

Statement of Intent

2014 - 2018

Statement of Intent for the Office of the Children's Commissioner



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Foreword from the Children's Commissioner

What kind of country do we want for our children? If children are our future, what does that future look like?

Most children in our country have wonderful childhoods, with parents who love them and most of their needs and wants met. However, too many do not. New Zealand has unacceptable rates of child abuse, neglect and poverty. This is both wrong, and a significant cost to society.

It could be different. It's been different before. However, if we're serious about making New Zealand a great place to be a child, we need to make some choices. These choices include how much we're prepared to let services share information about adults to keep children safe; agreeing an acceptable standard of living for all children and putting standards on rental housing.

For contentious choices like these, policy is likely to follow public demand, so the Office of the Children's Commissioner will continue to lead and inform public debate on these issues.

We'll work with central and local government, and the private and not-for-profit sectors to improve outcomes for children living in poverty.

We will continue to support Child, Youth and Family to improve outcomes for the vulnerable children they are responsible for. Our new way of monitoring Child, Youth and Family is the key to delivering on this goal. The framework takes a broader and more systematic approach, and has a strong focus on capturing the voices of children and young people.

If we want New Zealand to be a great place to be a child there is a role for all of us - political leaders, public servants, social services, health and education professionals, business people and philanthropists.

We are more effective though if we partner with others who share our goals. My team will seek every opportunity we can to work with others to improve outcomes for children.



Russell Wills MB, ChB, Dip Obst, DCH, FRACP, MPH
Children's Commissioner

Hei whakariterite to
tau kotahi

Whakatokia he mara
kai

Hei whakariterite mo
te ngahuru tau

Whakatokia he rakau

Hei whakariterite me
nga rau kei tua

Poipoia nga tamariki

To plan for a year,
plant a garden

To plan for a decade,
plant trees

To plan for a future,
nurture children

Who we are

The Children's Commissioner is an Independent Crown entity established under the Children's Commissioner Act 2003. The Act provides the Commissioner with a primary role to advocate for New Zealand children aged under 18 years.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to ensure that *"New Zealand is a place where all children thrive"*.

WHAT WE DO

Our main functions include:

- monitoring and assessing the actions of Child, Youth and Family (CYF) and other agencies under the provisions of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 (CYP&F Act)
- monitoring residences as a National Preventive Mechanism in respect of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)
- systemic advocacy and investigation of issues compromising the interests, rights and wellbeing of children and young people
- raising awareness and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and advancing and monitoring the application of UNCROC by the State.

The Treaty of Waitangi is central to the work of the Office and honouring the Treaty is one of the core values that drive our work.

The Office has established a range of core services and activities that fulfill our statutory requirements. These core services provide a foundation for our strategic work aimed at improving the wellbeing of children. They include:

- maintaining a 'Child Rights and Advice Line'
- investigating individual complaints
- ensuring the voices of children and young people are included in our work and informs the advice we provide
- providing child-centred advice to Select Committees, Ministers, Crown entities and local and non-government organisations
- raising awareness of children's interests among New Zealanders generally.

The Children's Commissioner is supported by a staff of 13.2FTE and has an annual budget of \$2.157 million.

