

Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) in England

2021 annual report

September 2022



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1. Introduction

Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) are an important part of the independent oversight of prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs). They are appointed by ministers under the Prison Act 1952. IMB members are a regular presence, visiting the establishment, monitoring the treatment and conditions of prisoners, reporting what they find to those running the prison, and dealing with queries and concerns from individual prisoners. They are unpaid but have statutory powers that grant them unrestricted access.

This national annual report summarises the key findings of annual reports published by Boards at young offender institutions across England which hold young people aged 15-18. These are:

- Cookham Wood
- Feltham A
- Werrington
- Wetherby

As the reporting year differs among Boards, this report covers the period 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2021. This reporting period was characterised by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and protracted restrictions on the wellbeing, development and progression of young people held in YOIs. Board members carried out both on-site and remote monitoring, depending on outbreaks and national or regional lockdowns.

Reporting years

Each annual report referenced covers a distinct reporting period as follows:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| • Cookham Wood | 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021 |
| • Feltham A | 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021 |
| • Werrington | 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021 |
| • Wetherby | 1 June 2020 – 31 August 2021 ¹ |

Positive developments since last year's national YOI report

- Improvements in reception and induction processes, including accessible information and fewer young people arriving late.
- Installation of in-room telephony, as well as ongoing work to install in-room showers.
- Generally lower levels of self-harm, except at Wetherby where the Board continued to raise concerns about a small group of young people with acute mental health issues who regularly self-harmed.
- On the whole, good delivery of healthcare services and fewer missed appointments.

¹ This is a longer reporting period in order to align with the other YOI boards in England.

Continuing concerns

- Although overall there were lower levels of violence, some Boards reported spikes in violence, triggered by frustration and boredom.
- Many rooms were not fit for purpose, lacking basic facilities and furnishings.
- Limited time out of room, even by the end of August 2021, hindering the progression and resettlement of many young people and impacting their mental health.
- While there was a gradual increase in face-to-face education, this was disrupted by lockdowns and staffing shortages. At the end of the reporting period, young people continued to receive insufficient education at most YOIs.
- Delays in transfers to the adult estate, with some young adults being held at the YOIs for months after their 18th birthday.
- Delays in transfers of acutely mentally ill young people to secure mental health hospitals to receive the necessary appropriate treatment and care.
- Problems due to poor support from some local authorities for young people for whom they were responsible, with regard to financial support during their custodial sentence and post-release accommodation support.

2. Main findings

2.1 Safety

Reception and induction

Fewer admissions and inter-prison transfers took place during the reporting period as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Overall, Boards, such as Werrington, praised the support provided to newly arrived young people and reported on improvements in reception and induction processes. At Wetherby, the Board found the new induction information pack to be more child friendly and welcomed the new accessible slide presentation for young people with reading and learning difficulties.

Boards at Wetherby and Werrington also reported that there were fewer young people arriving late² (by either admission or inter-prison transfer). At Werrington, while only two young people arrived after 9pm in the reporting period, 23 young people had to wait over four hours at court before being transferred to Werrington. The longest wait was seven hours.

In addition, at Werrington, 13 newly arrived young people complained to the Board about the length of time taken to register PIN phone numbers after induction, although the young people had provided next of kin contact details at reception.

Self-harm

Most Boards reported lower levels of self-harm during the pandemic. At Werrington, the number of incidents reduced by 60% from the previous reporting year. The Board there highlighted the marked reduction in cutting. The Board at Feltham A noted that in February, March and August 2021 there were no recorded acts of self-harm. In January 2021, the month with the highest levels of self-harm, there were only five incidents, compared to 24 in the same month the previous year. The Board at Cookham Wood found that there was no increase in the number of self-harm incidents, despite the prolonged Covid-19 restrictions and limited time out of room during the reporting year.

However, the Board at Wetherby continued to raise concerns about the number of self-harm incidents, sometimes serious and potentially life-threatening. The Board reported that a small group of young people regularly self-harmed. The types of self-harm included cutting, head banging, wall punching, ligaturing and poisoning/overdose. In the third quarter (July to September) of 2020, 10 young people accounted for 72% of all self-harm incidents at Wetherby. In the fourth

² The Boards at Wetherby and Werrington defined 'late arrivals' as those taking place after 7pm and 9pm, respectively.

quarter (October to December) of 2020, one young person there carried out 37 acts of self-harm.

Assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT)

ACCT plans are opened for young people identified as at risk of self-harm or suicide. The ACCT process was revised and relaunched at pilot site HMYOI Werrington in April 2021 and at the rest of the YOIs in early July 2021. ACCT version 6 (v6) aims to adopt a more person-centred approach, involving the individual in all decision-making related to their ACCT plan.

Following the introduction of ACCT v6, Boards received mixed feedback from both young people and staff. The Boards at Cookham Wood, Feltham A and Werrington found that staff provided tailored support to young people on ACCT plans. The Board at Feltham A reported that young people appreciated the change in colour of the ACCT file from bright orange to white, as it was more subtle and did not alert others that they were struggling with their mental health. At Wetherby, some members of staff with whom the Board had spoken considered the new ACCT v6 document to be more straightforward. However, others continued to find it challenging.

In addition, while some young people on an open ACCT plan at Wetherby appreciated the additional level of care that they received, others found the extra checks conducted at night to be too intrusive. There was low take-up by managers of the ACCT v6 training when it was first rolled out.

Violence and violence reduction

At Feltham A, the Board reported low numbers of prisoner-on-prisoner violence and assaults on staff. Young people there told the Board that they felt safer in their smaller groups ('bubbles'), introduced as a Covid-19 protective measure. At Wetherby, while the level of violence between young people and against staff remained high, the Board reported on a small decrease in violence due to these bubbles. The Board found that the spikes in violence were due to the limited regime and the periodic loosening of restrictions.

The Board at Cookham Wood raised serious concerns about the spikes in violence during the reporting year, given that there was a smaller population at the YOI. For example, there were high levels of violence in July 2021, followed by a 10-day period in August with only three significant incidents. The Board believed that a spike in violent behaviour over Christmas 2020 and the New Year period was probably due to the young people spending prolonged periods locked in room and the shortage of staff during the Covid-19 outbreak. The Board raised concerns that a 'gang mentality' was developing in some of the young people's bubbles, with regular finds of improvised weapons, and from June 2021 the ingress of drugs and mobile phones.

At Werrington, the Board was disappointed that the previous Governor had disbanded the conflict resolution team in late 2020. At the end of July 2021, the Board escalated its major concerns about the significant rise in and high level of violence to the Executive Director of the Youth Custody Service (YCS). The Board commended the swift response from the YCS management team in stabilising the violence by the end of August 2021.

Use of force

The Board at Werrington reported on an increase in the use of force, with 633 incidents in the reporting period compared to 605 the previous year, even though the population had reduced. There were, however, only three instances of staff using pain-inducing techniques³ during the year, down from eight the previous year.

At Cookham Wood, the Board found the use of physical restraint to be necessary and proportionate in all cases reviewed by the Board, but reported on a backlog of minimising and managing physical restraint (MMPR) refresher training among members of staff that could result in inconsistencies in the future. The Board was also concerned that the national team that is called in to deal with serious incidents was not trained in MMPR, which could lead to child protection issues if pain-inducing techniques are used incorrectly.

The Board at Wetherby continued to raise serious concerns about the inconsistency in whether body worn video cameras were switched on in the lead-up to, during and after violent incidents. In January 2021, only half of the 16 MMPR incidents reviewed by the Board showed use of body worn video cameras. The Board expressed disappointment that, until October 2020, the safer custody team did not analyse why cameras had not been activated during incidents.

³ The use of a technique by staff that is deliberately designed to cause pain to a young person in order to save life or prevent serious harm.

2.2 Fair and humane treatment

Accommodation

Works were carried out at a number of establishments in order to improve in-room facilities. Some Boards, including Wetherby and Werrington, reported on the installation of in-room showers. The Board at Werrington found, however, that this resulted in reduced time out of room for young people: young people were previously allocated half an hour out of their room to shower. At Feltham A, there was ongoing work to install individual shower pods.

The Boards at Werrington and Feltham A reported on the installation of in-room telephony. There were plans underway at Werrington to also provide in-room technology. Although these works were undertaken in sections, the Board reported that this had resulted in regime reduction and wing disruption, as some young people had to be moved to different rooms.

A number of Boards reported on rooms that were not fit for purpose. At Werrington, the Board reported that some rooms lacked curtains, and clean toilets and walls. The Board at Wetherby raised concerns about the variable heating on the upper levels which was 'unbearable' for both young people and staff.

