

Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) in England

2019/20 annual report

June 2021



Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Main findings pre COVID-19.....	5
2.1	Safety	5
2.2	Fair and humane treatment	7
2.3	Health and wellbeing	9
2.4	Education.....	11
2.5	Progression and resettlement.....	12
3	Main findings during COVID-19.....	13
3.1	Safety.....	13
3.2	Fair and humane treatment.....	14
3.3	Health and wellbeing	15
3.4	Education	16
3.5	Progression and resettlement	16
4	Conclusion.....	18

1 Introduction

Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) are an important part of the independent oversight of prisons; 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. Their findings are captured in their published annual reports.

IMB monitoring of prisons during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 emergency, IMBs used innovative monitoring processes where visits had to be curtailed or reduced in frequency for public health reasons; including meetings, and a freephone line.

This report summarises the findings of the 2019/20 annual reports of IMBs in young offender institutions (YOIs) in England. Cookham Wood, Feltham A, Werrington and Wetherby accommodate young people between the ages of 15 to 18. As the reporting year differs among boards, this report covers the period from 1 June 2019 to 31 August 2020. The first part of the report presents YOI boards' pre-COVID findings up to March 2020; this is followed by a section on IMB monitoring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, some IMBs, including Cookham Wood and Wetherby, monitored remotely during the first national lockdown. Others, like Feltham and Werrington, adopted a blended monitoring model, with some members undertaking on-site monitoring.

Reporting years

Board findings outlined below refer to IMB reporting years; these are:

- Cookham Wood - 1 August 2019 – 31 August 2020
- Feltham A - 1 November 2019 – 31 August 2020 (*adjusted as part of transition to different reporting year – previous annual reports ran 1 November – 31 October*)
- Werrington - 1 August 2019 – 31 August 2020
- Wetherby – 1 June 2019 – 31 May 2020

Positive developments since 2018/19:

- Some improvement in the quality of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) processes.
- Enhanced arrangements in place for young people to maintain family contact, including in-cell telephony and additional visit days.
- Welcome changes in healthcare provision, including some encouraging projects to engage with young people and education providers to champion health issues, and work by healthcare to improve the quality of care provided.

Overarching issues pre-COVID:

- There remained concerns about high levels of violence, and the resulting impact of managing safety through 'keep apart's'. Although there had been a reduction in one YOI and at a specialist behavioural support unit in another, levels of violence between young people and assaults on staff were still too high.
- Self-isolation was an ongoing issue, with some young people retreating into their rooms and refusing to engage in the main regime due to safety fears.
- A national shortage of secure mental health beds, leading to prolonged stays in segregation conditions for young people with complex mental health needs.
- Education provision, which was a significant concern for some Boards, who reported that it was unsatisfactory and under resourced, with last-minute cancellations of sessions undermining young people's learning.
- Extremely poor central sentence planning by HMPPS caused delays in transfers to the young adult/adult estate, with some over-18-year-olds being left in limbo for several months, often in segregation.
- Patchy and often poor support from local authorities for looked after young people.
- Concerns about poorly staffed or delayed resettlement planning.

Key points during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- In all four YOIs, young people spent at least 22 hours a day locked in their room, at least between March and May, with their progression and rehabilitation abruptly put on hold. Boards were particularly concerned about the withdrawal of specialist psychology services for the first three months of the lockdown.
- An increasing number of young people were held on remand across the youth estate due to COVID-related delays in the court system. These individuals experienced longer periods of uncertainty, which increased their vulnerability.
- Although levels of self-harm appeared to decrease, the lasting impact on young people's mental health remains a major concern, despite the efforts of prison staff.
- During the first national lockdown, education delivery was woefully lacking or poorly delivered in all four YOIs, with distraction and study packs delivered to rooms or 'dumped' on wings. This slowly began to improve, but not at the same rate as in the community.
- Regime restrictions following lockdown hampered the rollout of the Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) project and the Custody Support Programme (CuSP).

