

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Children and young adults in the secure estate](#), HC 1623

Tuesday 21 April 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 21 April 2026.

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Members present: Andy Slaughter (Chair); Pam Cox; Sir Ashley Fox; Warinder Juss; Sarah Russell; Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst; Vikki Slade; and Tony Vaughan.

Questions 1 to 95

Witnesses

[I](#): Rachel Ashurst, Service Manager, Barton Moss Secure Children's Home; Mark Scott, Governor, HMYOI Wetherby; and Phil Wragg, Director, Oakhill Secure Training Centre.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rachel Ashurst, Mark Scott and Phil Wragg.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Justice Select Committee, which is conducting its first evidence session in a new inquiry into children and young adults in the secure estate. We are very pleased to have with us three very experienced people who have run different types of youth custodial institutions. I will ask them to introduce themselves and their institutions in a moment after we have done our usual declarations of interest, starting with Warinder Juss.

Warinder Juss: Good afternoon. I am Warinder Juss, Member of Parliament in Wolverhampton West. I am a solicitor with a practising certificate but I am not practising at the moment. I am a member of the GMB trade union executive council and a member of various APPGs.

Pam Cox: Good afternoon. I am Pam Cox, the Member of Parliament for Colchester. My interests are as declared on the register. I would just add that I am the chair of the Penal Affairs APPG.

Chair: I am Andy Slaughter, the Chair of the Committee and MP for Hammersmith and Chiswick. I am a non-practising barrister. I am a member of the GMB and Unite trade unions, and I am the patron of two justice-related charities: Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre and The Upper Room for ex-offenders.

Vikki Slade: I am Vikki Slade, Member of Parliament for Mid Dorset and North Poole. My interests are as per the register, but none is relevant to this Committee.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: I am Neil Shastri-Hurst. I am the Member of Parliament for Solihull West and Shirley. My interests are as per the register, but I am also a registered barrister with a practising certificate.

Sir Ashley Fox: I am Ashley Fox, the Member of Parliament for Bridgwater. I am a former solicitor, and my interests are on the register.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much. As the first issue, just as a scene setter, we are aware that with what is now a relatively small population of young people in custody we have four separate types of institution. This is all familiar for you and something you are used to, but probably not to us and not to the public at large. Could I ask you first of all, in turn, to perhaps introduce yourselves and give a brief overview of your establishment, what its population size is and what its specific remit is? We will start with Mr Scott.

Mark Scott: I am Mark Scott. I am the Governor of HMYOI Wetherby. I have been at Wetherby since May 2024, having spent 30 years working in the prison service, predominantly in male adult prisons and a range of establishments. This is my first time working with children in custody.



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Wetherby holds male children from the ages of 15 to 18, where we provide education delivery and other activities that will hopefully resettle the children into better lives going forward.

Rachel Ashurst: Good afternoon, everybody. I work at Barton Moss Secure Children's Home. We can have children from the ages of 10 to 18, all boys. In reality, our population is aged 15 and 16 mainly or 14 to 17. We have up to 24 boys split over four homes of up to six children in each of the homes. I have been at Barton Moss since June last year. Prior to that, I worked in social care, and I am currently still a registered social worker.

Phil Wragg: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Phil Wragg. I am the Director with G4S at Oakhill Secure Training Centre, which is located in Milton Keynes. Our centre can take up to 80 children. This morning, just for reference, in our care we had 48 children. Normally, it sits around about 60. That is children both male and female.

To give that some context, this morning there were four female children at Oakhill. The remainder are obviously male. The age range is normally from 12 up until 18. However, we have not had anybody as young as 12 or 13 in our care for the last three years. We do have children in care from the age of 14 upwards, up until 18. We are the only secure training centre operating in the UK.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. I have figures from February this year that say that the total population for all youth custody is 412, of which 291 are in YOIs, 53 are in the STC and 68 are in a secure children's home. That is a 70:15:15 split, very roughly. Is that for historical reasons or is that because that is the way that the population should divide? In other words, is that the appropriate split for the people we have in the youth estate at the moment, or would you like to see it differently distributed?

