



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMYOI Cookham Wood  
Sir Evelyn Road  
Rochester  
Kent  
ME1 3LU

**MoJ ref:** SUB95036

11 March 2022

Dear Chair,

**HMYOI COOKHAM WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 31 AUGUST 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 August 2021. My predecessor Alex Chalk visited the establishment and met the Governor on 19 August 2021, which I hope the staff found helpful. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work, particularly as you continued to be short of Board members. I was pleased to note no rise in self-harm rates or deaths in custody at HMYOI Cookham Wood.

I acknowledge the Board's comments about the secure mental health service provision for children. I would like to reassure you that the efficacy of this provision is a key concern for NHS England and NHS Improvement. On average ten children transfer to secure hospital under the Mental Health Act (MHA) 1983 Part III from the Children and Young People Secure Estate (CYPSE) each year. Most transfers are facilitated in a timely manner, however, it is recognised that there are a small number of cases where the child either has a complicated presentation that requires an extended assessment period, the right type of bed is not available, or where the child does not fit the criteria for admission and/or detention. Over the last few years, a small group of children have been identified as extremely 'high harm, high risk, high vulnerability' who often create or contribute to systems failures. To better understand these children and their needs, NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned a clinical review of these cases to support future policy and commissioning. NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Youth Custody Service (YCS) part of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) have received the final report and will be reviewing the evidence and recommendations to evaluate next steps.

Often there are beds available in the Children and Young People Mental Health Medium Secure Network, however, these need to be appropriate for the needs of the child; such variables include access to extra care areas, gender specific services or services for children and young people with a learning disability. Funding has been made available for environmental changes to ensure the right provision is available to meet the needs of these children who require assessment and treatment under the MHA 1983. A revised procedure for the transfer or remission of children under the MHA 1983 Parts II and III for the CYPSE was published in November 2021 and this should improve the process further (recently updated in December 2021).

Locally, the Phoenix Unit at HMYOI Cookham Wood reopened in December 2021 which has formed a new Integrated Care Team (with oversight at a senior manager level) and it will continue to deliver an outreach service for children with complex needs.

I note the Board has raised for the second year running concerns about the large proportion of boys on remand at HMYOI Cookham Wood. Remands make up over a third of the children and young people in custody. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in 2019 recommended that the Government examines the scale and appropriateness of youth custodial remand. Subsequently, officials in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) conducted a review of Custodial Remand for Children and published the report on 26 January 2022, which can be accessed here [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-custodial-remand-for-children](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-custodial-remand-for-children). It is evident that more can be done where appropriate to limit instances where a child is remanded to a secure setting. The report identifies issues and steps to be taken across government and within the sector to cumulatively improve current practice and enhance scrutiny and oversight of the remand process. Recognising that any operational improvements will take time and implemented gradually, we have also taken steps in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to tighten further the tests courts must satisfy to remand a child to custody. The new measures, when in force, will also require justified reasons for remand, including a new statutory obligation for courts to indicate they have considered the welfare of the child and that the option of remand to local authority care has been carefully thought in the first instance.

An update to last year, HM Courts and Tribunal Service is working to hear cases involving children as quickly as possible. All Crown and Magistrates' Courts continue to review youth trials that are older than six months, which usually involves listing before a Judge for a formal review to determine whether the case can be brought forward. Cases involving youth defendants are being prioritised in all regions, and youth custody cases are currently being listed within the published custody time limits.

Undoubtedly this has been a very difficult reporting period and it was encouraging to receive your comments that HMYOI Cookham Wood staff were fair and adopted generally good relationships with the boys in their care. I am grateful to the Board for highlighting in this report some good initiatives and examples of staff commitment and compassion.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to the other issues raised in your report for the YCS are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMYOI Cookham Wood.

Yours ever,



**VICTORIA ATKINS MP**

## **HMYOI COOKHAM WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 31 AUGUST 2021**

### **HMPPS YCS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Covid-19 Recovery**

We have moved away from compartmentalising children for infection control purposes. Landing communities have resumed and there are mixed small groups set up for educational and religious purposes.

A new Rewarding Positive Behaviour policy was launched in December 2021 and this feeds into the wider behaviour management which is under review. HMYOI Cookham Wood's business plan highlights the importance of creating separate communities larger than those established during the initial period of the pandemic. The Framework for Integrated Care Secure Stairs will feature heavily in the 2022/23 business plan incorporating fundamental aspects, tools and a shift in culture (to a more child focus approach).

#### **Sentence and Transfer Planning**

As soon as a young person enters the Youth Secure Estate and it is known they will turn 18 years old during their current custodial period, informal discussions begin between the Young Offender Institution (YOI) and the Adult Estate about their potential transition (including setting key target dates for action). The level of planning intensifies when the child is aged 17 years and six months. If children enter the Youth Secure Estate after this point, transition planning will commence upon arrival and timescales will be adjusted to ensure there is sufficient time to allow for effective planning and sharing of key information, regardless of how close the young person is to turning 18.