2 Main findings pre COVID-19

2.1 Safety

Self-harm

There was a reduction in self-harm incidents compared to the previous reporting year at all YOIs but Wetherby. The Board there raised concerns about a significant increase of 48% on the main wings between October 2019 and January 2020 due to many young people with complex mental health needs being held in an inappropriate environment. There was a 48% decrease on Keppel, the high-dependency unit for particularly vulnerable young people during the same quarter. However, in the first quarter of 2020, 56% of all self-harm incidents occurred on the Keppel unit. At Werrington, self-harm incidents dropped by almost 20% during the reporting year, compared to the previous year. Cookham Wood IMB reported that a small number of young people with severe behavioural difficulties regularly self-harmed and posed a significant risk of harm to prison officers attempting to support them. A total of 125 self-harm incidents occurred at the establishment between August 2019 and August 2020, involving 37 boys. Feltham IMB noted a drop in the level of self-harm among young people over the reporting period following the transfer of a group of young people who had repeatedly self-harmed.

ACCT

Some YOI boards reported better management of ACCT paperwork and processes (ACCTs are opened for any young people identified at risk of self-harm or suicide). The Board at Cookham Wood reported a decrease in the number of ACCT plans opened and that officers diligently recorded changes in a young person's mental health. Werrington IMB noted that the multidisciplinary ACCT reviews, now being held on a designated day and time, were excellent examples of intervention and support by staff for the most vulnerable young people. A dedicated ACCT room was also introduced, with a person's outline drawn on the walls whose thought bubbles were written in by that particular young person. This aimed to help those young people struggling with their mental health to visualise their thought processes. At Feltham, pre-COVID, psychology staff engaged daily with young people who were subject to an open ACCT plan. By contrast, at Wetherby, while there had been an improvement in ACCT quality, the Board reported that inconsistency and incomplete record keeping remained a cause for concern.

Violence and violence reduction

Levels of violence were still too high across the youth estate. The Board at Werrington highlighted a rise in both violence between young people and assaults on staff. At Cookham Wood, the Board reported similar levels of violence to the previous year. At Feltham A, although the number of violent incidents between

young people and against staff had decreased since 2018/19, it remained high. At Wetherby, violence remained an issue and the Board continued to raise concerns about gang activity and the need to keep a large number of young people apart. Violent behaviour was especially concentrated in the college buildings, which resulted in last-minute cancellations, thereby disrupting education delivery. However, in 2019, levels of violence had dropped at the specialist Keppel unit, in part thanks to de-escalation tactics employed by experienced staff. In addition, the Board commended the conflict resolution team's efforts in mediating between young people and in incidents between staff and young people.

Use of Force (UoF)

While the Cookham Wood IMB described UoF incidents as controlled, necessary and proportionate, Boards elsewhere raised concerns. At Wetherby, there were over 70 misapplications of minimising and managing physical restraint (MMPR) techniques during incidents in January 2020. This included instances where physical restraint should not have been used in the first place or techniques were misused. The Board called for further training, particularly for new and inexperienced prison officers. However, data on MMPR incidents showed no bias by ethnicity. Too many staff, were not wearing or turning on body worn cameras (BWCs). At Werrington, the IMB reported that UoF incidents had doubled between 1 August 2019 and 29 February 2020 compared to each of the four previous years, although there had also been a general increase in violence at the establishment.

Self-isolation

Bullying and intimidation were raised as ongoing concerns at all four YOI establishments. At Cookham Wood, some bullying victims were reluctant to admit they were feeling frightened or to be labelled a 'snitch' for reporting this behaviour to staff. The Board urged the YOI to make more use of the bullying reduction plan system despite these difficulties in identifying victims. At Wetherby, the Board reported that some young people were 'self-isolating', as they were fearful of other young people. Bullying to obtain canteen items was commonplace. Feltham IMB reported that some young people subject to bullying behaviour preferred to remain in the segregation unit or retreated into their rooms and self-isolated as a result of these fears. Often, these vulnerable young people would end up transferred elsewhere as a solution. In more serious cases, such as one reported by Werrington IMB, a young person isolated in his room for over 130 days before being transferred to hospital under the Mental Health Act.

