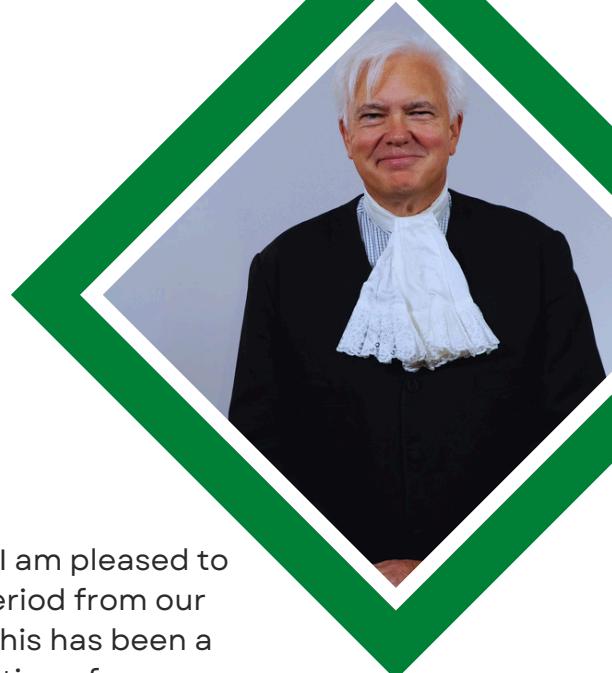




2024 - 25 ANNUAL REPORT

Chair's Foreword



As Chair of the Jersey Family Justice Council (JFJC), I am pleased to present our inaugural annual report, covering the period from our establishment in June 2024 through to June 2025. This has been a foundational year for the JFJC, marked by the formation of our structure, the identification of key priorities, and the creation of working groups to address critical issues within Jersey's family justice system.

Inspired by the Family Justice Council of England and Wales, the JFJC was created to foster collaboration among stakeholders in the family justice sector, including the judiciary, legal professionals, government ministers, children's services, and experts in child safeguarding and mental health. Our aim is to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families involved in family proceedings, ensuring that their voices are heard and that processes are trauma-informed, efficient, and effective.

In our first year, we held four formal plenary meetings, established working groups on key themes, and made progress toward data protection registration, online presence, and administrative support. Working groups met as and when required between formal plenary sessions. We have also engaged with external experts and begun exploring innovative approaches to improving family justice such as Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) and enhanced use of pre-proceedings protocols and new practice directions.

While challenges remain—such as resource constraints and the need for sustainable funding for services like child contact centres—we are committed to driving positive change. I extend my thanks to all Council members and Emily - who has acted as Council secretary and mailbox - for their support and hard work.

**Mr Robert MacRae KC
Bailiff and Chair
Jersey Family Justice Council**
October 2025



About the Jersey Family Justice Council

Establishment and Purpose

The JFJC was established in June 2024 to provide a collaborative forum for improving the family justice system in Jersey. Modelled on an amalgamation of the Family Justice Council and Family Justice Board in England and Wales, the Council has gathered together stakeholders working across the operation and delivery of family justice through the courts in Jersey and focuses on public and private family law proceedings, child safeguarding, and related matters.

Our agreed core objectives include:

- Promoting the welfare of children and families in legal proceedings.
- Facilitating the exchange of information and best practices among stakeholders.
- Identifying and addressing systemic issues, such as delays in proceedings, over-reliance on experts, and trauma-informed practices.

Ensuring where possible and achievable, that the voices of children, young people, and parents are central to decision-making within the framework that the law places on the judiciary

Terms of Reference

Adopted at our inaugural meeting on 20 June 2024, the Terms of Reference outline our role in advising on reforms, monitoring performance, and commissioning research. Key elements include:

- Reviewing family justice processes to reduce delays and improve efficiency.
- Developing guidance on topics like expert witnesses, secure accommodation, and domestic abuse.
- Collaborating with government and external bodies to implement recommendations, such as those from the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) report.

The Terms of Reference are available on the JFJC page of the courts.je website.

Membership

The Council comprises representatives from the judiciary, legal profession, government, children's services, health, and safeguarding sectors.

Membership is for a three-year term, renewable once.