Giving all New Zealand children the opportunity to thrive

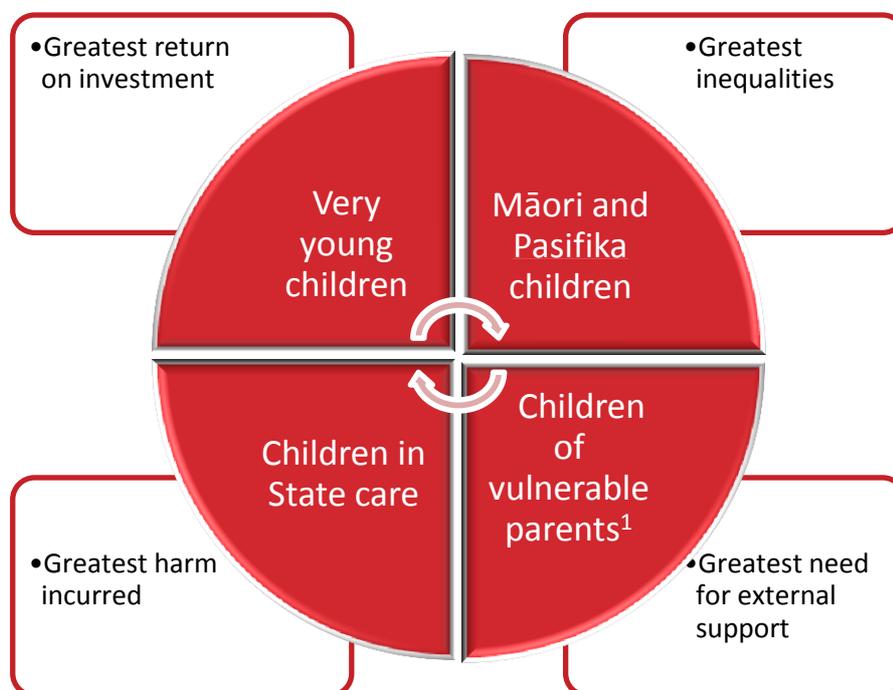
There are just over one million children and young people in New Zealand - 26 percent of the population (2013 Census). The majority of New Zealand children and their families enjoy a high quality of life and experience good outcomes. However, a significant proportion of our children need extra support and services so they can thrive.

We want to help these children to get the extra support they need. This means keeping more children safe from abuse, violence and neglect and ensuring children have access to adequate resources to meet their basic needs. This will also support improved health,

education and productivity for these children.

While there are children across all ethnic groups who are achieving excellent outcomes and thriving, we know that there is significant over-representation of Māori and Pasifika children among those experiencing poor outcomes. Extra attention is needed so Māori and Pasifika achieve at the same level as other New Zealand children.

Our understanding of children's issues and outcomes in New Zealand and where greatest attention and resources should be invested to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children is shown in the following diagram.



¹

¹ Vulnerable parents include those who are transient, in prison, have mental illnesses or addictions, intellectual disability, domestic violence, and teenagers and single parents with poor family supports.

Our priorities

Our goal is to ensure that New Zealand's most vulnerable children and young people receive the services and supports they need to thrive. I have set the following strategic priorities for the remainder of my term:

- ensuring that children and young people in the care of CYF are receiving quality services that improve their outcomes and wellbeing
- advocating for the needs of vulnerable children to ensure they get the services, supports and resources they need to be kept safe and thrive.

Through these two priority areas we will remain focused on advocating and monitoring access to resources, and the health, safety, education outcomes of these two groups of children.

My Monitoring and Investigations Team works to improve outcomes for children in CYF care by monitoring the practice of CYF social workers and managers and recommending improvements. While our approach to date has led to significant improvements in practice within sites and residences, outcomes for children and young people in care could be improved.

Our goal must be for children and young people to leave the care and protection or youth justice system in better shape than when they entered it. To that end we have worked with CYF to develop a new approach to our monitoring activity. This new approach will be much more powerful in helping social workers and

their leaders to lift practice and improve outcomes for these children.

I will also be looking at how well CYF works with education, health and social service providers to ensure

these children are given the hand up that they need to achieve the best outcomes possible.

Across all of our functions we strive to provide quality, timely advice that is fit for purpose and is valued by stakeholders.

My Advocacy Team is focused on improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people, particularly the youngest and those living in poverty and at risk of harm. We do this by working alongside and partnering with individuals and organisations that share these goals including core public service agencies, service providers, local government, business and philanthropists. This partnership approach supports organisations to maximize their investments in vulnerable children and families so that they have the greatest possible impact.

Our work programme also supports the Government's Better Public Service targets to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, and we will be actively involved in the Children's Action Plan and supporting the implementation of Children's Teams.

HOW WE TRACK THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

For a small agency we primarily measure our impact according to the extent our advice is valued and acted upon. Measures include the numbers of our recommendations that are agreed and implemented and the extent to which our advice resulted in changes to policy, legislation or service delivery.

Our performance measurement framework is illustrated on page. Our Statement of Performance Expectations provides more detail on how we measure our performance and track our impacts and outcomes.

