide direct support for families and parents and those can be directed to through the Children and Families Hub but there are, of course, groups that will continue to promote their service independently and accept people going directly to them. I mentioned before Brighter Futures whose work is well known and continues to be delivered obviously in different ways with the physical distancing, et cetera, and Family Nursing as well provides support for parents and pregnant women as well. That continues insofar as it is possible to do so with the restrictions. We can guide people to them but people do still have the option of going directly to them if they hear about that service separately to us.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

We have spent quite a lot of time on that. We will move on. The Deputy of St. John, you have some questions to go through. Thank you.

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes. Trevor Pointon, Deputy of St. John. I have got a series of questions that are looking at staffing in the service and wondered initially what are the current staffing levels within the Children's Service?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have got some numbers in front of me that I can give you. We have 36 social workers, 34 able to work, 8 of them unavailable for visits; 58 per cent of staff are available for short break services; 75 per cent of staff are available in residential and we have 15 fostering households available. There is capacity in there to help more people if that is necessary.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thanks, Minister, for that. You cited that there are a number of people unavailable. For what reasons are those people unavailable?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

There will be a mix of reasons. Does Mark Owers want to elaborate on that?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

Thank you, Minister. They are unavailable because they are shielding at home or have underlying health conditions or one of our team managers is running a children-in-need team from England because of their own circumstances. That is not to say that ... they are unavailable for home visits but they are available for running teams, providing supervision, having daily contacts, reviewing records. So it is just a distinction that we need to have to understand how we are able to deploy staff in the community.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you for that. Moving on, how many people are off sick and how many are off sick as a direct result of the COVID pandemic?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

I do not have the figure to hand but that is because it is very low. While we have people who are more vulnerable, they are available to work and then we have had a constant changing number within residential where people have come into contact with someone who has been symptomatic. They have had their 7 days or their 14 days and then they have rolled back on. So that number changes every 2 weeks but it is very, very low and it is under 10. I can supply the actual figure after the hearing.

The Deputy of St. John:

Is the level of absence through sickness so small that it is not having an effect on the service, or is it having an effect on the service?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

It is having no material effect on the service at all.

The Deputy of St. John:

That is very good to hear. You are able in actual fact to deliver, effectively, a full service. Given the hub, are you able to offer technically more support now than perhaps you would have been doing some months ago when people were perhaps more concerned about their health and took quite a bit of sick? Traditionally, the levels of sickness in organisations can be around 10 per cent. I am just wondering whether in fact the effect of this, the golden lining, is that we are getting a better service as a result of the situation we find ourselves in.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

It is the fact that the service that I took on in November is now closer together and more unified and more willing to work for each other than at any other time before that I have known. Nearly all staff

are prepared to go the extra mile. During this period, because we have developed a new operating model, we have reduced the caseload in the Children's Service from 600 to 450. That number has been fairly static. Now, of course, we are not seeing the number of referrals we would hope because of lockdown and agencies not seeing children and young people in the same way, but while we have a lot of agency staff that have left the Island—about 18 agency staff—we have a smaller headcount at the moment but we have fewer cases and we have more capacity to do direct work than we have had in quite some time. So, the short answer is, yes, Deputy, we are in a better shape than we have been.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I just ask a quick question regarding staffing? That is good, perhaps a sign of the impact it may have, but do you think that as we develop a regime of testing for essential workers it would help you further because you will know where your staff are? It may help with home visits, because there must be some difficulty with home visits. I know Deputy Higgins wanted to ask about how many home visits have been carried out and how they take part, because you would have to have a real protection factor in there for everyone involved, would you not?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

Essentially we are following the British Association of Social Workers home visiting guidelines and I have developed our own bespoke risk assessment matrix, which essentially is the 3, green, red and amber. Greens are those pieces of work we can do remotely, amber are those where we need to have direct contact but direct contact could be a visit in the garden, on the doorstep, in the home, in the park, on the beach, and we assess the extent to which we can do that based on need. So we need to visit them and then on the vertical axis it is risk of infection. We have different ways of understanding risk of infection, so we contact them in advance. We have a set of questions about whether they have been symptomatic in the period before the visit, whether there is anyone shielding in the home because we have a responsibility for both our staff and all people known to the family who we might come into contact with. If we cannot contact them in advance, we then have to treat them as symptomatic and we would then don the whole P.P.E. (personal protective equipment) both together and with our partners such as the police. We then have a red category, which is where we have to do a visit but we cannot do it safely. Of course where there is, for example, a life and death situation where, for example, a known family might be symptomatic but we know the child to be in danger, then of course we would take appropriate steps. But that would be if P.P.E. was not available, for example. It is highly unlikely that that situation would occur but our risk assessment allows for us to take it into account.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you. Sorry, Deputy Pointon, I interrupted you.