At Cookham Wood, the Board welcomed the closure of the Phoenix separation unit for refurbishment and re-designation in December 2020, having repeatedly raised concerns about the state of disrepair and sparse facilities. However, it reported that these works were taking far too long and young people could have benefitted from accessing the new services that were to be offered on the unit. This was part of the Board's wider concerns about the contractor's ability to complete works in a timely and competent manner.

Separation (segregation)

At Feltham A, the Board reported a drop in the number of young people held in the Falcon separation unit, which allowed Falcon staff to engage with young people on other residential units in order to pre-empt violent incidents. The Board commended the consideration with which Falcon staff interacted with the young people while they were on the Falcon unit and the attempts made to help them reintegrate onto their units.

Elsewhere, Boards, such as Wetherby, reported on an increase in the number of separated young people. At Wetherby, the Board attributed this to the easing of restrictions and young people having increased time out of room and in association with peers. The Board continued to raise concerns about the delivery of the breakfast pack to young people held on the separation unit at 4:30pm the previous day with the evening meal. At Werrington, there was an increase in the number of young people separated from main association, from 94 young people in the previous reporting year to 100, even with the very reduced population size.

The Board at Cookham Wood reported that, of 122 young people separated as 'risks to others', 86 ended their separation within a week. Their separation ended when the review team identified a new landing bubble that they could join or other young people with whom they could form a new bubble. The Board was concerned that staff were regularly using this approach of moving young people between bubbles as a 'keep apart' technique between non-associates (young people who could not be in bubbles together due to previous violent incidents or gang affiliation). The Board called for alternative behaviour management strategies as the regime opened up and 'landing communities' (bigger groups on a landing) formed.

Young people-staff relationships

Overall, Boards reported on positive interactions between staff and young people. For example, the Board at Wetherby reported that the monthly youth council was a useful forum that provided young people with the opportunity to voice their concerns and share suggestions.

Some Boards, such as Wetherby and Feltham A, believed that the bubbles introduced during the pandemic as a Covid-19 protection measure allowed more meaningful relationships to develop between staff and young people. However, at Cookham Wood, the Board had a more mixed view. While reporting that young people mixed comfortably in their bubbles and felt supported by their landing officers, the Board believed that the bubbles 'fragmented the community' and led to boredom and frustration among young people. This, in turn, led to further violence when young people were out of their rooms in bigger groups.

The pandemic disrupted the implementation of the care planning approach known as the custody support programme (CuSP). This subsequently became the Covid support programme (CoSP), which involved shorter 20-minute interviews between staff and young people. At Werrington, for example, the Board reported that these sessions did not run every day or on weekends due to conflicting operational demands, as staff were redeployed to other duties. The Board reported that, in July 2021, while 48 sessions took place, 34 young people were not offered at least one weekly CoSP session due to the unavailability of staff. In addition, it was not always the same officer who engaged with a particular young person, which resulted in a lack of continuity and hindered the building of important staff-young people relationships.

Equality and diversity

At Feltham A, the Board reported that the establishment introduced the provision of culturally appropriate hair and body care products, including durags and hair gel, following prisoner feedback.

The Board at Wetherby reported that there was no disproportionality in relation to protected characteristics, including ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual

orientation, in relation to the young people held in the care and separation unit (CSU). However, the Board found that physical restraint was more likely to be used on Black and mixed ethnicity young people.

The Board at Wetherby also raised concerns that the phone interpretation service for foreign national prisoners was not always available during the reporting year. However, at Feltham, the Board noted that staff provided additional support to young people whose first language was not English.

The Board at Wetherby reported that the establishment had been holding a small group of young female prisoners since mid-July 2021. Some male prisoners told the Board that they believed the female prisoners received favourable treatment, with better accommodation and the ability to wear their own clothing.

Faith and pastoral support

Boards were impressed with the level of care and support provided by the chaplaincy throughout the pandemic. Chaplaincy teams used new ways of working, such as distributing service sheets under room doors when group activities were not permitted.

The Board at Wetherby reported that, from October 2020, young people were able to attend in-person religious services with one other young person, as long as they were in the same bubble. At the end of the reporting period in August 2021, young people could attend more regularly in groups of three to eight.

However, the Board at Cookham Wood reported that, in August 2021, the multi-faith suite was moved off the main residential block to a different building on the other side of the establishment. This resulted in officers having to escort young people to attend services. Young people subsequently informed the Board that they were not always able to attend services due to staff shortages and conflicting priorities.