Phil Wragg: I think it probably is. It represents children being in the appropriate location. What we have seen over the last few years is a significant decrease in the number of children who are placed in our care across secure children's homes, YOIs or indeed the STC estate. I think we can say that now it is probably the most complex of children, those who are very poorly, who are with us in our care. We would suggest that those who do not require our care are now being looked after in the community.

Q4 **Chair:** I will say that if we have a question that is specific to one of you, we will make that clear. Otherwise, feel free to answer. Equally, we do not need you all to answer each question.

If I put that another way, what changes would you want to see? As we understand it, the different institutions have more intensive staff ratios or a different function, perhaps, in terms of education or the vulnerability of the children in them. How would you like to see that change? What is wrong with the system at the moment?



Rachel Ashurst: I guess I would go with what works rather than what is wrong. Coming from a secure children's home point of view, our ratios are 1:2 at minimum. What that enables us to do is to work in a trauma-informed way and a child-specific way. We develop our relationships with the children, which means that we can offer the care and support that they need, managing that trauma and working with that child to improve their outcome. That includes education, health, and day-to-day care from our residential care workers. My colleagues can come in here, but their challenges would be more about the larger population. I guess what does work is smaller populations and more direct work with the children.

Mark Scott: Yes, I would agree with that. Certainly, from a Wetherby perspective, we can hold the most throughout the youth custody estate. We have just had our operational capacity reduced to 154. It was over 300, but we have not seen those numbers in a significant time so that has been reduced. When I started at Wetherby in May 2024, we were averaging and fluctuating between 150 and 160 children in our care. That created some real challenges to keep our children safe and to keep our staff safe.

Learning from the SCHs and STCs in terms of having the lower number of children to be able to do that trauma-informed practice so that our staff can build relational practice with our children in custody, a reduction in the children has allowed my staff to do that, which is improving outcomes for children as well. This morning, I had 84 children in Wetherby, which is a significant drop from two years ago at 160.

As the Governor of Wetherby, what I am seeing is that that has allowed us to reduce violence. It has allowed us to reduce self-harm. It has allowed us to give improved education facilities and better access to the regime and time out of room. A reduction in those numbers allows the staff to really focus on that child and that child's need.

Q5 **Chair:** Is that just because the numbers have fallen and therefore the staffing ratios are better? Do you have any of the problems that they have in the adult estate in terms of staff shortages or people locked up for a long time?

Mark Scott: I can only speak for Wetherby. I don't suffer with staff shortages. I am able to recruit staff. However, my colleagues in other YOIs, Werrington and Feltham, do find that recruitment is difficult. They do struggle with resources. Again, I am at the moment supporting those establishments with some staff going down on detached duty to enable them to run some regimes. From Wetherby's perspective, I do not struggle with resources and recruitment.

Phil Wragg: Chair, can I just go back to your previous question a moment ago about what changes we would like to see?

Chair: Yes.



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Phil Wragg: I would really like to see a change in legislation in respect of how we look after children. At the moment what we have is a YOI operating completely differently to an STC. A child looked after in an STC today will be very well looked after in a YOI but the rules and conditions—the framework, if you will—in a YOI is different. What we need to do is look at how we want to look after our children in the different jurisdictions that we have and ensure that we have a common framework that is fit for purpose.

To answer the question regarding staffing, Milton Keynes is a very buoyant area for employment, but we don't suffer from employment issues in terms of getting new recruits, who go through an extensive training course into G4S. My figures, as they are at the moment, for employability rates longer than 12 months, 71% of frontline officers have been in post for longer than 12 months and 77% of all staff have been in post for longer than 12 months.

We do not have an issue and that means that the training and the experience that is then discharged on the children is obviously very well seated. People get used to working with children and they do not leave, and then we have new people coming in who have to be trained and they take time to become established.

Q6 **Chair:** What are the staff to child ratios in STC and YOI?

Phil Wragg: Two to one in an STC.

