



HM Prison &
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Dear Charlie,

HMIP Thematic Report – Building Trust: The Importance of Positive Relationships in Young Offender Institutions – 12-month update.

In 2025 you shared the HMIP Thematic Report – Building Trust: The Importance of Positive Relationships in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). In line with the requirements of our Memorandum of Understanding I am now writing to provide you with the 12-month final update on the concerns that you raised.

As you know, the YCS developed the roadmap to effective practice in the public sector YOIs, working in partnership with NHS England, education providers and psychology services. The roadmaps focus on achieving critical outcomes, such as safety, behaviour management and education, Each YOI has been working to its roadmap for over 12 months.

Our update to the concerns raised in the report are as follows:

1. The limited time children spent out of their cells meant there were few opportunities for them to build trusting relationships with staff.

When we wrote to you previously, we talked about creating spaces for co-located multi agency hubs. Whilst this work continues, we are focussing on ensuring staff presence and accessibility on units and a refreshed focus on the introduction, and consistency of support teams. We have also seen a further reduction in the youth custody population which has meant that we have improved staff to young person ratios.

We remain committed to single communities in our YOI's.

In our previous letter we provided an update on the implementation of the Custody Support Plan (CuSP). Through the roadmap to effective practice, YCS are now prioritising relational practice but not proscripting the delivery of CuSP. This means that CuSP is no longer in place across all sites.

In HMYOI Werrington it has been replaced with a locally designed model developed in collaboration with key stakeholders. This has included incorporating the voice of children. Early performance indicators over a 12-month period at Werrington point to a significant improvement in relationships between staff and children. This is reflected in reductions in violence as well as more positive feedback from both children and staff. Further evidence of impact will be drawn from HMIP surveys of children conducted during inspections and Independent Review Panels (IRPs).

Conflict Resolution continues to be delivered with examples of successful outcomes. However, the shrinking estate, wider displacement of young people and community affiliations can impact our ability to deliver successful outcomes, particularly where conflict is embedded and complex.

2. Systems designed to support staff to develop good relationships were poorly implemented and the framework for integrated care did not include frontline staff who worked directly with children.

The roadmap to effective practice is underpinned by the Framework for Integrated Care (FfIC). The Integrated Care Board (ICB) is well established within the YCS governance structures, with a focus on supporting local teams to deliver and sustain the framework. As above, as part of the roadmap to effective practice delivery YCS are prioritising relational practice as the core function of the regime, ensuring it is no longer seen as secondary to process. This includes explicitly recognising frontline staff as central to the delivery of integrated care, with their day-to-day interactions providing the primary insight into children's needs, risks and progress. YCS are embedding this into practice by ensuring that frontline staff contribute to, and inform, Support Team discussions, planning and decision-making. This approach seeks to strengthen the role of those who know the child best and ensuring care is grounded in real, lived experience, these are our agents of change. To further support this, the Head of Integrated Care for YCS has developed "*Delivering Integrated Care in YOIs*", a practical summary for sites, alongside an operational toolkit to guide consistent application and support frontline delivery.

To support staff in their endeavours with children, the various elements of the Behaviour Management and Support (BMS) framework have been reviewed, incorporating the views of front-line staff and clinicians to ensure that the various initiatives support delivery and outcomes for staff and children alike. This review has identified learning and opportunities to do things differently in a more flexible and needs / risks led way.

To support consistent implementation, we are adjusting regimes to create the time, space and structure needed for meaningful relational engagement. This includes building in protected time for staff-child interaction, setting clear minimum expectations for relational contact, and ensuring that responsibility for relationships is shared across the whole team.

The accompanying practical summary and toolkit provide sites with clear guidance on how to operationalise this within existing structures, reinforcing consistency and embedding best practice. By doing so, YCS are moving away from fragmented or discretionary approaches and towards a coherent, system-wide model where relational practice is planned, prioritised and actively supported through leadership, regime design and workforce expectations.

3. Many frontline residential staff did not receive regular support and supervision from line managers to enable them to develop their skills.

Guided Reflective Practice (GRP) has been reviewed across YOIs as part of the broader roadmap programme. This review identified that GRP's potential impact on professional development is limited by gaps in the delivery of complementary staff support mechanisms, including Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), Care Team, debriefs, line management engagement, New Colleague Mentors (NCMs), and wellbeing support functions.

As a result of the improved staff support offer through year 1, there will now be increased focus on the quality and engagement with GRP through years 2 and 3 of roadmap delivery.

The YCS recognises the benefits of smaller units with higher staff-to-child ratios, and this vision remains central to our longer-term strategy. At the same time, YCS are firmly focused on transforming our existing YOIs to ensure that improvements are felt consistently across the estate. Whilst I acknowledge there is work to do, YCS are beginning to see early signs of progress, with some encouraging examples of practice that are strengthening relationships and contributing to safer, more supportive environments for both children and staff. YCS are committed to building on these foundations by embedding consistent relational practice, strengthening staff capability and support, and ensuring leadership focus at all levels. Through this, YCS aim to sustain momentum and deliver the cultural and operational changes needed to realise the ambitions set out in the thematic review and to improve outcomes for children in our care.

Yours sincerely,



Alison Clarke,
Youth Custody Service (YCS) Executive Director