We are focused on ensuring the quality of our advice and engagement, and aim to measure our impact using stakeholder feedback and measures such as requests

By vulnerable we mean children and young people receiving statutory services from Child Youth and Family and the White Paper's definition of those children who "are at significant risk of harm to their wellbeing now and into the future as a consequence of the environment in which they are being raised..."

for advice and input into the work of other agencies.

In addition to measuring our own outputs and impacts, we will also monitor the

wider environment of children’s progress. This will include child-poverty related indicators as well as Better Public Services results where applicable.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

Our Vision	New Zealand is a place where all children thrive	
Outcomes	Children and young people in the care of Child, Youth & Family and those vulnerable to poor outcomes get the services, supports and resources they need to be kept safe and thrive	
	 WIDE RANGE OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES <i>(including cross Government and Non-government activity on the Better Public Service targets for vulnerable children and the Children’s Action Plan)</i>	
		
	Monitoring & Investigations	Individual and Systemic Advocacy
Our Impacts	Our recommendations for improving CYF systems and services are agreed and implemented	Advice is valued and sought by stakeholders and is used to shape policy and legislation for vulnerable children
Our Outputs	CYF sites and residences are visited and assessed and quality reports with robust findings and recommendations are provided to CYF for action	Provision of child-focused policy advice or submissions to select committees, Government departments and Ministers Child Poverty Monitor produced
What We Do	Monitor the quality of services provided to children under the CYP&F Act	Advocate for and advise on the rights and wellbeing of vulnerable children
Our Priorities	Children and Young People receiving statutory care services	Vulnerable children at risk of poor outcomes
How we Work	<i>We provide authoritative, independent advice on the wellbeing of children and young people</i>	

Our business strategy

The direction for the Office is to continue our shift from providing comment on policy and legislation when it has been developed, to one where we actively build relationships and work collaboratively with decision makers to ensure that children's issues are prioritized in the early stages of policy, legislation and service delivery development. We are explicitly adopting a high leverage model that relies on us being effective in influencing the priorities and direction of larger organisations. To do this we must be seen as highly professional and credible by our stakeholders.

Central to our approach is to be the Centre of Excellence in engaging effectively with children and young people and to provide a platform for young people to have their say. Over the next four years and subject to resourcing, the Office is looking to develop a comprehensive network and online medium to connect with a diverse

range of children and young people, with a particular focus on those in the care and protection system and those children in vulnerable communities or circumstances.

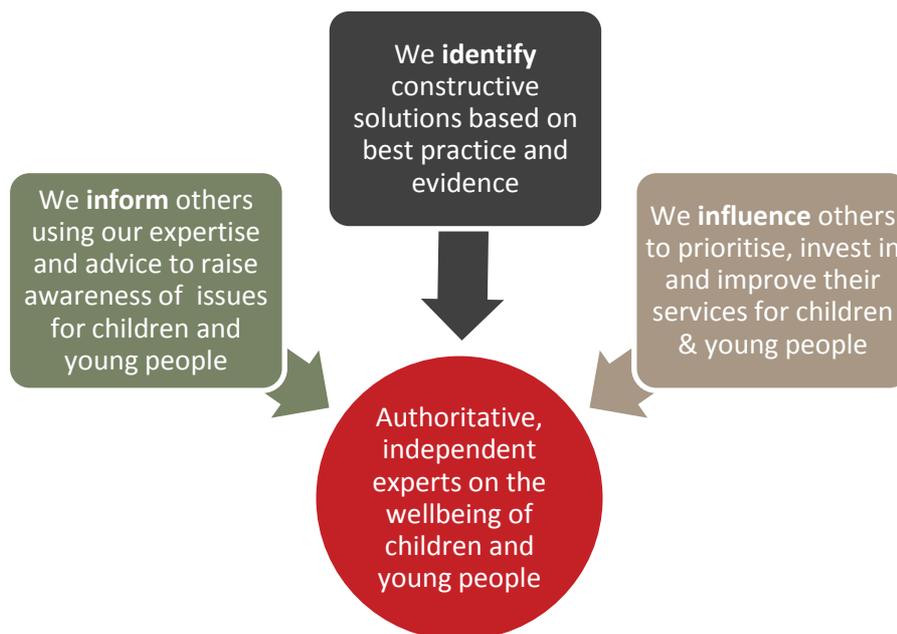
Our role is to support other agencies to develop child-centred policy advice as well as advise them on how they can engage effectively with children and families.