Mark Scott: In Wetherby, with a low roll at the minute, it is equal to around about 2:1 or 3:1 with the regime that we deliver.

Q7 **Vikki Slade:** Can I just ask a quick question on that, which just struck me? If we had schools where the roll was falling, the funding would fall with it. How does your funding work? Is there a risk of reduced funding if you have reduced numbers in your establishments?

Mark Scott: At the moment there is no reduction in my funding, but it allows me to do different elements, whereas if I had a full complement I would be restricted. At the moment I have around about 30 staff shortfalls in terms of band 3 or band 4 youth justice workers. I don't need to recruit into those at the minute, but it allows me to free up some financial resource to do other elements. I am changing some of the resource element within Wetherby to do things like vocational training and have vocational instructors to do additional learning with the children.

Q8 **Chair:** Can I just pick up what you were saying, Mr Wragg? Do we need YOIs and STCs? I thought the plan was that they would both be replaced with secure schools. Well, we have all been following the history of secure schools for about a decade: not much luck so far. Where is that going? The overwhelming majority of young people in custody are going to be in that type of institution, so what is the best model for it?



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Phil Wragg: I think secure schools is something that is in progress. YCS colleagues will be in a better place to talk about where they are with secure schools and when they will come back online in the future.

To answer your question about whether we need STCs and YOIs, yes, we do. I think they serve a very defined purpose. An STC from 1988, when they came into fruition, if you will, was dealing with a different child than what it is now. What we need to do is to look at the child and the complexities that they bring to all our establishments. What do we need to do to refine that, to make sure that we make our provision fit for the child of today?

We have already heard this afternoon that we have fewer people in our care, but we must recognise that the children in our care are so much more complex. They are children who unfortunately have a background of violence. In Oakhill, 80% of my children are in for violent acts against the person. We are talking homicide, knife crime, street robbery and so on, and that is a very large number. Then if we really start to drill down into mental health, neurodiversity and so on, we start to understand just how—this is the word I am going to use—poorly these children really are and what the provision has to be to ensure that their needs are properly met.

Q9 **Chair:** I have one more question. Do you have 18-year-olds and over 18-year-olds in any of your institutions?

Rachel Ashurst: Yes.

Mark Scott: Yes.

Phil Wragg: Yes.

Q10 **Chair:** That number is going up, is it not?

Rachel Ashurst: No.

Mark Scott: No, it is going down.

Q11 **Chair:** Should they be there or should they not be there? Is this part of the transfer process?

Rachel Ashurst: Again, looking from a trauma approach, I guess it is how we manage it both legislatively and in a trauma approach way. When they need to move on to an adult provision, we do the transition and ensure that we prepare that young adult as best we can. It is similar to what Phil has just said. The level of trauma that the children and young adults have experienced requires that understanding for them to move on. It would be better for them to move on in that planned way than move in a rush, for example. It is coming down. We manage it.

At Barton Moss, for example, we would have an extra safety plan for adults and when they turn 18, which states that they cannot be left alone with any other child. In reality, our children are not left alone with each



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other anyway, but we do step up that level of supervision for that young person to protect the other children we are looking after. It is more about that transition and getting that transition right for them to go into the adult estate.

Mark Scott: Can I just put into context what the position is at the minute with 18-year-olds? In the youth custody setting at the minute, we have 67 18-year-olds in the system. I have 16 of those at Wetherby, which is a significant reduction over the last 12 months, so we have transitioned. Just to put some context to that as well, it can have some positives because the maturity levels sometimes are better from the 18-year-olds, who can then give some guidance to the younger children. There is also the context of the violence element as well in terms of an 18-year-old potentially using violence against a 15-year-old. There is a fine balance between what works and what does not work.

Q12 **Pam Cox:** While we are on the more general setting-up of the discussion here, I would quite like to explore the extent to which the children in your care have themselves been victims of crime beforehand. The victim/offender overlap is very high, particularly among younger people. Could you give me a broad idea about that?

