



Ministry  
of Justice

**Damian Hinds**  
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMYOI Cookham Wood  
Sir Evelyn Road  
Rochester  
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27 February 2023

*Dear Chair,*

**HMYOI COOKHAM WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 – 31 AUGUST 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 31 August 2022. I am very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing annual reports and thank you for providing a comprehensive picture of HMYOI Cookham Wood over the reporting period, especially considering the staffing vacancies that you had to contend with. I met the Governor, Darren Wilkinson, and staff when I visited HMYOI Cookham Wood on 7 November 2022, and I was pleased to discuss some of these themes in more detail with them.

I have addressed below the specific points you have raised for my attention:

I understand the Board's continued concerns about the number of young people on remand. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is taking forward actions to avoid long periods of time being spent on remand. The judiciary continues to prioritise cases involving Custody Time Limits, as well as cases involving vulnerable complainants and witnesses which includes youth cases. Crown Court capacity has increased by fee-paid judges sitting on more days, flexible deployment of judges and approving judges to continue to sit in retirement. A Crown Court Improvement Group has been established to improve overall performance of the Crown Court, which is a judicially led consultative body reporting to the Lord Chief Justice. In May 2022, the Magistrates' Courts sentencing powers also increased allowing more cases to be retained in the Magistrates' Courts. These actions are enabling the courts to get through cases more quickly and reduce the number of people on remand as well as the length of time they are held on remand.

In addition, the proposals in the 2022 Review of Custodial Remand for Children are being implemented with partners across the youth justice system. This includes supporting local Youth Justice Service Management Boards and Local Criminal Justice Boards to undertake regular reviews of local remand cases. Since last year's response to the Board, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022 has come into force which implements tighter tests for the courts to satisfy to remand a young person to custody. The PCSC Act also requires the courts to record their reasons for imposing custodial remand, which will aid higher quality analysis of the drivers of remand trends.

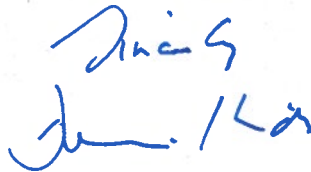
Turning to the Board's concerns about the outcomes of the High-Risk High Harm Health Needs Assessment commissioned by NHS England, following completion of this internal report, the NHS England Health and Justice Children Programme and the Youth Custody Service (YCS) have been working together at a national level to identify appropriate actions. In addition, a range of related

workstreams have been linked to continue to support improvements within the Children and Young Person's Secure Estate which includes the Framework for Integrated Care known as 'SECURE STAIRS'.

It is recognised there is work still to do at HMYOI Cookham Wood, but it was reassuring to receive your comments that staff treat young people fairly, are caring and understanding of their needs and that reception staff are skilled in assessing new arrivals. I was encouraged to read about the determined efforts of staff to rebuild landing communities following the Covid-19 pandemic and was pleased the Board recognise the environment staff have created on Cedar Unit. HMYOI Cookham Wood continues to welcome the valuable insights the IMB provides to improve services for the young people in its care and will continue to work closely with all partners to improve outcomes.

I note you have raised two local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) YCS comments in response to other issues raised in your report 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.



**Damian Hinds**  
**Minister for Prisons and Probation**

## **HMYOI COOKHAM WOOD: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 – 31 AUGUST 2022**

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

#### **Adult Prison Transition**

The YCS Transition Policy Framework launched in April 2022 and was implemented from September 2022. To ensure young people are supported and given time to prepare for the move, the aim is to provide a minimum of three months between the time a placement is confirmed and the agreed date of transition. During this time young people are provided with information in an accessible easy to read format including outlining the differences between the youth and adult estates. Sentence planning and review meetings will involve the young person and their parents, carers and social workers in the transition planning to prepare for the move and should include exploring any specific needs or anxieties with the young person. A single point of contact is allocated at the receiving prison with all relevant information provided to the prison regarding the care and management of the young person including healthcare information. Where appropriate, staff from the receiving prison will contact the young person to start to build relationships and reduce any anxiety ahead of the transfer. Adult sites are also expected to identify an appropriate peer mentor who can be assigned to help prepare the young person.

As a result of capacity pressures in the adult estate, the YCS have moved away from automatically transitioning young people at the age of 18 and instead will look to transition them up to the age of 19. For a planned transition this would begin at the age of 18 years 4 months, however, a case-by-case view will continue to be taken. It is noted that the IMB commends the work of the resettlement team at HMYOI Cookham Wood to support transitions. Once a transfer has taken place, the HQ Central Management Team continue to maintain contact for a period of three to six months to monitor the progress of the young person.