The Deputy of St. John:

What is new, Chairman? I am going to ask questions now about the residential homes. What plans do you have in place to maintain staffing levels in the residential homes at this time?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The staffing levels are currently sufficient. There are 7 places that are available in residential homes across 5 homes and there are bank staff that are not currently being used who could be called upon and family support workers can stand in if necessary as well. Apologies, I can hear my phone going off in the background. I will try and ignore it.

The Deputy of St. John:

How often do you review your plans in relation to staff, given the circumstances we have and the changing external circumstances?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

They are constantly being monitored and I am being updated every week about the situation in residential homes, how many places there are and who is able to work them. I think that has been pretty good and, as far as I understand it, the feeling in those residential homes between the young people who are there and the people who are working there is pretty good, by all accounts, at the moment.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

Minister, can I just follow up? In the leadership team in the Children's Service we see a daily update. Before 8.30 a.m. our analyst updates our daily dashboard, which panel members have seen in private, and we have a 9.30 a.m. tasking meeting every single day where we review out-of-hours information from the police, our current headcount and need. That is also then shared with partners and it is being shared with the Children's Commissioner and it is part of Mark Rogers's daily dashboard for understanding the work of the whole directorate.

The Deputy of St. John:

So as staff come and go in these residential homes, what are the arrangements for protecting the children living there in the COVID environment?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

We have restricted movement. We are running the homes on a minimal number of staff possible and keeping those staff to a constant. Of course, they are required to adhere to the social distancing rules themselves and they are being very clear on their own potential symptoms. So we are being

entirely very vigilant around that as well as the young people. We are not letting people into our residential homes in a way that we perhaps used to, including if the police are attending. Our missing children numbers have been dramatically lower during this period than at any other time, and that is because young people in residential children's homes having been staying in and that has been enabling them to build relationships. So there has been a lot less movement across the homes. But, of course, we run short breaks in 2 of our homes, which are slightly different, where we have children and young people with quite high complex needs and health needs, for example having tracheotomies, and of course they need to be changed and you have to get very close to them, at which times the full P.P.E. is available at all times and that is undertaken under the supervision of nurses and our staff. Those children's conditions are constantly reviewed by paediatricians.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you for that, Mark. There used to be a situation in which children living in residential homes might often absent themselves. Certainly in my days as an honorary policeman, one of the tasks would be to perhaps go searching for an individual. What is the level of absconding now in this environment?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

I will just share my screen and let you see for yourself. Can you now see that bar chart?

The Deputy of St. John:

No.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

I think some of you can. So what this shows you is missing from home. This is the weekly update as of 18th May. You will see in April there were only 25 episodes and so far in May there have only been 12. That is 9 young people and for 7 of those it was only missing once and the highest of those young people they have been missing only 5 times in the last 28 days. This is against an average in February ... sorry, the total number in February was 90. So you have got February 90 and you have got April at only 25, so a significant reduction, which has enabled our residential staff to build relationships they could only have dreamt of before COVID. In some respects, with respect to the harm caused by COVID, it is enabling much more boundary setting and relationship building in our residential homes.

[11:00]

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Deputy Pointon, have you finished your section?

The Deputy of St. John:

No, I have got a couple of other things. What are your main areas of concern? We have talked about staffing. Are there other issues that are challenging the residential service at this time?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