Rachel Ashurst: Exploitation is a major factor. The work we do with our children is looking at and helping them understand that they are victims and what they can do, along with services around them, to support them when they do go back into the community. That is why the focus is very much about a child-centred, trauma-informed approach and understanding that, when there might be an incident whereby a child has reacted in a way that could be seen as aggressive or violent, what that is about. Often it is about a trauma response or dysregulation.

Our staff are building relationships with children, so they are able to prevent it to start with. If it does get to that point, it is how we manage it and what we do afterwards to support that child to understand what happened and where that fits into what happened prior to them coming to custody. I think Phil mentioned before that the level of trauma our children come in with is what we need to consider. Going back to your question around what we need to get better at, it is everyone understanding what our children need and what response in day-to-day care they need.

Q13 **Pam Cox:** Would you say the majority have experienced harm of some kind at the hands of an adult, an intimate adult, or another child?

Rachel Ashurst: Yes.

Q14 **Sir Ashley Fox:** Presumably, all the children in your care, as you have described it, are there because they have committed a criminal offence?

Rachel Ashurst: We do have some children on remand.

Q15 **Sir Ashley Fox:** Yes. You are describing these children as victims, but in



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fact they have also committed criminal offences. There are what I would call real victims, those that they have perpetrated these crimes against. How do you ensure that they accept that they are responsible for those crimes and that their responsibility is not absolved? I am slightly concerned about you talking about them as victims. There are real victims, people they have offended against, and they might not be perhaps terribly pleased to hear the perpetrators of those offences being described in these terms.

Rachel Ashurst: Well, I think it is both, isn't it?

Sir Ashley Fox: Well, I don't know.

Rachel Ashurst: Yes, it is. The answer to your question there is that we do interventions across the three sectors. We do offence focus work with the children around what happened and about taking responsibility and victim impact. However, none of that works if we do not understand the trauma and the reason behind what happened in the first place, which obviously is individual to each child. If we are going to look at moving children forward and help to make them safe in society, we have to understand the trauma that they have experienced.

We do offence focus work alongside any other issues that the child may have. I know Phil mentioned before that a lot of our children come in with suspected neurodiversity. They are waiting on assessments and we can help; our health teams can get involved and assess them for that. A lot of the time we have a better understanding of what is going on for that child day to day.

Phil Wragg: We recognise that, unfortunately, the children we care for have got to a place in their life where there has been a criminal outcome. Either they have been sentenced or they are remanded because an offence has occurred. The thing that we—and I think my colleagues too—have at the centre of what we do is the care for our children because they have been through such traumatic incidents, many from the beginning of their life, from when they were very small up until the point where they come to our care.

The one thing I will never do is split the barrier, if you will, between the victims of a crime and the victims of the children I have responsibility for. As my colleagues have said, we have interventions in place for those children who are sentenced. We cannot have interventions on children who are remanded. That is not appropriate and it does not happen. We work with our professionals and with our psychology team to ensure that our interventions for those children take place. As Rachel has just said, the core requirement of our responsibility is the care for that child, recognising the very traumatic place that they have been in their life to date.

Q16 **Warinder Juss:** Thank you for that. I see this when I go into schools. We come across children who have SEND needs and very often because



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their needs are not met they are seen as misbehaving or showing defiance. Considering the high level of children we have in these institutions who suffer from some form of neurodiversity, would there be an argument to say—and you have mentioned that we only have one STC in this country—that we should have more STCs and perhaps less YOIs?

Phil Wragg: They both perform an equally valuable function. My colleague will talk about education in YOI. If I can just talk about education in STC for a moment, I think it is a very good question and a point that is really important. It will not surprise the Committee that many children come to us who have been excluded from education, have not been in education for years. Unfortunately, for a percentage they cannot read or write. Within 12 weeks at Oakhill we will move a child on one point, one grade up, from basic levels of numeracy and literacy. We have children who are up to the point of GCSE and A-levels. Our spectrum of education provision using SEND teachers as well is very broad and encompasses all the needs and requirements for those children.

You will be aware that we are regulated and inspected by Ofsted. Ofsted is very clearly into our education provision and wanting to make sure that it is fit for purpose. At Oakhill we go a step further. We bring in our own expertise in education to ensure that we are a curriculum as high as we possibly can be.