Rewards and sanctions

During the pandemic, no young person was on the basic level of the rewards system unless sanctions had been imposed. The scheme no longer allowed for the removal of TV from a room or preventing a young person from attending a landing association activity, as it did not seem fair when young people already spent prolonged periods locked in their room.

Some Boards, such as Feltham A, found that the green (award for good behaviour) and yellow (demerits for bad behaviour) colour-coded card system worked well. Young people liked the fact that green cards could be exchanged for additional phone credit, which was especially valued during the pandemic. However, the Board reported that criteria were used inconsistently in issuing these cards, which the Board believed may have undermined trust in the system. At Cookham Wood, the Board found that this card system had 'lost its value', partly because the sanctions

were not used. Some young people did not see the point of working for a benefit that they had already been given due to the removal of the basic level. The Board believed that the scheme could still be made to work if there were greater rewards for good behaviour, including an increase in group activity time.

Property

Some Boards continued to raise concerns about lost or misplaced property. The Board at Wetherby reported that complaints to the prison were often concerned with property loss and delays in the delivery of property to young people. The Board at Feltham A noted that young people could wait a significant amount of time to receive their property following transfer between establishments. The Board struggled to resolve property complaints involving other establishments within a reasonable timeframe, as Covid-19 lockdowns had led to a further breakdown in communication between establishments.

2.3 Health and wellbeing

Healthcare: general

A number of Boards reported good practice and improvements in the delivery of healthcare services. At Cookham Wood, the Board praised the work of primary care nurses in providing a 'reassuring presence' on the wings to young people. The Board at Wetherby found that the relocation of general practitioners (GPs) to the wings better met the young people's needs and almost halved the number of appointments where the young person did not attend, from 26 in January 2019 to 14 in August 2021. The Board there also welcomed the introduction of a health promotion practitioner that contributed to improved dental care and fewer appointments where the young person did not attend, from 40 in January 2020 to only seven in August 2021.

The Board at Feltham A reported that young people had to be escorted to the healthcare unit for appointments, which was situated on Feltham B (which holds young adults aged 18-21). The movement of individuals for healthcare appointments was deprioritised compared to movement for other activities, such as education.

Regarding waiting times, the Board at Cookham Wood reported that there was no waiting list to see the GP or dentist. While at Feltham A there was similarly no delay to see the GP, there were waiting times of a maximum of three weeks for dentist and optician appointments.

Young people aged over 17 years nine months were offered the Covid-19 vaccine once it became available to their age group. At Werrington, the Board commended the creation of a patient focus group that sought to discuss 'vaccine hesitancy' with young people in order to encourage the take-up of the Covid-19 vaccine. The Board at Cookham Wood noted, however, that there was low take-up up to the end of the reporting period.

The Board at Wetherby continued to report on healthcare staff recruitment and retention issues, which resulted in agency staff often having to be used to fill the vacancies.

Mental healthcare and wellbeing

Boards reported on the implementation of some positive initiatives. At Feltham A, a new 'lab' had been commissioned to incorporate rap music as part of music therapy. At Cookham Wood, the Board commended the introduction of a dedicated health and wellbeing therapist for each landing and unit at the beginning of the pandemic as part of the NHS-led Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS). These therapists played an integral role in supporting wellbeing, both of the young people and staff. However, fortnightly group reflective sessions were often cut short due to operational demands.

There were mixed staffing levels in mental health teams across the YOIs. At Cookham Wood, the Board reported that the 'exceptionally well resourced' wellbeing team provided individual therapeutic support to approximately half of the population (50 young people) at any one time. The Board at Wetherby noted that while there were improvements in filling some vacancies in the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) during the reporting year, the team could not deliver specific therapeutic intervention work. As at October 2021, the CAMHS manager position remained vacant.

A number of Boards, such as Cookham Wood, continued to raise serious concerns about the national shortage of mental health hospital beds for children, which resulted in young people being held for prolonged periods at the establishment while they awaited transfer. At Wetherby, the Board described the delays in transfers for four young people with severe mental health issues during the reporting period as 'inhumane' and 'unacceptable'. One of these young people waited for six months for a transfer to a secure mental health hospital that then never happened; instead they were transferred to the adult prison estate upon turning 18. The Board acknowledged the level of care provided by staff but noted that they were not trained mental health professionals. However, at Werrington, the Board reported on the compassionate management and timeliness of one transfer of a young person to a mental health hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Social care

At Werrington, the Board reported that safeguarding referrals made by external services, such as Barnardo's, were sent directly to the local authority designated officer.⁴ Most referrals related to allegations of physical abuse during restraint by staff, which were not upheld. The Board found that learning points from the MMPR footage were acted upon even if not directly linked to the allegation in question.