2.2 Fair and humane treatment

Accommodation

Overall, there had been some improvements to the physical environment in the youth estate. Wetherby IMB commended the additional installation of six in-cell showers on the wings. At Feltham A, renovation work had improved the communal showers and serveries. However, there continued to be delays in the completion of the new library. The Board also reported hot water supply and heating issues in winter months. Short-term solutions provided by the prison did not adequately address the ageing infrastructure. Cookham Wood IMB continued to raise concerns about the Phoenix segregation unit, described as depressing and unfit for purpose, and where rooms became excessively hot in the summer and cold in the winter.

Segregation

In the youth estate, separation (segregation) should only be used as a last resort in order to protect both staff and young people. It should not be used as a form of punishment. In January 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) published a scathing report on the separation of young people in YOIs. It called for a new model of separating young people that ensured an equivalent regime to that of their non-separated peers.

IMBs across the youth estate in England raised particular concerns about prolonged periods of separation. For example, at Cookham Wood, a young person spent over four months in the care and separation unit (CSU) before being transferred to another YOI. This included four separate periods of over 21 consecutive days.

There were also some areas of better practice. Wetherby IMB reported that Anson, the CSU, continued to show improvement. While busy throughout the reporting period, it remained calm and organised. The Board noted that staff were committed in their support of young people in this unit, as well as those young people held in segregation conditions on the wings. Young people were also supported with their reintegration into the main regime after a prolonged stay in segregation. At Feltham, the enhanced support unit (ESU) closed for refurbishment in December. There were so few young people housed on the unit that when they could not mix for safety reasons, they were held in segregation conditions and treated as separated prisoners. The Board criticised this practice for going against the policy of the ESU as a place of therapeutic care and reintegration. Falcon unit opened in April 2019 to provide a small specialist unit for the purpose of reintegration for young people who struggled to cope with the main regime. The Board noted that, during this reporting year, the Falcon unit team began an early intervention programme to engage with young people whose behaviour consistently raised concerns with residential staff. Feltham IMB commended the dedication and expertise of the specially trained unit staff in caring for young people with complex behavioural and emotional needs.

Delays in transfers to secure mental health provision

Boards continued to report severe delays in transfers to secure mental health settings due to an apparent shortage of mental health beds. Young people with highly complex mental health needs could end up being held in segregation for several weeks or months until a bed became available. At Wetherby, the Board reported that this could be a lengthy process, especially for young people aged over 17.5 years, as it was particularly challenging to find a suitable secure setting for this age group. The average length of a stay on the CSU was over two weeks, which had almost doubled since June 2018. The Board attributed this rise to an extremely complex and vulnerable young person who required specialist mental health provision. The symptoms of young people struggling with mental health issues may also worsen during their stay in segregation. At Werrington, the Board had struggled to monitor 'self-isolators' and young people held in segregation conditions due to confusing and inconsistent staff paperwork. However, the appointment of a governor for enhanced support services and equality had led to an improvement in processes and record keeping. Boards have repeatedly called for these unacceptable delays that exacerbate existing mental health issues to be addressed.

Delays in transfers to the adult estate

Boards reported that some 18-year-olds became 'stuck' in segregation awaiting transfer to the adult estate, which was described by Cookham Wood IMB as "inhumane" – the Board raised this directly with the Prisons Minister in March 2020. Without agreed pathways or a central Youth Custody Service (YCS) team to allocate places, it is down to each individual adult prison governor's discretion as to whom they accept from the youth estate once the young people turn 18. While awaiting transfer, some young adults were held in segregation due to safeguarding concerns if held with under 18s. Young people with a history of extreme violence, sexual offences or disruptive behaviour were often turned down by adult prisons, which further delayed their transfer. The Boards at Cookham Wood and Wetherby raised concerns that these rejections were demotivating and heightened anxiety for those awaiting transfer. In some cases, this provoked violent behaviour.