#### **Leadership**

Following a recent recruitment campaign, Paul Crossey has been appointed as the Governor of HMYOI Cookham Wood and will take up post with effect from 27 February 2023. Paul brings a wealth of experience from across the agency, including being part of the Senior Leadership Team for some time at HMYOI Feltham. A clear transition plan will be put in place to ensure the smooth handover of leadership at HMYOI Cookham Wood.

#### **Maintenance and Capital Projects**

It is recognised that historically the delivery of projects at HMYOI Cookham Wood has not been effectively managed which has impacted completion of the work. However, recent changes within the facilities management provider, including a new Site Manager, as well as the appointment of a new Regional Property Operations Manager, have shown early signs of improvement. The introduction of a regular meeting between the facilities management provider, MoJ Property Services and HMYOI Cookham Wood has improved communication, the delivery of projects and reactive repairs. A functional head at HMYOI Cookham Wood also now has responsibility to work closely with the facilities management provider and the project teams. There continues to be national attention to the performance of facility Management providers by the YCS Executive Director.

As the Board has noted, delays in obtaining materials have been a major contributing factor in delivery, such as the Phoenix room doors where there is only one supplier. However, HMYOI Cookham Wood has agreed a full scope of work with MoJ Property Services and regular quality checks have been introduced to ensure all unit refurbishments are acceptable. Two landings so far have had a complete refurbishment and are free from graffiti and it is reassuring to note that these are much appreciated by the young people. Plans are in place to fully refurbish further living accommodation including Cedar Unit. Work on the in-room detection and new smoke extraction units for both Cedar and Phoenix units is due to be completed within the 2023-24 financial year. In addition, rooms that were out of action are now being painted by agency staff and the MoJ has recruited an additional contractor to focus solely on graffitied accommodation rooms as the facilities management provider only has one painter and they were unable to keep on top of all the graffiti. A review of why young people graffiti at Cookham Wood is currently being completed and a decency strategy will be developed to improve the living conditions to make the environment young person focused and tackle issues such as graffiti.

A space to teach practical activities and the conversion of the constant watch room to toilet facilities were requested but the associated cost was above the agreed budget and is not able to be progressed. The former shower unit is also unsuitable to be converted to a staff toilet as there is no sewage infrastructure and it would be too disruptive to put this in place.

### **Staffing and Purposeful Activity**

It is recognised that HMYOI Cookham Wood is at 83% staffing within the frontline Youth Justice Worker group and ongoing recruitment is continuing to be delivered by MoJ Resourcing to address this shortfall. In the short-term, incentivised overtime has been offered to staff to increase the amount of time young people can spend unlocked. Whilst the employment market in Kent and the Medway towns is highly competitive, HMYOI Cookham Wood is receiving marketing support, as well as having a market supplement to attract candidates. The 2022/23 pay award has also delivered an increase in base pay of at least 4% for all staff between bands 2 to 11, alongside further targeted pay rises for our lowest paid staff of up to £3,000 and the impact this and marketing is having on attracting candidates is being monitored.

In addition, work has commenced with local and national Human Resource leaders to improve retention and support for staff. Staff now receive guided reflective practice on a weekly basis to offer additional support and new colleague mentors have been recruited to offer specific support for new members of staff. To help staff who have experienced a traumatic event, such as an assault, whether directly involved or witnessed from afar, they are supported by the Trauma Risk Incident Management (TRiM) Practitioners and Managers who have undergone specific training to enable them to understand the effects that these events can have upon people. Staff are offered practical advice and are signposted to specialist support services where appropriate and the provision of Occupational Health (OH) and the Employee Assistance Programme are also available.

Delivery of the new Education contract has recently commenced which has been designed to improve learning outcomes for young people by supporting the integration of custody, education and health services. This change is intended to align the curriculum closer to the requirements of the population with greater emphasis on vocational training and technology. Through a virtual campus, young people will be able to use an online career coach to find online courses and job opportunities whilst in custody. Young people will be timetabled for full-time education with the new contract providing 21.5 planned hours and additional enrichment provision planned for the evenings and weekends. There are some young people who will not be expected to be in full-time education due to their individual needs and will have a tailored timetable which will include other activities such as psychologically led interventions. The education pathway for these young people is built into the new education model and delivery is coordinated by the Enhanced Support Services team in line with the Framework of Integrated Care.