There is an overarching concern across the whole Government, which is just about people's wellbeing and the fact that people are sometimes working in different ways. People will be feeling anxious and stressed out about everything. That is across the entire Government but it is something that we as an employer have got to be cognisant of and respect that in our workforce if they come to us and say that they have got particular concerns. But as Mark has just explained, in the context of residential homes, we are paradoxically in quite a good situation there where the working environment probably has some advantages to it because of this and the relationships that are now being built up and the fact that there is capacity there as well probably helps a bit too.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thanks for that, Minister, but it inevitably brings us on to funding. Do you believe that you have sufficient funding to provide the service at this time?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes. We are lucky in that we are in a growth area in that it has been recognised by the Government and the Assembly that putting children first is a strategic priority and so extra funding has begun coming our way and in the Government Plan as it stands is due to continue coming in, so that puts us in an advantageous position. We had, of course, before all of this kicked off, been working hard on some of the growth areas. We were looking at an extra service. The problem, though, is that that has been disrupted because of this and some of the energy that would have been going on changing the things that we were really keen to get moving on has obviously been disrupted. I am not clear exactly at this point of the overall scale of that disruption and to when certain things might end up being delayed because of that. It is the case, though, that we are forecasting at this point £800,000 operational underspend but £1.5 million slippage on growth initiatives. So we are not worried at this point about going over budget or anything like that but just having to have a year where we are not doing what we planned we were going to do means the picture is different. At some point there will have to be a discussion about how those projects we were wanting to get on with get put back on track, how long that is going to take, if there needs to be reviews about how some of that is done. I think ultimately that will end up coming to the next stage of the Government Plan, which is going to be an interesting experience, I will call it, given the optimism there was at the passing of the first part of it and now having had everyone's work disrupted. So we are not in a

position of worrying about overspending but the general disruption is obviously something to be concerned about but was always going to be inevitable, unfortunately.

The Deputy of St. John:

Thank you for that. Thank you very much indeed. I will pass you over to Deputy Mike Higgins.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Before we do, can I ask Mark Owers, you mentioned about in extreme cases in terms of home visits where you would have to don full P.P.E. or involve the police. How many times have you had to do that to date?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

I would have to give you a detailed breakdown because the way in which we consider what is donning full P.P.E. and visiting with the police versus wearing just the gloves and the face mask or not wearing an apron is difficult. But in terms of a child protection visit with the police, again those numbers would be lower than 5. In terms of it being a full kit and with the police for a child protection visit that is a very low number.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thank you. Moving on, I want to look at the regulation of children's residential homes. As you are aware, Jersey Cares have raised a number of concerns, especially when we were looking at the emergency legislation. Can you tell me, first of all, what recent contact you have had with Jersey Cares and have you also discussed these issues?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Me, personally, I do not think I have spoken directly to Jersey Cares for a few weeks now but while this was a heated issue I was in correspondence with the head of Jersey Cares and I know my officers have been in contact with them as well. I know Mark Owers spoke to Kylie Glover from Jersey Cares as part of this to offer some assurances about what our perspective was on the changes to the regulations and what actions we would undertake if we ever hit a worst case scenario.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Have you managed to allay her concerns and the concerns of the others on that particular body?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

She will have to speak for herself there. When I have spoken to her, she has had a perspective that I respect and think is ... she has made a challenge that I have told her is, from my perspective, a welcome challenge because it forces people to think very carefully about these issues and not just

brush things under the carpet or not even think about them and just agree without considering the wider implications. So I have said that I consider that challenge to be helpful and useful in forcing people to think about this through a children's rights perspective, but we have made clear that the provisions that now exist, which did not exist before, are not anything that we have any desire or even anticipation that we may have to invoke. They were passed as part of the earlier tranches of emergency legislation that exist purely for a worst case scenario, and when I say worst case scenario I mean society really struggling to function because so many people have got ill. It looks like that we are not even going to get close to that situation now because of the fact that the virus is not spreading throughout the community like it was for a brief period in Jersey and the success we have had there. So, ultimately, she will have to speak for herself about whether she is content with that but I have welcomed her challenge on that and ultimately there is much I agree with her in it.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

For the avoidance of doubt, can you confirm whether or not you have had to use any of the emergency measures that were discussed and caused concern?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not think we have, no, and we are a long way from that, which is a good thing and I hope we do not get anywhere near.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Moving on, one of the things that was a concern - in fact I must say I share the concern - is how you are ensuring the children's residential homes are effectively regulated. As I understand it, you are not doing any visits to the residential homes, or is that a mistaken belief?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The Care Commission have suspended their physical inspections until further notice. They have regular contact with the residential children's homes. I do not know if Mark wants to add anything to that, but that is obviously not ideal. Having the Care Commission and them being able to conduct physical inspections is an important thing that we would want to have them feel they can recommence as soon as possible, but they are still in contact though.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