Staff-young people relationships

Boards reported varying levels of positive staff-young people interaction. Cookham Wood IMB reported that the CuSP had been rolled out on all landings before the national lockdown. The Board highlighted the inter-agency teamwork that sought to support the most vulnerable young people at weekly meetings. Wetherby IMB commended the proactive welfare checks that focused on child-centred support. In particular, the Board pointed to the exemplary practice of checking on those young people who had not made telephone calls on the PIN system for 40 days. At Werrington, there were 1,593 adjudications between January and June 2020. Of that total, 36 young people were referred to the independent adjudicator. The Board raised concerns with the Governing Governor that not all governors were offering the

young person in question the right to appeal when the charge was proven. At the time of writing its annual report, Werrington IMB noted an improvement in practice, but remained concerned that minor reports had not been used effectively as a less punitive alternative to adjudications.

Equality and diversity

At Wetherby, provision was made for telephone interpreting for foreign national young people, but the Board raised concerns that this service was not always readily available. However, liaison with immigration services ran smoothly and these young people were also provided with extra credit for telephone calls to families abroad. The IMB reported that the YOI had made a real effort to raise awareness of discrimination and reporting procedures, which could partly explain the almost 90% increase in the number of discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) submitted in 2019. Over 80% of these DIRFs related to race. The Board noted that all DIRFs were processed in the agreed time frame.

Property

Across the youth estate, many complaints (applications) made to Boards continued to relate to property. This included lost property following inter-prison transfers, or delays in delivering items to young people. These items were sometimes of sentimental value and their loss could be particularly distressing for many young people. Boards continued to encounter obstacles in resolving complaints with other establishments within a reasonable timeframe. Feltham IMB called for YCS/HMPPS to ensure that property was easily traceable throughout the criminal justice system, due to the additional time and resources spent in trying to recover lost property.

2.3 Health and wellbeing

Physical healthcare

At Wetherby, although there was usually a waiting list for weekly dental sessions pre-COVID, young people could still see a dentist for urgent appointments. On average, the waiting list for non-urgent dental treatment ranged from six to eight weeks.

There was, however, some good practice. Wetherby IMB also reported that the merger of the healthcare team, child and adolescent mental health service and substance misuse team into one building enabled a more efficient and united workforce. The Board welcomed the initiative of the new proactive health promotion team lead and practitioner in leading the prison health and wellbeing strategy, as well as working with the education department to deliver joint sessions. At Werrington, the Board noted an improvement in healthcare services and effective collaboration between prison staff and the healthcare team. The healthcare team had achieved 100% on the Quality Outcome Framework in delivering services to

young people with long-term conditions, which was commended by the Board. The introduction of a health engagement strategy encouraged young people to voice their opinion on all health issues by becoming members of the health champion programme. Cookham Wood IMB reported that the healthcare teams were well resourced, committed and accessible to the young people.

Mental healthcare

At Werrington, in the 2019/20 reporting year, over two thirds of the young people had mental health issues. Funding from the YCS/NHS England Improvement Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) project had been used to hire two clinical psychologists, an additional full-time mental health nurse and learning disability nurse post in order to better care for all vulnerable young people by identifying issues and proactively offering interventions. At Wetherby, recruitment remained a concern, as illustrated by the under resourced and overstretched department, with the mental health nursing vacancy factor at 55%. At Feltham, Wren, a residential healthcare unit, still housed both young people and young adults. However, this was under review at the time of writing the Board's annual report due to safeguarding concerns.

Social care

Looked after young people rely on financial support from their home local authority in order to pay for canteen items or telephone calls, as they have been in their care prior to their time in custody. These are some of the most vulnerable young people and require comprehensive care plans. At Werrington, the Board reported that a small number of authorities were slow to respond, as evidenced by a young person who did not receive financial assistance for almost five months. Wetherby IMB continued to raise concerns about some local authorities failing to provide adequate support for looked after young people despite being legally obliged to do so. As a result, these young people were disadvantaged compared with others at the YOI. Cookham Wood IMB noted the lack of equality regarding preparation for release, depending on the local authority. Some looked after young people would be kept waiting until the very last minute before being provided with details of their accommodation on release. The Board at Wetherby also reported that there was an unacceptable variation in treatment. Some looked after young people maintained regular contact with their social worker and were informed of their accommodation details well in advance of their release, while others received few or no visits from their social worker. Some local authorities unfairly put the onus on individuals who turned 18 prior to release, with councils telling these young adults to report to the local authority housing office, which meant that they would be deemed homeless upon release. The Board reported that the social work department at Wetherby strongly challenged these local authorities and, as a result, no young people were released without accommodation.

