



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMYOI Wetherby
York Road
Wetherby
LS22 5ED

6 March 2023

Dear Chair,

HMYOI WETHERBY: 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 Wetherby over the reporting period, especially as you had several vacancies. The IMB Secretariat are aware of the difficulties you are facing in completing your work and I can confirm that they will be addressing these concerns directly with the Board.

I understand that my predecessor Robert Butler MP visited the establishment on 29 September 2022 and hope this was helpful. I address below the specific points you have raised for my attention.

The government views tackling serious violent crime as an absolute priority and believes that every young life lost to violence is one too many. We are doing everything in our power to keep young people safe and are pursuing a twin-track approach to address the underlying causes of serious violence combined with tough enforcement to remove dangerous weapons off the streets with programmes that steer young people away from crime.

We are demonstrating that commitment by investing £130m this financial year (2022/23) into activity to tackle serious violence in the community, including murder and knife crime. This includes £64m for Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) in local communities which bring partners together to tackle the drivers of violence in their area including early intervention and prevention programmes to divert people away from a life of crime, and our £30m 'Grip' programme operating in the same twenty areas as VRUs to identify violence hotspots and target activity in those areas. We also remain committed to evaluating the programmes and initiatives we fund. Analysis shows that a combination of the VRU and Grip programmes has prevented an estimated 49,000 violent offences in their first two years of activity. The Home Office is providing £200million over ten years for the Youth Endowment Fund to build a comprehensive evidence base around what works in preventing youth violence and to encourage practitioners to adopt effective practices.

The long-term position on continuing to place girls within the Youth Secure Estate is currently being considered by the Youth Custody Service (YCS). The YCS Placements team currently consider all possible options to avoid long journeys for children to and from court, including lodging girls at other sites within the Youth Secure Estate where appropriate. Since November 2022, an additional placement option for girls has been available at Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC) on a full-time basis, providing wider options to manage highly vulnerable girls.

The YCS, with the support of wider prison and probation service departments, is undertaking a review of the long-term viability of HMYOI Wetherby as a continued placement option for girls as part of the review for the YCS Future Estate Strategy. The review is due to be completed by the end of March 2023 with input from key stakeholders. Whilst supporting a policy stance the review will also seek to understand the impact and operating effectiveness of this unit on girls and subsequent effects on boys.

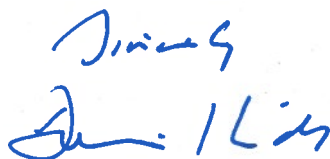
Turning to assaults on staff members working within the Youth Secure Estate, I can confirm that staff in the YCS, known as Youth Justice Workers, are classed as emergency service workers. They are given the same levels of protection as other front line emergency workers and assaults against them are taken seriously. However, prosecutions for assaults against Youth Justice Workers and sentencing of these offenders may differ due to the age of the children involved (from 12 to 17 years old). The Crown Prosecution Service and courts will consider the plea of the child to the assault together with the current sentence the child is serving.

In regards to children's Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), there are various funding streams allocated to children in the community designed to improve outcomes that are no longer accessible once a child enters custody. Whilst the EHCP itself does not formally end when a child enters custody, access to additional funding and engagement with local authorities can affect the level of support children receive. Additionally, when children enter custody, some EHCPs have not been reviewed or revisited for some time and accessing assessment teams to ensure current needs are addressed can be lengthy. The YCS is liaising with the Department for Education to address how EHCPs are managed when a child enters custody and are reviewing the current position to improve the continuity of funding and support for children in custody.

It was encouraging to receive your comments about the good relationship between young people and staff, the excellent initiatives offered to young people such as the Three Peaks Challenge, and the most successful year ever for Koestler awards entries. It is also a credit to all staff at the establishment for skilfully managing complex young people whilst they await transfer to specialist mental health facilities and for creating a general atmosphere where sadly some say they do not want to be released.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to 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 Wetherby.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Prisons and Probation

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Staff Recruitment and Retention

It is recognised staff retention and recruitment is a challenge at many establishments and not limited to the youth estate. The staffing position at HMYOI Wetherby was impacted by the closure of Rainsbrook STC which resulted in an increased number of children and young people being placed at the establishment. This, alongside the decision to place girls at HMYOI Wetherby, impacted on resourcing and contributed to the need to increase staffing levels. Alongside changes made to pay progression arrangements, MoJ Resourcing continues to deliver recruitment campaigns to recruit Youth Justice Workers. HMPPS recently went live with podcasts with existing employees talking about their experience and changing roles. This supports the work HMPPS is doing to improve the branding of the agency and the focus from the YCS on Youth Justice Worker recruitment.

Since April 2022, HMPPS has invested in several new initiatives to improve the experience of new joiners and increase retention of employees. These include a new peer-to-peer learning scheme, the introduction of mentors for new employees, a supervision pilot in two prisons, and new leadership training in prisons facing retention challenges. A national Career Pathways Framework has been developed to allow staff to see career options and the variety of job roles available to them across prisons, the probation service, youth custody and headquarters. The framework includes extensive information about learning and development programmes available to aid progression and obtain qualifications.

Every YOI also has a Retention Action Plan to focus on actions generated by exit interviews. Retention rates at HMYOI Wetherby have improved and are now among the best in the country. Average leaving rates now fall significantly below the YCS average and the Adult Prison Estate. To ensure the establishment has a skilled workforce specifically trained to work with children, the YCS has provided funding for every Youth Justice Worker across the estate to take up a qualification in youth justice. As of January 2023, there are 336 Youth Justice Specialists in post with a further 280 staff working towards qualification across the YCS. A review of delivery and impact of the foundation degree and apprenticeship is scheduled to take place during 2023.

Family Contact

Most of the children within the Youth Secure Estate are placed within the catchment area of where their court appearances are taking place, as proximity to home is a key placement factor when determining where a child should be placed. As at the end of November 2022, data presenting the average distance from home (where home address was recorded) in the Youth Secure Estate show that 61% were placed less than fifty miles from home. Distance is measured in miles and is the direct geographical distance between the child home to the establishment. Girls can now be placed into Oakhill STC, reducing the chance of girls being placed more than fifty miles from their home.

Support from family is a key factor in safety, resettlement and reducing reoffending and the YCS is committed to supporting and strengthening supportive relationships for the children in our care, ultimately improving life chances for the future. The YCS is undertaking an internal Family Review to ensure we have a clear picture of our current practices and a clear plan to set out how we will act to improve our approach.

Due to operational reasons, HMYOI Werrington's operational capacity was temporarily reduced in June 2022 which had an impact on placements at HMYOI Wetherby. Consequently, the small number of beds available at HMYOI Werrington were kept for children on remand in local courts to ensure the YCS could facilitate future court appearances. Between 1 June 2022 to 31 August 2022, the end of the reporting period, thirteen children were diverted from HMYOI Werrington's catchment area with eleven being diverted to HMYOI Wetherby. The operational capacity at HMYOI Werrington was increased to seventy-five along with five contingency beds, during the week commencing 23 January 2023, with the intention that fewer children must be placed further away from their catchment area and into sites such as HMYOI Wetherby. Over time, the YCS will continue to gradually increase the operational capacity at HMYOI Werrington whilst keeping a close eye on stability.