We have just introduced science into our curriculum at Oakhill to ensure that all our children have accessibility, whether it is through academia or through vocational skills, to ensure those needs are met. I do not know, Mark, if you want to say something about your YOI provision.

Mark Scott: Yes. We are legally obliged to provide education provision within the YOI settings. It is set at a minimum of 15 hours per week. My observation from the education model that we deliver within YOIs is that it does not necessarily meet the core of the children we have in that custodial setting.

In Wetherby 80% of my children were excluded from mainstream education. They have lots of SEND needs and they have lots of neurodiversity needs. I do not think we particularly think about a child-first focus and what is right for that child at the stage within their life where education is then something that they wish to participate in and undertake. As much as we try to do that, that can cause difficulties.

It is difficult to navigate the education model. We currently work on an education contract within Wetherby that is provided by Novus, which was designed just prior to covid. Then we went into covid, things got put on hold, and we are now delivering that, which is a seven-year contract. However, I don't think we do enough within the YOI settings around vocational learning that we can then incorporate some of the core English, maths and so on into. That is work that we are undertaking within the YOIs to see how we can do that better.



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I have set up and used some of my resource money to bring in vocational instructors, and the kids are now thriving through that. They are actually learning better, they are developing better, and they are getting better skills where they are then asking to undertake maths and English. Previously, if you were to say to them, "We are going to put you in a maths class for two and a half hours", it did not really interest them. They did not want to do it. They could not concentrate for that length of time. Now they are seeing some of the benefits around that. We do need to think, especially in YOIs, about how we change some of that education delivery and do things differently for the cohort of children we have in custody.

Phil Wragg: Can I just add as well that in the STC our children receive 25 hours of education a week. With additional regime activity that equates to 40 hours a week that they are involved in a regime. That is very difficult for schools outside to be able to achieve. We start the core day by getting children up in the morning and ensuring that they have breakfast.

We actually have my staff walking children to school. When I do my rounds every morning at 8 o'clock, I am saying, "Are we up and about and have we got children going to school?" While we are a secure facility, as a training centre we really want to embody children going to school, and 98% of my children go to school.

Q17 **Vikki Slade:** Thank you. I know we are going to be coming back to talk about education in a little while, so I just want to go back to Ashley's point about the fact that these children have all committed crimes, some of them very serious crimes. I know that there is a very small number of children—maybe a tiny number of children—who are girls or at the younger end of the spectrum. That means they are not in a YOI, and they are in one of your two establishments.

How do you manage children who have very long sentences for very serious crimes, who have really no prospect of returning to the outside world, in their own imagination, alongside other children who are there for therapeutic reasons when they are very small establishments? I can see they could be lost in the system in YOIs, but they are not in YOIs, are they, those younger boys and girls? Is it young boys under 14 who do not go to YOIs?

Mark Scott: We only accept 15 to 18-year-olds.

Q18 **Vikki Slade:** You accept 15-plus. We all know some very famous cases where crimes happened at a very young age. Those children, how do you bring that together?

Rachel Ashurst: Every child who comes to us has a care plan that is bespoke to them anyway, in terms of all the information we already have about the child and what needs they have. Touching back on education, we would build an education plan to get them into that. We would adjust,



if you like, their day-to-day activities. For example, we have an incentive scheme, and the children get different things depending on their incentives and their points. It could be a later bedtime, but for a younger child we would change that to what would work for them and their incentives.

In answer to your question about how to keep them engaged, we do a lot of work around adjusting that care plan as they get older. We involve children in everything that we do, so it is done with them, but the education would be changed around to what their interests are as they get older. We do GCSEs, for example.

For some children, once they have done that, what do they do next? We have Duke of Edinburgh. We did CSCS cards for the building sites. We would look at what interests them. Yes, it is difficult when you know they are going on to the adult estate, but we still do the work with our interventions team around their offence, and also what else they need to work on and relationals.