Key members include:

- **Chair:** Robert MacRae, Bailiff (RMR)
- **Deputy Chair:** Family Judge Samantha McFadzean (SMcF)
- **Ministers:** Deputy Mary Le Hegarat (Justice and Home Affairs) (MLH) and Deputy Richard Vibert (Children and Families) (RV)
- **Judicial and Legal:** Commissioner Caroline Wright (CW), Advocate Rebecca Morley-Kirk (Judicial Greffier) (RMK), Jurat Alison Opfermann (AO), Advocate Nina Benest (NB), Advocate Barbara Corbett (BC), Advocate Sarah Brace (SB), Advocate Lauren Glynn (LG) and Family Court manager, Ms Louise Bond (LB)
- **Children's Services and Health:** Ms Donna Marriott (Director, CYPES) (DM), Dr Darren Bowring (CAMHS) (DB), Dr Jamie Carter (interim Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children) (JC)
- **JFCAS:** Ms Eleanor Green (JFCAS Manager) (EG)
- **Independent expert:** Dr Peter Green (Child Safeguarding) (PG)
- **Children's Commissioner:** Dr Carmel Corrigan (CC)
- **Probation:** Mr Mike Cutland (Chief Probation Officer) (MC)
- **Safeguarding Partnership:** Mr David Goosey (Independent Chair and Scrutineer for Safeguarding Partnership Jersey) (DG)
- **Jersey Cares:** Mrs Susie Richardson (SR)

Apologies and substitutions are noted in meeting minutes to ensure broad representation.

A Code of Practice for members, emphasising independence, confidentiality, and collaboration, was finalised in March 2025. This Code of practice provides for members to declare any conflicts of interest on any matters which the JFJC considers.

Governance and Support

- **Meetings:** Quarterly, held in the Old Library at the Royal Court (or alternatives as needed).
- **Steering Committee:** Formed in 2024, comprising RMR, SMcF, EG, MC, DM, NB and BC, to oversee agenda setting and progress.
- **Administrative Support:** Funded by the Bailiff's Chambers for the first year; it is intended that a 0.5 FTE role will be recruited in due course. The members of the JFJC extend their thanks to Emily for her help to date.
- **Data Protection:** Registration completed in early 2025, enabling feedback collection from children and parents.
- **Online Presence:** A dedicated page on courts.je launched in December 2024, featuring Terms of Reference, Code of Practice, and contact details (JFJC@courts.je).
- **Press Release:** Issued in December 2024 to announce the Council's formation and objectives.

Activities and Achievements in 2024-2025

Meetings Overview

The Council held four meetings during the reporting period:

1. **20 June 2024:** Inaugural meeting—adopted Terms of Reference, confirmed membership, and established working groups on the voices of children and parents, training, and VAWG recommendations.
2. **30 September 2024:** Approved prior minutes, updated working groups to include a working group on experts and pre proceedings, selected key objectives (eg trauma-informed proceedings, expert use, FDAC), and discussed secure accommodation and VAWG progress.
3. **16 December 2024:** Reviewed working group updates, advanced FDAC research, discussed VAWG review Terms of Reference, and addressed funding for the Centrepoint contact centre.
4. **20 March 2025:** Finalised Code of Practice, updated FDAC pilot potential, and progressed practice directions on pre-proceedings and experts.

All minutes were approved at subsequent meetings, with action points tracked and summarised.

Key Initiatives and Progress

Working Groups

Five working groups were established to drive focused work:

1. Voice of the Child (EG, CC, DB, with input from Jersey Youth Service and Children in Care Council):

- Met multiple times to develop ethical frameworks for gathering feedback from children aged 13+ in private and public proceedings.
- Collaborated with JFCAS on pilot projects, including semi-structured interviews and trauma-informed training via CAMHS.
- Explored links with UK bodies like the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB); a presentation is planned for a future meeting.
- Gathered research on trauma-informed courts in other jurisdictions and began mapping children's experiences (eg number of retellings of stories, meetings with judges).
- Achievement: Terms of Reference adopted; pilot strategy in development by December 2024.

2. Voice of the Parent (NB, EG):

- Developed a questionnaire to capture feedback on understanding processes and support during proceedings.
- Considered focus groups and QR code/website access for responses, ensuring trauma-informed and safe participation.
- Identified themes: lack of process understanding and support gaps in private/public law.
- Achievement: Questionnaire finalised in December 2024; rollout of the questionnaire subsequently promulgated via eg Court, JFCAS and advocates.

3. **Training** (CW, SMcF, DM, with LG joining in 2025):

- Circulated publications from the UK Family Justice Council on topics like allegations of alienating behaviour and best practice in relation to judiciary meeting with children.
- Organised training on domestic abuse by Professor Jo Delahunty KC (November 2024), attended by legal professionals and judiciary.
- Explored training on pre-proceedings, expert use, supervision orders, and Article 29 reports.
- Achievement: Identified as a standing agenda item; shared UK guidance on supervision orders for local adaptation.