Time out of room and exercise

There is an HMIP *Expectation* that young people spend at least 10 hours out of their room during the day, including an hour in the open air. However, Boards raised concerns about low staffing levels leading to insufficient time out of room. At Wetherby, between July 2019 and March 2020, the Board reported that time out of room on the main wings was below acceptable levels, with an average of seven hours on weekdays. Young people spent only five hours out of room at weekends on both the main wings and the Keppel unit. Cookham Wood IMB reported that, in late summer 2019, staff struggled to provide a consistent regime for young people. Activities were regularly subject to last-minute cancellations. Staffing difficulties often resulted in half-day lockdowns, particularly at weekends. If these lockdowns occurred on a Sunday, young people would be in their room for over 24 hours before being released on a Monday morning. This was partly due to the YOI population almost reaching capacity, as well as a temporary staff recruitment freeze. However, this situation gradually improved as the number of young people decreased and additional officers were transferred in. Similarly, at Werrington, although time out of room varied between wings, not all young people were offered daily exercise due to staffing issues. At Feltham A, with a cap on admissions of young people, time out of room steadily increased during the first half of the reporting year. It is worth noting that the use of averages can mask the actual lived experiences of young people who may have more or less time out of room depending on their particular regime.

2.4 Education

Education for young people under 18 is a statutory requirement, but delivery remained inconsistent due to uniformed staffing levels for escorting young people to lessons, pupil attendance and the facilities available. Boards reported that practical subjects and learning techniques were more popular with young people than classroom-based learning, often because young people had had poor experience in formal school setting. These needs are not properly addressed by the current approach.

At Wetherby, those who did not attend education classes were supported by various agencies to re-engage young people. Disruptive behaviour by some young people, maintenance work and shortages of uniformed or education staff often resulted in class cancellations. Feltham IMB reported that attendance had been poor but improved considerably during the reporting year. Earlier assessments and better allocation procedures resulted in attendance and average time in education doubling to 74% and 17.5 hours respectively - in part, by scheduling legal visits at the beginning or end of the school day. However, the Board noted that the physical environment did not encourage learning, as it was poorly equipped and run-down. Cookham Wood IMB reported high levels of educational attainment, but access to education was restricted due to slow movements off the wings and lockdowns caused by staff shortages. At Werrington, the Board reported that education

attendance was running at an impressive 93-95% during most of the reporting period. Cancellations were fewer during the year, but the Board noted a lack of engagement by young people in some education classes, compared to those that also offered vocational skills. Less conventional settings outside of the classroom need to be considered in order to help young people gain the necessary practical skills to find a job post-release.

Vocational training

There was some good practice resulting in positive outcomes for young people but still some way to go to achieve consistent breadth of opportunity across YOIs. Cookham Wood IMB praised Woody's Café that trained young people in the skills required to be a barista, as well as helping them to develop their customer service skills. At Wetherby, the Board reported that the similar Admiral's Café remained popular. At both, the young people followed a City and Guilds pathway. Werrington IMB noted that, despite the limited availability, the Restart Dog Training with on-site kennels had been a success. Some young people also attended horticultural and maintenance work classes that had significantly improved the appearance of the establishment and grounds. However, the Board called for a far greater range of opportunities to prepare for life after custody.

2.5 Progression and resettlement

Family contact

At Cookham Wood, arrangements for family contact remained excellent up to March 2020, with four visit days a week and monthly family days, as well as on additional days around the Christmas period in 2019. At Werrington, only young people on the enhanced level of the incentives scheme were entitled to regular family days and there was little support for young people who were fathers. At Wetherby, Werrington and Feltham A, the Boards welcomed the pre-COVID installation of in-cell telephony. As Wetherby increasingly held young people from all over the country, this facilitated family contact for all except those in the CSU unit. At Feltham, the Board reported that this offered young people more privacy and reduced the risk of violence or bullying, which had been an issue in the past while queueing to use the telephones. However, they raised concerns about restricted status young people, as they had less time allowance for telephone calls compared to those on the main wing. This was partly due to the need for specially trained staff to monitor all calls.