It is more of a challenge when children have a long sentence and they are with us for a long time, but we continue to adjust that care plan with them around what we can do. Certainly, children who have long sentences often are not entitled to ROTL either, so we have to consider everything within the centre because they are not able to go out—sorry, ROTL is release on temporary licence.

Some children get towards the end of their licence, and they might go out for education and things like that. However, children with long sentences who are going on to an adult estate know that is not available to them, so we do have to be creative to keep children engaged. For girls I will hand over to Phil.

Pam Cox: I am coming on to girls.

Chair: You are, yes. We are getting off track. We have some questions from Neil Shastri-Hurst.

Q19 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: If I can pivot across to placements in the youth custody system, the Youth Custody Service's placement team determines them. Can you set out your experiences of how that process works?

Rachel Ashurst: The Youth Custody Service has a placement team that has its placement indicators. It will contact the establishments about a child. For example—and I will talk from our point of view—we would get a phone call with the information about the child, and we have an hour to make a decision whether we can meet that child's needs.

As secure children's homes come under children's home regs, we have to consider other children living with us and how that placement would impact them. We do come from, "How can we meet this child's needs?" rather than, "We can't", so we do look at what we can do. For example, we have four homes, so it might be that we could in a different way.



On occasion there are refusals, but I will say they are extremely low. Certainly, from a Barton Moss point of view there have been no refusals this year because we do come from the “How can we meet that child’s need?” The only reason we would refuse is if there was concerns around affiliations between the children. We would not be able to meet that need safely for anybody and it could impact on the package that we give the children when they are in our care.

Phil Wragg: In a secure training centre it is very much like the SCH in terms of timescales. We get limited time notification, and we get a brief history come through on the child, male or female, at Oakhill and we cannot say no. In terms of the regulations that underpin secure training centres, we have to take a child—male or female.

Often we will be taking children with short notice and unfortunately later into the evening. We might be receiving children who have travelled quite a considerable distance. Yesterday I received a female child into my care who travelled from Plymouth, and we are in Milton Keynes so not far from the middle of the country. That happens because the placements team will look at the centre, the site, the facility that can provide the best care at the time for that child.

Q20 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: Can I just pick up on that? You have said you get limited time, and you get limited information when the referrals are made across to you. How do you therefore ensure that you are effectively transferring a child’s care history or their risk profile from the community into one of your establishments?

Phil Wragg: I have an excellent resettlement team, who will be on the phone to YOT workers and social workers immediately. The information we get, first of all, is name, date of birth, medical history, what has happened today. Has the person been remanded into our care? Have they received a sentence? How were they at court? Did they display any suicidal ideation, any self-harm and so on? Are they on medication? Are the parents aware? What provision of the Act are they on?

That gives us enough to get started. Then we will be reaching out to youth team workers in the community and wanting to understand and build the profile of that child so that our staff know the child they are going to be getting into that care before that child arrives, remembering, of course, that we are talking about very complex children here, children who are coming to us with a raft of needs.

With female children, I will just refer to the Hancock report, which focussed in on the needs of female children. They are so much more complex and so much more likely to self-harm and have those concerns. The amount of information we can get so very quickly allows us to ensure that the care package is in place for that person before they arrive.

Q21 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: You have set out how it works. How could it be improved to ensure that it is more efficient and effective?



Rachel Ashurst: I think pulling in all colleagues together from all sectors to somehow have—it is data transfer. We all work on different systems. That is probably a bit pie in the sky, but in reality it is how we could share information more effectively and more quickly. Like I said, we do get an hour. As Phil said, we will do our best to gather the information, but it is a manual task that we have to gather the information. There is not a database, for example. There is not a quick way of getting all the information that we require at the time.

Equally, and you guys would be the same, when a child arrives we have a protocol of how we look after them. We have first night alert, for example, higher obs so we get to know our children. The children will watch some information on our home on the way, so they start to know what to expect.

We have somebody to meet them. We have very clear protocols of how we get a child into our care and obviously with that in itself we are building pictures. Then health also meets with them. We start to build a picture ourselves, alongside gathering the information from those who know the child, notwithstanding family members and that.