4. **Pre-Proceedings and Use of Experts** (SB, CW, SMcF, NB, PN):

- Reviewed over-reliance on experts, the costs incurred and delay occasioned by unnecessary use of experts, quality of reports, and re-focus on use of potential local resources/social worker assessments.
- Discussed agreed expert lists, prohibiting self-promotion in reports, and ISW parent assessments.
- Review of pre-proceedings work by Children's Social Care and consideration of implementation of new practice directions to cover pre-proceedings, public law children work and use of experts in public law children work (DM,CW, NB).
- Achievement: Draft practice directions developed for public (CW/NB) and private (SMcF) law; presented for Council discussion in March 2025. Practice Direction restricting use of experts in private family proceedings across the Family Division published in July 2025 (SMcF).

5. **Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC)** (Led by SMcF, CW, SB, DM, EG):

- Held meetings with and consulted Lord Justice Peter Jackson, and HHJ Andrew Berkley and others, on the experience of FDAC courts in England and Wales.
- Attended Manchester FDAC (SMcF and EG) and planned FDAC visit (RMR, DM, RV and CW). Meetings with the Centre for Justice Innovation to discuss practical implementation of pilot, and training for all relevant potential professional participants.
- Explored pilot feasibility, noting cost savings and child-focused benefits.
- Achievement: Tentative agreement for a Jersey pilot; ongoing research despite resource constraints.

Other Achievements

- **VAWG Report Recommendations:** It was agreed that consideration of the implementation of VAWG report recommendations would be standing agenda item. The review of the Family Court would be initiated by MLH. Draft Terms of Reference for an independent review of the family courts circulated (MLH); feedback provided by Council. Review to overlap with criminal justice review, targeting completion by mid-2026.
- **Children's Social Care Residential Improvement Plan:** Became a standing agenda item. DM updated on reform programme, including site review and alternatives to secure orders. Discussions on practice directions ongoing.
- **Centrepoint Contact Centre:** Secured two-year government funding (announced March 2025). Explored further funding via Jersey Community Foundation and Attorney General.
- **Judicial Communication:** Guidance shared on writing letters to children post-proceedings; positive feedback noted.
- **Research and Cases:** Shared England and Wales Family Court Annual Report 2024; included standing item for recent cases of interest, filtered via Training Working Group.

Challenges

- Resource limitations across public services impact progress and the Council members are acutely aware that innovative costs savings, expediting delivery to avoid delay for families and children and improving efficiency are required to enable reform in key areas, like being able to offer FDAC/ a problem solving court. Fiscal constraints also impact accommodation reforms.
- Delays in data protection registration affected feedback collection but this has now been achieved.
- Funding uncertainties for services like Centrepoint required advocacy and innovation but was achieved because of the importance to the island's children of having this facility funded, at least for two years.

Future Plans for 2025-2026

- Finalise and publish practice directions on pre-proceedings, experts (in public law proceedings), and secure accommodation.
- Draft practice direction on managing domestic abuse on the court in conjunction with the review of the Family Court due to be commissioned by MLH.
- Launch child feedback pilots; present FJYPB insights.
- Advance FDAC pilot, including FDAC visit by RMR, DM, RV and further meetings Centre for Justice Innovation (CW and SMCF) and training once pilot is agreed.
- SMCF and CW invited to participate in FDAC Judicial Forum offered in England and Wales.
- SMCF to attend Judicial College to undergo continuation of public law training.
- Commence and complete VAWG-mandated family courts review and consider implementation of any recommendations.
- Produce Jersey-specific guidelines on supervision orders and court proceedings involving allegations of domestic abuse.
- Continue to update online presence with newsletters and upload publications by English and Welsh equivalent body where they are relevant or inform Jersey practice or law.
- Schedule further meetings: 15 September and 8 December 2025 fixed. 2026 dates to be agreed
- Appoint or co-opt additional members or experts as needed.
- Consider facilitating public attendance at one meeting annually.

Financial Summary

Funding for administrative support and initial activities (eg FJYPB presentation) provided by the Bailiff's Chambers. No dedicated budget yet; future needs (eg training, reviews) to be discussed with government partners.



More Information



JFJC@courts.je



www.courts.je/jersey-family-justice-council/