The Board at Wetherby continued to raise concerns that some local authorities were unwilling to provide any money for looked after young people⁵ for whom they were responsible. As a result, these young people were unable to purchase canteen items or pay for more telephone calls.

Time out of room

Boards continued to raise major concerns about the limited time out of room for many young people, even almost 18 months after the imposition of the first national lockdown in March 2020. At Wetherby, up to August 2020, young people spent less than two hours a day out of their room. This slowly increased and, during 2021, young people were out of their rooms for an average of seven hours a day. At Werrington, the Board was concerned about a serious incident in the art room of the

⁴ The local authority designated officer works within children's services and is responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children.

⁵ This term refers to young people who had been in the care of their local authority.

education block where two teachers were held hostage in February 2021. The young people involved attributed this to the extremely restricted regime they had had to endure the weekend prior. The Board at Cookham Wood noted that, in August 2021, the establishment had to postpone plans to significantly expand the regime to provide 18 hours of education a week and additional association time due to considerable staffing shortages.

Using averages to report on time out of room may mask the experiences of certain sub-groups, depending on the day of the week and the unit within an establishment. For example, at Feltham A, the Board reported that during the reporting year the average time out of room for most units was 5.7 hours on weekdays and five hours at weekends. However, young people on the platinum level of the rewards scheme, held on Dunlin unit, averaged nine hours out of room per day. On the other hand, on the separation unit at Feltham A, young people spent an average of only 2.3 hours out of room per day. Similarly, at Cookham Wood, young people spent an average of four hours out of room per day throughout the reporting period. However, the Board found that young people who were held under rule 49 (for their own protection or the protection of others) spent less than two hours per day out of room, especially at weekends.

2.4 Education and training

Education

Some face-to-face education resumed in July 2020. At Wetherby, the Board reported that young people on the main site had access to two hours 45 minutes of teaching either on a one-to-one basis or in groups of up to four, twice a week. Young people held on the separation unit at Wetherby received up to seven 45-minute sessions a week. The Board at Werrington reported that, in September 2020, young people received an average of 15 hours a week of classroom-based learning. In-person education was subsequently suspended during the lockdown period in winter 2020.

While schools in the community resumed full-time in-person attendance in March 2021, Boards raised concerns that young people held in YOIs received only limited education. For example, at Cookham Wood, the Board found that in a four-week period in May and June 2021, young people received an average of 7.79 hours a week of education. In August 2021, young people were still only receiving 12 hours of education and three hours of physical education a week. A number of Boards reported that, after protracted restrictions were lifted, young people wanted to socialise with their peers and struggled to engage in classroom-based learning, but the situation gradually improved. At Wetherby, the Board found that some bubbles became 'substitutes for gangs', which led to an increase in disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

At Cookham Wood, the Board reported that classroom-based teaching was delivered to bubbles of six young people without taking into account their chosen subjects. This led to frustration among young people, as they were unable to follow their preferred pathways. Similarly, young people at Wetherby voiced their frustration to the Board that they had to remain in mixed ability bubbles.

Some young people gained qualifications despite the restrictions during the reporting period. The Board at Feltham A reported that, in the summer of 2021, 12 young people took 18 GCSE examinations between them, gaining 16 passes, which equated to approximately 30% of sentenced young people held at the establishment. The Board reported that the provision of 30 on-site electronic tablets had significantly improved the learning environment. However, the Board at Werrington raised concerns that online education courses had not recommenced at the time of writing its annual report.

Vocational training

Boards welcomed the renewed focus on more practical courses outside a classroom, which improved young people's engagement with education in non-conventional settings. At Werrington, for example, a dog training programme was popular, although there was limited capacity and it was only accessible to the most 'well-behaved' young people. The Board at Cookham Wood again praised the Woody's Barista Café, which equipped young people with the skills to prepare professional

quality food and beverages and ultimately earn a City & Guilds qualification. At Wetherby, during the reporting period, young people successfully completed 594 qualifications in various courses, including art and design, music and industrial cleaning. The young people welcomed the resumption of outdoor training courses, such as farms, gardens and horticulture, in August 2021. However, there were challenges in recruiting staff for the courses, in particular construction staff, as they were in high demand and better paid in the community.