Progression and resettlement planning

Boards reported a mixed picture. Cookham Wood IMB reported that young people were offered an excellent range of release on temporary licence (ROTL) opportunities. At Feltham, the Board reported that, by December 2019, 80% of young people had been allocated their custody support plan officers. Young people

were supposed to meet with their allocated officers for 90 minutes a week, but this was not always possible due to staff shift patterns and clashes with other activities. At Wetherby, between September 2019 and February, almost 25% of the young people interviewed by the Board did not know their resettlement practitioner, which would have an adverse impact on their preparation for release and resettlement. Some young people only received post-release accommodation details on the day of their release. This uncertainty and delay in providing essential information could be worrying for many young people in the run-up to the end of their sentence. However, the Board did praise the work of a charity, In 2 Out, which provides mentors for young people in prison and for 12 months after release. At Werrington, although all individuals being discharged had secured post-release accommodation, the Board reported that young people struggled to open a bank account to bank their savings without a permanent address.

3 Main findings during COVID-19

3.1 Safety

The remand population - who were often more vulnerable due to uncertainty and delays - increased significantly during the pandemic as normal court processes were paused. For example, at Feltham A, the Board raised concerns that the proportion of young people on remand rose to 45% of the population in May 2020. At Cookham Wood, in the first week of July 2020, two thirds of the young people were on remand.

Levels of violence fluctuated throughout lockdown. At Cookham Wood, the Board reported a drop in violence from March to June. However, there was a rise in assaults as some restrictions eased and young people spent more time out of their rooms and in larger groups. As the weeks went on, the situation calmed and the number of assaults remained relatively low throughout August. The Board had spoken to young people who were pleased about their hour-long morning exercise and the limited resumption of face-to-face social visits. Staff had been successful in containing pockets of violence and incidents involved only a small number of young people. Feltham IMB reported that there had been an overall reduction in the number of assaults against staff between April and August 2020. However, in late June, there was a serious incident of concerted indiscipline. The poorly ventilated rooms could become intolerably hot during summer months, which the Board identified as a possible catalyst for the incident. Towards the end of the summer, there was a spike in the number of assaults on staff. The Board partly attributed this to some young people's reaction to restrictions easing in YOIs at a considerably slower pace than that in the community. Boards reported that, as lockdown progressed, many of the assaults on staff had been triggered by some young people's frustration at the lack of physical exercise and purposeful activity.

There were varying levels of self-harm during lockdown. At Cookham Wood, the Board attributed the slight increase in acts of self-harm to a young person with

severe mental health issues. The rest of the prison population data did not give rise to concern. At the time of its report writing, Feltham IMB reported that the number of self-harm incidents among young people continued to be in the low single figures. At Wetherby, young people were allocated to small family groups of three or four, which improved staff-young people relationships and the Board reported that young people felt safer than before. However, it is known that prisoners, especially young people, are most vulnerable during their first days in custody. Although there had been a 50% drop in ACCTs between April and June, Wetherby IMB reported that 40 plans had still been opened during that period due to low mood, suicide attempts or statements of intent. Most of these young people were based on the induction wing. At Feltham, during the first lockdown, the Board noted that some ACCTs were opened and closed by unit staff within the span of one day. Once an ACCT plan is opened, trained assessors conduct a review. Often they will then close the ACCT, because it is determined that measures can be put in place to ensure the young person's needs can be adequately met without the need for an ACCT. Opening the ACCT in the first place ensures that the correct procedure has been followed and the necessary care plan is in place. Officers and young people prisoners alike spoke of a greater level of trust between them.