This multi-disciplinary process involves all key stakeholders involved in a young person's care and sentence planning. This approach ensures all key milestones and targets are considered and allows for effective sequencing of any needed assessments and interventions. The Transitions Team created to support a young person also consists of members from the Adult Estate site the young person will be moving too, allowing ample opportunity for crucial conversations to be made around continuation of needed services and support already in place that may need to continue.

A young person's transition journey is overseen by a centralised team in the YCS who are responsible for the oversight and transition of all young people who will turn 18 whilst in custody. They will coordinate effective engagement and communication between the YCS, Adult Estate and key stakeholders and professionals on a strategic and case level basis as well as sharing information, planning and support to enable effective risk management plans to be developed prior to transition. They will also have oversight of and coordination of all transitions of critical, high profile cases including those under the Terrorism Act. Lastly, they will agree for any young person over the age of 18 to remain in the Youth Secure Estate alongside children under 18.

Effective and safe transitions practice is delivered with a joint commitment between the Under-18 and Adult Estate; it is fundamental to have an agreed consistent approach. The Transitions Policy Framework Team is working jointly with the Transitions Project Team and the HMPPS Under 25s Team to establish a clearer pathway.

The aim of the project is to:

- Allow effective sentence planning and to sequence interventions across the whole sentence, not at individual custodial points in the journey;
- Reduce the risks associated with ineffective and unplanned transition of young people;
- Reduce and manage any anxiety for young people in the transition process;
- Establish a process that enables the principles of constructive resettlement and rehabilitative culture to be a central thread;
- Standardise the operational process for a young person remanded or sentenced and who will turn 18 years old whilst in custody; and
- Achieve greater consistency and transparency for the planning and placement of young people into the Adult or Women's Estate.

The Policy Framework and the Transitions Guidance will now come together as a joint product for a single clearance pathway through the HMPPS Operational Policy Sub-Board. Following alignment of the draft policy framework with the transitions guidance, the YCS Policy Team has concluded their various consultations and aim to publish the policy early this year.

### **Full-time Education**

It is recognised Cookham Wood boys have a range of individual needs. YCS is working towards embedding an individualised approach in line with the Integrated Care model which will see education timetables introduced to help maximise the amount of time children spend out of their rooms engaged in education/activities.

From the end of March 2022 full time education will resume for children identified who will benefit the most from this. There are currently 15 to 18 pathways of learning available at any time. Children are allocated to learning pathways which include core subjects English, Maths and Personal and Social Development.

HMYOI Cookham Wood is reviewing the Regime Management Plan to ensure there are sufficient staff available, so all children are offered 15 hours classroom - based education and three hours face to face community learning per week.

### **Governor Appointment**

The recruitment campaign for a permanent Governor came to an end on 11 February 2022. Plans will be implemented once the successful candidate is confirmed to enable and support a smooth leadership transition period.

### **Digital Technology**

Two key strategic objectives of the 2021-2022 Digital, Data, and Technology Strategy are to give the people in our care the tools and technology to support rehabilitation and to make video conferencing accessible to everyone, building rehabilitative relationships for people in prison, their families and friends and staff supporting them. HMYOI Cookham Wood is at the forefront of this effort and was the first prison to receive in-room technology. We are currently in the process of completing rollout of this technology to all YOIs within the public estate.

The boys at HMYOI Cookham Wood now have access to analogue telephones in their rooms to communicate with their family and organisations such as the Samaritans. We recognise that the Secure Social Video Calling service is a crucial part of maintaining family connection. While there are two laptops available, the boys can make use of up to 90 video call slots per week. Data indicates that HMYOI Cookham Wood averages between five and seven calls a week, meaning less than 10% of available

video calls are being used. This suggests that there is adequate provision of technology to support calls. However, to help improve the provision a survey will be sent to children and families to establish how the service can best support their needs. Likewise, MoJ Digital and Technology will work with HMPPS Communications Team to better advertise the availability of the video calling service to improve uptake in Cookham Wood.

### **Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)**

There are several steps the YCS is taking to help sites work collaboratively with YOTs.

- The YCS is working closely with London Resettlement Pathfinder which consists of several London YOTs, which is an effective channel in raising concerns/ issues that are difficult to resolve at a local level.
- The Safeguarding Team within the YCS has adopted good working relationships with local authorities and so are also able to raise concerns.
- The YCS is also developing guidance to site Resettlement Practitioners to support them in highlighting to YOTs their responsibilities whilst a child is in custody.
- The YCS is developing a post where we will centrally co-ordinate issues between site and YOTs Heads of Service, to ensure children receive the best multi-agency support possible.