Despite the suspension of most vocational training during the pandemic, the Board at Feltham A reported that young people participated in an initiative to paint the education block and other parts of the establishment, through which they gained recognised 'competence units'.⁶

⁶ The minimum element of a vocational competence that can be accredited.

2.5 Progress towards transfer/release

Case management and progression

A number of Boards raised major concerns about the high number of young people on remand. Over a third of the population at Werrington was on remand. Many young people were being held on remand for lengthy periods due to delays in waiting for trials, with the longest wait being eight months. Similarly, at Cookham Wood, the Board was concerned about the proportion of young people who were held on remand, with a peak of 45% (41 out of 91 young people) of the population on remand in June 2021. The Board found that the young people having to wait a long time before their court appearance were the most vulnerable and required the most support.

Some Boards continued to report on delays in transfers to the adult estate for those aged over 18.⁷ The Board at Wetherby, describing it as a 'perennial problem', reported that in some cases arranging transfers required intervention from the Governor or regional staff. While the Board at Cookham Wood noted that there had been an improvement in the timeliness of transfers to the adult estate in the last six months of the reporting period, it nevertheless continued to have significant concerns.

Release on temporary licence

During the reporting period, Boards reported on the almost complete cessation of release on temporary licence (ROTL), due to Covid-19 restrictions. At Werrington, only one young person was granted ROTL during the reporting year. At Cookham Wood, young people were no longer able to attend external colleges on ROTL. However, the Board at Cookham Wood reported that, by June 2021, a number of young people were attending ROTL placements, for example at Sports Connect and the Timpson Foundation.

The Board at Wetherby reported that, from June 2021, young people were allowed to assist the charity Wetherby in Support of the Elderly (WISE) with gardening tasks.

Family contact

Boards reported in-room telephony being available across all five YOIs, except in the separation units. On the Falcon separation unit at Feltham A, the rooms had the provision to plug in telephones if and when required. The Board at Cookham Wood queried why, unlike at secure training centres, young people held in YOIs were unable to receive calls in their rooms from friends and family approved on their PIN list.

At the start of the pandemic, young people in YOIs were provided with £20 additional phone credit, which was, however, halved in June 2021. At Wetherby, the Board

⁷ It should be noted that some over-18-year-olds are held in YOIs instead of being transferred to the adult prison estate if they only have a short period left to serve.

believed that the extra phone credit had contributed significantly to the stability in the establishment.

On the whole, young people preferred to maintain contact with family and friends via telephone rather than Purple Visits (video calls). At Cookham Wood, the Board identified several reasons for this: the limited number of laptops at the establishment, a shortage of devices in the family home, reluctance from the family to use video and the distress experienced by some young people in seeing their home environment. Numerous young people at Cookham Wood expressed their frustration at delays in receiving mail and approving phone numbers. However, the Board at Werrington reported that by the end of August 2021, most young people were using social video calls.

Despite the national lockdown in November 2020, a small number of face-to-face visits took place on compassionate grounds. Visits for immediate family resumed in mid-April 2021, although physical contact was still not permitted. From the end of June 2021, Feltham A participated in a pilot scheme that allowed physical contact if visitors took a lateral flow test in the visitors' centre before the visit. However, the Board found that families of young people were still reluctant to use public transport during the pandemic, which resulted in fewer social visits than expected.

Resettlement planning

The Board at Cookham Wood reported that the resettlement team was well integrated and managed, and liaised effectively with families, youth offending team workers and the legal teams for individual young people. However, there was no permanent caseworker on two landings due to staff shortages. The Board also raised concerns about the limited IT and phone facilities which hindered the resettlement team's communication with external agencies.

Some Boards raised concerns about the quality of support provided by local authorities to looked after young people for whom they were responsible. At Wetherby, there had not been any progress since the Board's last annual report with several local authorities failing to secure post-release accommodation for young people. This should be confirmed at least two weeks prior to release, but many arrangements were last minute which led to anxiety among the young people concerned. Similarly, the Board at Feltham A raised concerns that securing suitable accommodation for looked after young people near their support network (e.g. family and friends) was challenging. In addition, social services were sometimes unwilling to pay for accommodation when the room would be empty for up to two weeks prior to the young person's release.

The Board at Werrington reported that, out of the 58 young people released during the reporting year, only one was homeless on release. However, it was not clear whether this always extended beyond the first night. There were some other challenges in preparing for release, as young people had to be over 18 years old and approaching their release date in order to open a bank account.