It is the fact that it is the Care Commission that regulates us and they have chosen to stop visiting, so part of that question is for them. But within that we continue to fulfil our regulatory requirements. We have to notify them of any incidences of children going missing, of any children being ill and staffing levels coming to a critical level, for example, and all of those notifications come via me and ultimately are overseen by Mark Rogers, and that continues. We continue to get regular updates

and correspondence from the chief inspector and the inspection team in relation to their plans, which homes are not being visited and why. They are continuing to have regular contact with the registered managers, and sometimes that is daily and certainly it is weekly. Fortunately, the independent person who we essentially contract with has continued to do remote visits, so he is not physically visiting but he is holding registered managers and staff to account and when young people are in the home he is also speaking to them remotely to gather views. He is continuing to do his monthly reports, which come to our residential service managers, the registered manager and a copy goes to the Care Commission.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

We are looking at a possibility of 2 years before the Care Commission does a physical visit; is that correct?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

The current power that was agreed by Assembly Members is up until September and, of course, they are reviewing that on a daily and a weekly and a monthly basis. They are, of course, routine inspections that they have suspended but if, of course, they needed to an inspection for an emergency reason I am sure, without taking this away from them, they are able to visit with P.P.E. I cannot foresee a situation where they would not visit for 2 years but that is, of course, a matter for them.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

In terms of using remote meetings and inspections, in a sense, you will accept that it is no substitute for an actual physical one. I must say that this is something that does concern me because when we get into situations like this a lot of the oversight, the regulation just does not exist in an effective form. We are having a videoconference now; I can see you face to face; I cannot see what is going on behind the scenes. I do not know when they are talking to a child that there is not someone over their shoulder looking. When do you think we will get to a point where we can have some physical actual visits, bearing in mind obviously the need for P.P.E.?

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

That is as much driven by Health as it is by anybody. Of course, we are going through the stages of our exit strategy as the Government and I would hope that we would start to see some of that as soon as possible. But there is no doubt that lots of things are hidden by our current circumstances and we need to work hard to be as transparent as we possibly can without putting staff, young people and their families at risk of a disease that ultimately could kill them, so it is a very fine balancing act. That is not to say that we are not vigilant to that and, of course, where we can have transparency we should have.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thank you. I just want to ask one final question and that is: what support are you offering to young people currently who are in residential homes and how are they maintaining contact with their social worker and key support services? Whoever wants to take that up.

Director, Safeguarding and Care:

As I have already said in answer to another question, interestingly young people are having more interaction and are developing better relationships with the staff in the homes than they have enjoyed previously in the main. They are receiving a higher level of support by definition of having stronger, more trusted relationships. Interestingly, feedback from our staff is that during the lockdown period where they have been allowed out for 2 hours, for example, the children and young people who usually would not be seen dead with their residential childcare officer have happily gone for a bike ride along St. Aubin's Bay, for example. The social workers have been able to do doorstep visits and garden visits and, when appropriate, have been able to enter the property. We have also been able to continue to facilitate social distancing physical contacts with their birth families, obviously following the risk assessment that I described earlier. Where they have needed to have access to health professionals and other staff, then that again has been risk assessed and facilitated accordingly. I am not in any receipt of information whereby a young person in our residential care has been denied a service that they have needed as a result of COVID.

[11:15]

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thank you.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I think, Deputy Huelin, you have got the first of the general questions that we were talking about. Do you want to lead with that one?

The Deputy of St. Peter:

This is very general. I believe the first annual children's day is due to be celebrated in early July. What form will that now take, if any?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Good question and who knows at this point, because there have been the beginnings of preparation for having something occur on that day. I think we were looking at one aspect would have been a family fun day in one of the parks here, but unfortunately anything that would have been in the form

of a gathering or people coming together in that way has to be reviewed on the basis of the health advice. I am not particularly optimistic that we will be in a position at the beginning of July to be recommencing that sort of public activity, which is a great shame not just for this but for lots of other things as well. So the intention is still to mark it in some sort of way but that may mean rather than having the sort of fun aspects of it, more focus on perhaps some online learning and stuff, like we know the schools and Education are doing at the moment. So it may simply be that we have to incorporate something through there but still with the intention of having it marked and understood and involved with children in that way because we do want it to be a big deal in Jersey in the coming years.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could I just follow up on a related matter, and that is the idea of the memorial that was planned, which was highly controversial. Can you tell us the current status of that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We had been calling for people to come and offer design concepts to us and that had begun before the pandemic kicked off and since that has obviously disrupted lots of things, we have extended that to enable more opportunities for people to contribute their ideas. The intention beforehand was to have some sort of public opportunity for people to come and see concepts, comment on them and for us to take feedback on that in recognition of the fact that it is controversial. I think that lots of this proposal has been misunderstood and that is why I am keen for there to be some form of public engagement so that it can be, I think, better understood what it means and what format it may take. That is obviously difficult to do where people are restricted in where they can go, so there will have to be a think about how that can be facilitated but beyond that I am not quite able to say just yet.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