Werrington IMB reported that a new safeguarding governor had been appointed during the 2019/20 reporting year, who encouraged officers to wear BWCs. As a result, in January 2020, two thirds of officers were wearing BWCs, which then dropped to just over 40% in April. This could be partly attributed to young people being locked in their rooms for most of the day and fewer staff-young people interactions. A subsequent reward-based initiative to improve BWC use resulted in 94% of officers wearing them in July 2020. It is unclear whether the BWCs were also turned on.

3.2 Fair and humane treatment

At the start of the first national lockdown, the primary objective was to keep prisoners and staff safe and minimise infection across the prison estate. Young people in custody in the youth estate experienced the same severe regime restrictions as adult prisoners. As a result, many young people across the youth estate were effectively held in solitary confinement for most of the first lockdown period, March to July 2020. While this led to young people feeling safer due to fewer opportunities for violence and bullying, both the immediate and cumulative effects on young people's mental health have been severe. Although extra phone credit and – later in 2020 – the brief reintroduction of social visits and access to Purple (video) Visits were positive moves, and generally YOIs remained calm, this came at great cost.

Even accepting the geographical variations resulting from COVID outbreaks and associated staffing problems, time out of room varied across the estate. At Cookham Wood, the Board repeatedly raised concerns about the most severe YOI lockdown, with young people out of rooms for only 40 minutes a day and the consequent impact on mental health. At the beginning of June, they wrote to the Secretary of

State asking for these issues to be addressed. In mid-July, despite the phased resumption of face-to-face education, young people continued to eat in their room rather than being allowed to associate with others. At both Wetherby and Feltham, young people spent 23 hours a day in their room, and 22 hours a day at Werrington. The Board at Wetherby reported that the introduction of CuSP worked well during lockdown, but then was not prioritised once face-to-face education resumed in the summer. In July, CuSP became CoSP (Covid Support Programme), which consisted of shorter sessions and a workbook for young people to complete. The Board at Feltham praised the response by staff and young people despite the incredibly challenging and uncertain circumstances.

3.3 Health and wellbeing

Few young people contracted COVID-19 and those who did had mild symptoms and quickly recovered. Unlike at Feltham, the Board at Cookham Wood reported that operational staff had sufficient personal protective equipment from the initial imposition of lockdown. Primary healthcare nurses provided normal first response and triage services, seven days a week. They saw all young people daily, taking temperatures and dispensing medication at room doors. The Board noted that their presence on the landings comforted the young people. At Werrington, the Board reported that the healthcare team responded well, with only dentistry provision reduced. At Wetherby, nursing staff worked on additional wings, which led to a decrease in 'did not attend' rates for medical appointments.

At many YOIs, non-emergency healthcare services were suspended at the start of lockdown. At Feltham A, to the great concern of the Board, HMPPS forensic psychology services were withdrawn; this was the situation across the estate. Prison officers, chaplaincy staff, and other external agencies, such as Wellbeing, Kinetic Youth and RoadLight, attempted to fill this much-needed gap. While their efforts are to be commended, the gaps left by the absence of usual services and the reduced regime meant that inexperienced staff were responsible for caring for the most vulnerable young people. In July 2020, forensic psychology practitioners returned only to deal with the most acute cases. Barnardo's staff, who provide an independent advocacy support to young people, were absent during the first lockdown but maintained contact via a freephone line. Cookham Wood IMB reported that each landing had a dedicated health and wellbeing therapist, who supported prison officers with their daily welfare checks. However, the abrupt interruption in access to mental healthcare services had impacted many young people and the long-term mental health implications remain to be determined. The Board raised concerns about a substantial backlog of one-to-one therapeutic work with young people in order to reassess their needs post-lockdown.

3.4 Education

Education should be central to the work of YOIs. However, in the early days of the first national lockdown, some under-18 establishments provided very little education; in-cell provision was woefully lacking and poorly delivered, largely consisting of distraction packs rather than learning materials, but there were pockets of good practice. Although this gradually improved, by the end of 2020 provision still fell well short of the level and standard it had reached prior to the pandemic. While teenagers in the community returned to school in early summer, there was a very limited return to education provision within YOIs.