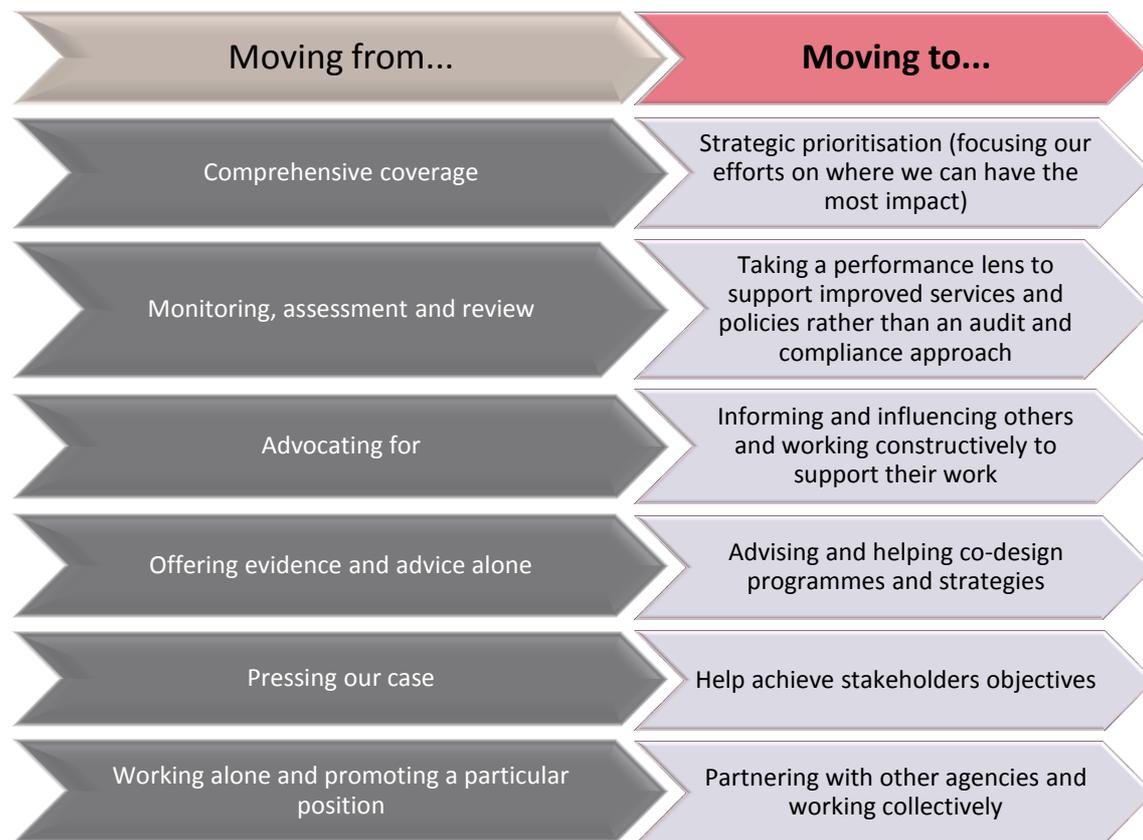
We will continue to invest in our staff and in building our expertise and knowledge base, so that we are the authoritative, independent expert on issues facing children and young people.

The following diagrams illustrate our core approach and the key strategic shifts we are making and will continue to make over the next four years so that we can influence the services and policies for children in the care system and those who are at risk of poorer outcomes.

Our vision includes supporting government agencies and other organisations by connecting them with children and young people through our network so that policies and services are informed by their views and needs.

Given our small size, we need to work strategically and influence others to deliver the services and supports children need to thrive.





This shift in how we work will assist us to deliver on our strategic goals in specific ways. For example focusing on children in care and on vulnerable children requires us to prioritise how we use our resources and ensuring our work programme and activities support improvements for these children.