But you are still planning on going ahead with a memorial, are you?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is the intention. It is still out open to tender. When the picture is clearer of what that will look like we will engage the public then, but the Government committed to accepting that legacy recommendation of the care inquiry, a citizens panel was convened to make proposals regarding that and I personally think it would be wrong to U-turn on that. Certainly at this point I think what is right to do is to have some form of public engagement for people to understand what it could look like and contribute ideas to it. I think that is a better way of achieving some sort of reconciliation, much better than simply ploughing ahead without considering people's opinions or U-turning without considering the people on the other side of the argument.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thank you.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Minister, given by your own words, and I think it is acknowledged, it is controversial and there is some very strong opposition to it, for very valid reasons, from people who are quite close, would it not just make sense, given we have so many other issues going on at the moment, which are really fundamental to the future of our Island and the livelihoods of many, many people, that we just do not give it oxygen for the time being, take it away, defer it and maybe review it in a year or so's time and focus on other really very, very important issues that we are facing?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It is still theoretically possible that that could happen but the process was open before the pandemic hit us. It has a course to still go through. It is not detracting from any efforts anywhere else at this point. We will see what comes of it and if a future decision needs to be made about how to deal with it best in the circumstance then we will get to that, but that decision does not need to be made at this point.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Why do you not just take the leadership and say: "We are going to defer it. We understand it is controversial. We want to focus all energies elsewhere on important matters at the moment" and then bring it back when the new normal returns?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Because I have just said that I do not think it is detracting from any efforts on anything anywhere and I have also said that the next stage of this is not set in stone at this point. So it may well come to a point where it is dealt with differently but we are not there yet and it is not detracting from anyone's energy. There was a process beforehand. It will require us to sit down and have a think at some point but we are not there yet. There will be more information when we are at that point, but I do not feel that a change is necessary beyond what we have already changed, which is extending the period for tenders.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

I have got a few questions that sort of link into that about the impact of COVID-19 on policy priorities. I will start with a couple of specifics and then perhaps if you want to answer those and if you want to add any general impacts. Are you progressing as planned bringing forward the legislation for indirect incorporation of the U.N.C.R.C. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The broad answer to all questions about the policy priorities for this year is that the officer support for developing that, which had been planned ... we had our children's legislation transformation programme that had our phases and our deadlines. All of the people that were doing the work for that have been redirected to the response to the pandemic. They are extremely busy and I, unfortunately, have very little time with them now because of all the hard work they are doing as part of this response. So it is the case that no work is being done on those policy projects that we were planning to work on had we been in normal times. That has meant that there is inevitably going to be delay to some of these things. In terms of achieving these outcomes, U.N.C.R.C. incorporation, amendments to the Children Law, et cetera, they are non-negotiable as far as I am concerned in that they continue to be priorities and will be delivered. I think it is in June that we are due, as the Council of Ministers, to have an update on the picture of where we are and we will have to make some decisions about how things are timetabled going on after this disruption. But at the moment no work is being done on those things, which is a very upsetting situation to be in, unfortunately.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So we can assume that what was referred to as omnibus amendments to the Children Law in 2020 will not be happening this year?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

