

Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining its actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.



Gailina Liew, Director, Jersey Policy Forum

Poverty denies children their rights

Exactly one year ago in this space, I invited readers to consider the issue of social inclusion and growing evidence of poverty and inequality in Jersey. In conversation with Deborah McMillan, Jersey's first Children's Commissioner, I was interested in understanding whether a 'children's rights approach' might be useful to tackle the tough issues of poverty and inequality. Deborah's most recent experience in Bridgend, Wales, and then in the Welsh Government to address children's poverty, well-being and bridge with social care, is confident that widespread positive change for children and young people in Jersey can be achieved if the issues can first be more clearly and broadly understood. I invited Deborah to share her perspective on her role and her early observations.

Article by Deborah McMillan, Children's Commissioner for Jersey

I feel immensely honoured and privileged on my appointment as the first Children's Commissioner for Jersey. The role was created in response to the first recommendation of the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry (IJCI): "We recommend that a Commissioner

for Children be appointed to ensure independent oversight of the interests of children and young people in Jersey." A new statutory framework will provide me with the statutory powers to ensure that I have the critically important independent oversight that was

recommended by the Care Inquiry. I will act 'without fear or favour' of government, children's agencies, or the voluntary and private sectors.

The appointment of a Children's Commissioner is more than just a 'tick-box' exercise. The 'completion' of this IJCI recommendation is not in itself an end-point, but the start of a journey to drive improvement and transformation. The eight recommendations in the IJCI all represent key building blocks to improving the lives of children and young people, not just those in our care, but for all children and young people in Jersey.

The role of the Children's Commissioner will be explicitly focused on the promotion and protection of children's rights and will be underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and a key aspect of this role is to hold government to account on its commitments under the UNCRC. The UNCRC is an agreement written by the member countries of the United Nations. It lists over 40 rights that belong to children and young people and is part of international law. The role of the Children's Commissioner abides by the Paris Principles – international standards which frame and guide the work of human rights institutions. I will also be encouraging and supporting all schools in Jersey to become Rights Respecting Schools.

As Jersey's champion and advocate of children and young people, I will be listening and representing their views, in order to make a real difference on something that matters to us all – the futures of all children, young people and their families within our community. More specifically, I will:

- support children and young people to find out about children's rights;
- listen to children and young people to find out what's important to them;
- advise children, young people and those who care for them if they feel they've got nowhere else to go with their problems;
- influence government and other organisations who say they're going

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to make a difference to children's lives, making sure they keep their promises to children and young people;

- speak up for children and young people on important issues.

Children's rights broadly fall under the categories of provision, protection and participation. We must provide those things that children need, for example health, education, and a decent standard of living. We must protect children from harm and protect their right to privacy. We must ensure that children have a voice, and a right to express their opinion and be heard.

So, what have I learned so far? The Jersey Household Income Distribution Survey 2014/15 stated that 29% of children were living in relative low-income households. The 2017 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey reported that 1 in 10 households were in severe material deprivation. 23% of households with children said that they have gone without new clothing for their child over the last year. For the 2017/18 academic year, 3,500 pupils were eligible for the Jersey Pupil Premium – a funding stream to support children living in low income households. These statistics are indicative of families in Jersey 'just about managing.'

What have I heard? I have prioritised listening to children, young people and those that care for them. I have met with over 80 stakeholders and visited half of Jersey's schools. I hear of children living in substandard unqualified housing, with children using a bucket for a toilet, and children arriving at school with rat and flea bites. I have seen environmental health photographs of over-crowded accommodation with children sleeping

on mattresses on the floor, and rooms black with mould. I hear of children who never go outside to play, and some who have never been to the beach. I hear of children who are not going to see a doctor or dentist when they need to because they are worried about the cost. What strikes me is the hidden levels of poverty in the island. What is clear, is that poverty denies children their rights.

We need to shine a light on poverty in Jersey and make it safe to have the conversations that will allow us all to understand the true picture of our families 'just about managing.' Only then can we start to think about how we reframe the narrative on poverty to move away from placing the responsibility on individuals, to understanding and changing the way in which we all work collectively, joining up our thinking and action, to tackle poverty in Jersey.

The Jersey Policy Forum is interested in hearing your views and perspectives. Please share them by email to contact@jerseypolicyforum.org.