MONITORING ACTIVITY

In 2013 my Monitoring and Investigations Team worked with CYF staff to produce a new monitoring framework that clearly describes what good practice in residences and sites looks like and the steps to get there. Rather than taking a site by site “inspectorate” or “audit” approach to our monitoring activity we have shifted our focus to looking at the performance of CYF in achieving outcomes for children in the system.

We will now look across a range of sites to provide a view about how well the system is achieving outcomes for children and young people. We will be better placed to identify exemplary performers,

share that practice and monitor how change occurs.

Part of our new approach is to examine the performance of several sites on the same dimensions (a “thematic” approach). A key theme over the next four years will be to focus on supporting Child, Youth and Family to achieve its vision of delivering a modernised and re-focused statutory social work service. Within the complex and changing environment created by the Children’s Action Plan, Children’s Teams and the CYF Workload Review, we will look at how well sites and residences are positioned to provide a quality social work service to the most vulnerable children and young people.

Also central to our new approach is the move away from a primary focus on the views and perceptions of adults to having children and young people’s voices at the centre of our monitoring. We have developed a more robust and structured process for gathering their feedback across all aspects of their involvement with child youth and family.

To increase the transparency of the Office's monitoring activity we will produce aggregate reports that will be released publicly. The reports will describe the themes we examined over the year, what we found at an aggregate level, showcase innovative and good practice that achieves good outcomes for the children in care, and outline the improvements we expect to see as a result of our recommendations.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITY

Our advocacy activity has been shifting from an approach that attempted to give comprehensive coverage across several issues to focus on vulnerable children. We will focus on the issues that make the biggest difference for these children, including their safety and access to adequate resources.

Rather than trying to undertake large initiatives and research projects ourselves, we are looking to partner with others with similar goals. An example of this is our work with JR McKenzie Trust and Otago University to produce an annual Child Poverty Monitor. By combining our various skills and resources, together we have produced a credible and accessible source of information on the status and trends related to child poverty.

Working more strategically means we are using our expertise to raise awareness of issues for children and young people, we are providing quality advice and identifying solutions based on best practice and evidence, and influencing how other organisations prioritise, invest and deliver services for vulnerable children and young people.

UNCROC ACTIVITY

Our work to raise awareness and understanding of the UNCROC has shifted from holding training workshops in local communities to focusing on advancing and monitoring the application of UNCROC by the State. To this end, we are working closely with the lead agency, the Ministry of Social Development, to

support the development and progress of an UNCROC work programme.

We support Non-Government Organisations advocating for advances in UNCROC to be included in this process, and also support them in their external monitoring of UNCROC progress.

HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Our Statement of Performance Expectations sets out our outputs and the impact we expect from our activities and can be accessed at [Corporate documents » Office of the Children's Commissioner](#).

Our impacts include robust and credible assessments of Child, Youth and Family performance so that they act on our advice and implement our recommendations. This outcome will be assessed through the percentage of our recommendations being responded to by Child, Youth and Family.

Across our advocacy activity we aim to improve child wellbeing and outcomes for vulnerable children through influencing others. To be successful we must ensure we provide credible advice that is valued by our stakeholders. We will assess our impact through the percentage of stakeholders that rate their satisfaction with our advice as satisfied or very satisfied.

Organisational health

The Office is based in Wellington with 13 staff and the Children's Commissioner, and 2 staff based in Auckland.

CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Like many agencies we are faced with ongoing cost pressures. To support the implementation of the new monitoring framework in 2014/15 we will need to further draw down against reserves. The Office will need to seek further baseline funding from 2015/16 to maintain the delivery of our core functions to existing levels, as all potential cost saving options have been put into effect.

There is a potential flow on impact of reduced financial reserves on the capacity of staff, particularly our monitoring team, to deliver on our new framework and respond effectively to a number of significant changes in the care and protection environment. Specifically, the Office needs to be involved and contributing to further work on the Children's Action Plan, the rollout of further Children's Teams and the CYF workload and residence reviews.