At this point I am not prepared to rule it out but I will acknowledge that it may well be unlikely. It may well be pushed back a few months but it remains high up on my list of priorities because there are changes to that legislation that do need to be made. It is just not a simple thing to do, unfortunately. It requires time and attention, which has not been able to be devoted to it because of the pandemic. But I will endeavour to update the panel as soon as possible on that because you will probably have some important scrutiny work you want to do on that when it is clearer. I will make sure you are high up on the list of people to be informed when the timetable is a bit clearer.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Good. Thanks for that. We have got a few minutes left. Trevor, do you want to ask the next question, the next general one, so we move on a little? I do not know if we have lost Deputy Pointon, so I will ask the question. When are you expecting to publish the findings of your joint survey with the Children's Commissioner and how are you intending to respond to those findings?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The survey is currently being looked at by our officers and is already being considered as part of the development of the children's rights impact assessment on eventually reopening the schools. The Children's Commissioner herself has done some analysis of it with her team and has sent that on to

us. I personally have not yet had a proper opportunity to go through the analysis that we have been shown so at this point I am not 100 per cent sure when the results will be made public. I do know that an invitation has hopefully gone out already to yourselves as a panel for us to meet Ministers, the Children's Commissioner and yourselves to go through some of that, but at this point I am not sure exactly when the moment is that it will all be made public.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Before we finish, there is, I think, a very important question to ask about any legislative developments in respect to COVID-19. Are they being adequately addressed to ensure children's rights are taken into account? I ask that because I know that as Scrutiny panels we are trying to pick up pieces of legislation across panels, because many of the emergency things are crossing panels, and we are having quite a job to do that. How is that in terms of children's rights?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We have not had the U.N.C.R.C. incorporation procedures implemented in Jersey yet, so there is not a compulsory requirement to produce children's rights impact assessments yet as there will be in the future, which will make that process an inbuilt thing as just something we do. It has been the case, and I think it is right to admit this, that some of the legislation development that has happened in the last couple of months has been clumsy at times where some of the communication has not been as good as it ought to have been, which has meant that there have been issues that have potentially been overlooked or missed first time round, which has made correcting some of it more difficult than we would have liked it to have been. There have also been instances where there has just been honest disagreement about the children's rights aspects. Often in legal arguments on human rights there is not necessarily a right answer and a wrong answer. There is legal argument one way or the other and arguments about proportionality in particular can be difficult to settle. So it is becoming part of the culture in the Government that children's rights are at the forefront of our mind, but in an unprecedented situation like we are in some of the development of that has been clumsy and there are definitely lessons to learn for the future. But when we get that compulsory requirement for children's rights impact assessment it will end up just being something we do and that process will hopefully be much improved.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

How are you ensuring that as we recover from this ... I will give you a worst case scenario and perhaps you could deal with that, Minister. If we recover from this with austerity or even austerity on steroids, it is a well known fact that the poorest, and particularly children of the poorest, are damaged most by that sort of policy. How are you going to try to ensure that that does not happen and that young people and children are protected as we come out of this pandemic?

[11:30]

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think the philosophy that I have taken since becoming Minister has been that doing the right thing for children is what you must do and cost or affordability are something you think of completely separately to that. I do not like the argument that has existed as a fundamental part of political discourse for the last decade that constant efficiency savings or austerity is somehow a path towards prosperity, because I think that the economic evidence is that that is a complete load of nonsense and what improves your society is investment. You have just got to be clever about how you invest in it and how you then benefit from the returns you get from it. What we have demonstrated in Children's Services is that if you invest in particular things like the help, like the intensive fostering service that we are developing, which requires upfront money to do that, eventually it just provides natural savings because you are providing better support for people in the early days and you will then avoid some of the more expensive scenarios that you can encounter where you have to send people off Island or take harsher safeguarding measures because you did not deal with something earlier. My political view is that austerity is a false economy and when we resume discussions about recovery and about the next stage of the Government Plan, I have said, both publicly and privately ... I think the word I have used is "fools". I think we would be fools if we attempted to do what we have done in the past and expect a different outcome. Our commitment to maintaining investments in Children's Services cannot be shaken at all by this crisis. If anything, it demonstrates that it is even more important.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you very much. I am conscious of time. Is there anything that anyone else on the panel wants to ask before we finish? I will take silence as a no. Is there anything, Minister, that you want to add or any of your officers want to add or ask of the panel before we finish?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

No, just to thank you for the work that you are doing. I know there is a lot of pressure when there is relatively short notice for legislation that has to be scrutinised and I think that your panel in particular is regarded as having done a very good job on that. The place you are coming from in your commitment and understanding to children's rights leads to very welcome contributions, so thank you for everything that you are doing as well.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you. I want to embarrass our Scrutiny Officers and say a public thank you to Andy and Monique who work so hard behind the scenes, that you do not see and absolutely do that type of

work. Thank you to them. Thank you, Deputy Huelin. With that, I will call the hearing to an end and say thank you very much.

[11:33]