At Cookham Wood, Novus education staff provided remote resources, including individual work packs, newsletters and prison radio podcasts that were pushed under room doors during lockdown. Within two weeks of 20 March, Novus had developed a risk assessed plan for partial return to education. This was supported and agreed locally by management, staff and unions. However, it was rejected at higher levels in the prison service by HMPPS Gold Command, though a very similar plan was implemented four months later. In mid-July, limited classroom-based education classes resumed in small groups. This only amounted to just over five hours of education per week. At Wetherby, most young people would have been classified as 'vulnerable' in the community. Therefore, the Board argued that they should have received at least some face-to-face education throughout lockdown. Instead, young people were provided with in-cell workbooks and distraction packs. The same was true at Werrington. At Feltham A, education staff remained on site to provide remote learning. This included staff delivering daily work packs to all young people from the second week of lockdown. These were collected and marked, with incentives for those who completed packs. Once back in the classroom in July 2020, small-group teaching was well received and most notably, attendance improved to a rate higher than it had been prior to lockdown.

It is clear that some education providers had not adopted a creative approach to delivery after many months into the pandemic, thereby severely disrupting the rehabilitation of many young people, and the education and skills needed to find a job upon release.

3.5 Progression and resettlement

Social visits were banned as the first national lockdown was introduced until July 2020. Even then, at Cookham Wood, there were restricted monthly family visits, with each young people allowed a maximum of three visitors. At Wetherby, the Board reported that only evening visits by adults were allowed, which disadvantaged those young people whose families did not live nearby and those who were fathers themselves.

Cookham Wood IMB also reported that the lack of IT and telephone capacity affected family contact and resettlement reviews during these months. Despite this, the resettlement team attempted to maintain relationships with families, carers and

legal teams. At Feltham A, there was a low take-up of video visits due to technical issues and safety features that meant that calls were stopped if there was any movement. However, all young people were provided additional weekly telephone credit during lockdown. The use of iPads allowed some young people to remotely attend funerals.

At Cookham Wood, the Board raised concerns that the lack of ROTL meant that young people could not evidence progress and were therefore at risk of being denied early release.

As reported above, there was a backlog of 18-year-olds, some several months beyond 18, who were awaiting transfer to the adult estate. During lockdown, inter-prison transfers were limited across most of the estate. At Feltham A, progression preparation was more difficult to facilitate post-lockdown. At the time of writing the Board's annual report, 10% of the population was over 18, which also created potential safeguarding issues by holding young people alongside young adults. The lasting impact of this prolonged disruption still remains to be fully determined. However, at Wetherby, there was some improvement in the speed with which these young people were being transferred to the adult estate as a result of the pandemic and the Board hoped that this would continue post-COVID.

4 Conclusion

Pre-COVID, Boards had raised concerns about high levels of violence in the youth estate, gang activity and the need to keep non-associates apart. All four YOI boards raised particular concerns about separation/segregation, especially for those young people awaiting transfer to a secure mental health hospital or to the adult estate. They called for more specialist secure mental health resources and a robust plan to address the shortage of mental health beds. Across the youth estate, understaffing and a lack of resources remained a serious concern, including in healthcare and education, and this was having a significant impact on outcomes for young people. Without cross-governmental action to address these issues, the rehabilitation of too many young people will fall short and the risk of reoffending will not be properly addressed.

During the first national lockdown, young people were locked in their rooms for all but an hour or two a day, with limited meaningful activity in the form of study or distraction packs. The long-term mental and physical health implications of this exceptionally restrictive regime, coupled with the disruption to education, which was not reintroduced at the same pace as in the community, are likely to have a long-term impact on both the individual young people concerned and on the wider YOI estate. The significant increase in the remand population during the pandemic will take a considerable time to resolve as a result of court backlogs and some young people who are not guilty will nevertheless have spent many months in custody.

As elsewhere in the prison estate, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing problems, primarily in relation to young people's mental health, their education and progression through to adult prisons. Boards will continue to monitor both day-to-day outcomes and, where possible, the longer-term impact of the restricted regime on young people and report their findings to HMPPS locally and nationally, and to ministers.



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