



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

19th February 2024

Dear Chair,

**HMYOI WETHERBY: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 – 31 AUGUST 2023**

Thank you for providing your Board's annual report on HMYOI Wetherby. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, particularly as you continued to operate with several vacancies. I hope my predecessor Damian Hinds MP's visit to HMYOI Wetherby on 9 November 2023 was helpful.

I appreciate the Board's continued concerns about the suitability of placing girls at HMYOI Wetherby. The review into detaining girls at HMYOI Wetherby (April 2023) concluded that the establishment was a safe and appropriate placement option based on the support and care that it can provide. However, work is progressing to develop a 'Children and Young People's Strategy' as a priority area for the Youth Custody Service (YCS). This strategy, which will incorporate the work around the future estate, will set out a clear set of strategic ambitions for the Children and Young People Secure Estate, how we will care and support our children, the outcomes we are trying to achieve and how we want staff to operate to enable these outcomes. This will include our approach to girls, recognising that although the numbers of girls in custody remain small, they are often some of the most complex children in the estate.

Latest published youth custody statistics highlight that in December 2023 there were just six girls in custody and 544 boys, including eighteen-year-olds. The complexities that girls present in the secure estate is unique and no doubt brings about distinct challenges for the staff caring for them. The YCS has a range of placement options for girls within the Youth Estate beyond HMYOI Wetherby and includes Oakhill Secure Training Centre and most secure children's homes. Girls will also be placed at the new Oasis Restore Secure School that is due to open later this year.

The adult male prison population has been under acute pressure since September 2022. Due to the ongoing pressures on the adult male estate, Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) are expected to hold 18-year-olds longer than they have historically. This is a temporary change in policy, and it is anticipated that we will be able to end this by January 2025. The change is to enable spaces in the adult resettlement estate to be prioritised for use by reception prisons. The request for flexibility should be mitigated in the long term by recent initiatives to relieve some of the pressures experienced in the prison population. A thorough review of how the interim policy arrangements are operating in practice is to be completed by summer 2024.

I understand the Board's ongoing concerns about local authority payments for some children and young people. The Board will be aware these payments vary up to £40 per week for each recipient and we recognise that there is inconsistency in these payments across the authorities. The issue of consistency in financial assistance for all children and young persons is an area that has been raised by HM

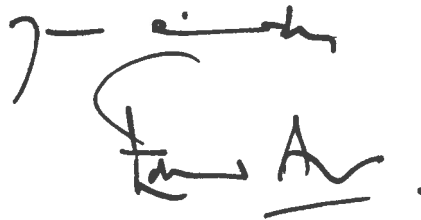
Inspectorate of Prisons in its recent remand thematic report and one that the YCS will continue to raise to local authorities through existing forums and relationships.

The Childrens Act 1989 (Section 20) governs provision of accommodation for children and the YCS is aware that young people are not always released to an address deemed to be suitable by the social care team. The YCS, in collaboration with the Youth Justice Board, has consequently set performance targets on release accommodation and this is routinely monitored as part of the YCS' performance framework. HMYOI Wetherby will continue to challenge any occasions where the establishment believes the address location is not appropriate.

It was reassuring to receive your comments about the exemplary patience and skill demonstrated by staff in supporting the young people at HMYOI Wetherby, the effectiveness of the conflict resolution team, and the positive feedback from the Independent Restraint Review Panel. I also appreciate the Board's recognition of the investment made in the colleges and general site improvement, together with the refurbishment of the separation unit.

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. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

I appreciate the valuable contribution from members of Independent Monitoring Boards, and I am grateful for the work you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Argar', with a large, stylized initial 'E' and a flourish at the end.

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Interventions

Whilst interventions to address offending behaviour are not delivered to remanded (un-convicted) children and young persons, the Secure Stairs model is the primary tool for supporting all young people in our care and we continue in our efforts to implement this fully across all our YOI's. Support by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team is determined by clinical need and not legal status. All children can be supported in relational work by youth justice workers.

Purposeful Activity and Reintegration Preparation

The YCS has increased the levels of learning in some courses, including GCSE and A-Levels in English, maths, and level 3 units in the vocational offer. Several employment opportunities have been introduced at HMYOI Wetherby alongside a skills tracker. The tracker helps to identify skills gaps and progress in technical and essential employability skills, supporting transitions into the adult estate, and employment in the community.

Male Officer Recruitment

HMPPS is actively monitoring the ratio of male to female Youth Justice workers at all sites to establish whether future campaigns need to be targeted. Any consideration around targeted campaigns would be subject to legal advice. HMPPS embraces diversity and promotes equal opportunities and aims to have a workforce that represents the wider society that we serve. Our attraction methods aim to portray a diverse range of individuals to encourage applications from people of all backgrounds. The Ministry of Justice is currently in the process of refreshing some of the Youth Justice Worker specific content and this will be reflective of those working in the Youth Custody Service.

Staff Attrition

HMPPS acknowledges there has been a recent increase in resignations for new starters. Retention levels at HMYOI Wetherby are not a significant concern as overall the establishment is close to its staff-in-post targets. HMYOI Wetherby has a below average attrition rate in comparison to the national figure, and the length of service of its Band 3-5 group is the same as the national average.

To support new staff in their early career journeys and to provide supportive early onboarding, HMPPS has New Colleague Mentors (NCMs) in place throughout the estate. NCMs implement buddying schemes within their establishments which provide informal peer-to-peer support.

Placements and Family Links

The Placements team take a number of considerations into account when determining the appropriate placement for children and young persons. One of these considerations is proximity to home, although this cannot be the only consideration. Our estate is geographically dispersed and as such there are several initiatives to assist children to maintain family ties and contact. These include access to virtual visits, family days, and provision of some free calls to family. The Placements team also consider requests for children to spend periods of time lodging at alternative establishments to enable them to access accumulated visits from family and will continue to do so where possible and appropriate.