We will monitor our financial situation closely and will need to adjust the scale and scope of our activities depending on the level of funding available from 2015/16 and out years.

NEW COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Our objective is to ensure that the Office is respected as a credible, well-informed and considered voice for children, and as an active monitor and accurate assessor of the quality of services provided to children under the CYP&F Act.

To achieve this objective we ensure that staff have high levels of expertise and are skilled in a broad range of competencies, with an emphasis on expertise in children's issues, social work practice, relationship management and machinery of government. To support our performance management approach we

have developed a new competency framework for the Office that guides our recruitment and the development of our team.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES SUPPORT THE OFFICE

Good employer practices and Equal Opportunities statement

The Office encourages the achievement of a work-life balance and supports staff through flexible working arrangements. It takes a flexible approach to part-time work.

Training and development

Staff have access to mentoring/coaching and professional development. The Office has a dedicated staff training budget. Performance management processes are embedded and linked to the deliverables expected of the Office.

Organisational design

The Children's Commissioner is a 'corporation sole' and is 'the board' for the purposes of parts of the Children's Commissioner Act 2003. The Commissioner is part-time and is supported by a full-time Deputy Commissioner who oversees all aspects of the Office's operations. Certain functions are contracted out in full, or in part, such as information technology, web design, and financial accounting services.

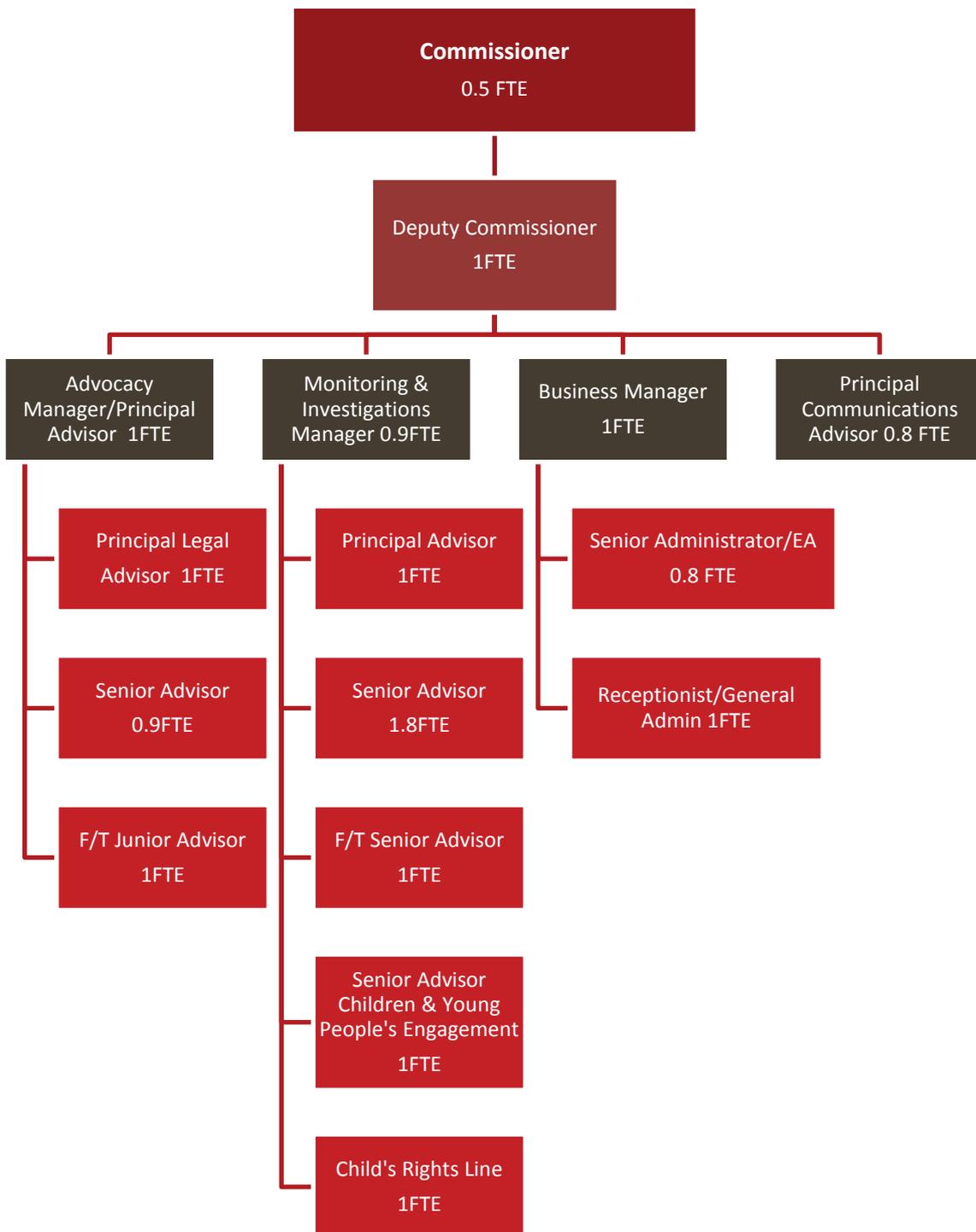
Systems

Information technology is a critical component in supporting the Office's strategy. All components of information technology are outsourced. This arrangement allows the Office to enhance its business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements, and to maximise the effectiveness of the Office's expenditure.

Accommodation

The Office co-locates with the Families Commission to ensure value for money.

Organisational structure



Risk Management

The major risks to which we are exposed and our responses to these are:

Risk type	In response, our office will:
<p><i>Financial:</i> the Office will overspend in the 2014/15 financial year in order to deliver on our commitment to implement our new Monitoring framework for CYF. This overspend equates to the salary for 1 senior FTE and associated overheads. The Office will be under considerable financial pressure in the 2015/16 year and beyond. The Office will require further baseline funding from 2015/16 to be able to deliver all of its statutory functions to a satisfactory level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to explore opportunities to save on overheads with the Families Commission including accommodation and further back office costs and apply any savings to offset the predicted overspend in 2014/15. • Apply for a baseline funding increase in the 2015/16 budget process or identify opportunities for a funding transfer at October Baseline Update (OBU) or March Baseline Update (MBU)
<p><i>Staff capacity and capability:</i> There is a risk that with current funding pressures that we do not have sufficient capacity in the office to deliver on all of our functions to the level of quality required. Without investment in training, key capabilities may not be available to deliver on the Commissioner's work, including the successful implementation of the new monitoring framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above and ensure that any savings found in 2014/15 will be applied to address training and skill development necessary to deliver on our work and to support the capability development of our monitoring staff. • Recruitment, induction, performance management and retention strategies are in place to ensure that the required skills are developed and maintained
<p><i>Representation:</i> The risk that the Office does not remain the authoritative advocate of the interests, needs and rights of children. Our capacity limits our ability to engage with stakeholders and maintain high levels of sector engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a review of the way in which the office includes the voice of young people in its work so that we are more effective within our current resources. • Keep informed of national and international good practice and emerging issues
<p><i>Credibility:</i> The risk that the Office loses the confidence of key stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the quality of its investigation and reporting capability, and of its advice and advocacy and ensure statutory obligations are met • Ensure that its position and advice on issues is evidence-based by using reliable information and robust research • Maintain relationships with leaders in civil society, local and central government, business and philanthropy. • Maintain absolute political non-partiality
<p><i>Results focus:</i> The risk that the Office could lose focus on its key outcomes and results and on business priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and maintain results-focused planning systems within the office • Manage external pressures and demands on the work agenda of the office

Consultation and reporting to the responsible Minister

The Children's Commissioner has agreed a Statement of Performance Expectations with the responsible Minister, setting out details on the way in which the Commissioner will continue to consult and report on the Government's purchase interests in the Office.

Reporting will include:

- regular meetings with the responsible Minister and briefings on issues relating to the interests, rights and well-being of children
- regular reports on output delivery, key developments and financial reports.

The Commissioner will continue to work with the Minister on a "no surprises" basis and raise issues at the earliest opportunity rather than waiting for formal reporting to be done. I will continue to brief the Minister on significant publications, speeches and releases.

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