Phil Wragg: I would suggest that the to-our-care and the from-our-care communication needs to be sharpened up. I have a very serious concern about the ability to put one of our children back into the community and to do that in a place that meets their best needs. The communication of that can be somewhat challenging.

Equally, bringing that child into our care needs to be slicker. We need to have the professionals from the community accessible to a call so that we can download the information, ask the relevant questions, and assure ourselves that we understand all the requirements for that child before they get to us.

Q22 **Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:** Mr Wragg, you set out the example of a child who was transferred from Plymouth up into your institution in Milton Keynes. The youth custody population report sets out that around 60% of children and young people on the secure estate are based in an institution that is within 50 miles of their home, but around 15% are held over 100 miles from their home. That clearly poses challenges.

To what extent is a child who is held further from their home, and therefore their support network, more exposed to being volatile or at risk of adverse events than one who is housed closer to their home? Perhaps, Mr Scott, you would like to start with that.

Mark Scott: Yes. We accept that a child should be placed as close to home and family as possible. There are lots of factors that prevent that from happening. That could be, as my colleagues have described, evaluating the best placement for that child in terms of other elements and risks that they may pose to other people and risk to themselves as well, to make sure the best secure setting is provided for them.



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You are right that we do have a high number of children, about 15% of children in the youth custody setting, who are currently more than 100 miles away from home. We also do the best we can. Speaking for Wetherby, I offer family visits six days a week to allow families the opportunity to come and do a physical visit with their children. I also understand the difficulties of that in terms of travel, distance and so on.

We do an assisted visit scheme that will help financially for the families to come and visit their children. We do video calls with family members daily, and we are just looking at how we can develop that further with access being more prevalent for children. We do extended visits as well. If families are travelling a significant distance, instead of the usual timeframe that we allow for visits we may allow a double visit session to allow them to have an extended visit during their travel and their time within Wetherby.

For those who unfortunately do not receive visits, we also have our official prisoner visitor scheme that is run by the chaplaincy team. That is approved, vetted individuals who will come and provide support and visits to those children who do not receive family contact or visits.

Q23 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: Let's just keep on that thread because there will be those who receive a physical visit from their family and those who will have more video contact because of perhaps distance. Looking at the HMIP survey from 2024-25, for Wetherby 60% of children who did not receive a physical visit did not get a secure video from family or friends once a week, and in Oakhill it was 62%. That is quite a vacuum in having contact with a support network, which we know is so important upon release and for resettlement. What steps should HMPPS be doing to increase contact between family and friends amongst this group?

Mark Scott: As I just said previously, we are developing technology and I think we have to use technology better within our custodial environments. Within youth offender institutions and in Wetherby each child has a laptop to be able to do education, to contact other departments and professionals, where they can communicate with them.

There are podcasts, videos and so on. We are looking at how we can develop that technology to allow the children to have video visits and video calls within the confines of their rooms. That could be enhanced further to allow them to do that. In terms of family contact, they also have telephones within their rooms, so they can make calls whenever they wish to family and friends to maintain that contact.

Q24 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: I gave you the data from 2024-25. You say you are making progress on that. What are the figures for 2025-26?

Mark Scott: I couldn't tell you the figures, but I could try to get those figures for you.

Q25 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: Mr Wragg, are you able to?



Phil Wragg: I cannot give you the latest data, but we can certainly get that data for you. I think, though, that I would just emulate what Mark has just said in respect of all the access points for family to be able to meet with children. We have telephones in rooms as well. Family days are very important to us at Oakhill.

We have four themed family days per year, and what often concerns me is the efforts that some families do not go to see their children, even though we try very hard. We support and we assist families to be able to come and visit their children, but we have to work equally as hard with the children who do get family visits and with those who do not get family visits to ensure that their needs are catered for because the family, for whatever reason, do not come and see their child.

Q26 **Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:** Ms Ashurst, local authorities have the right to refuse a placement of a child in a secure home. On what grounds would that child be refused? Can you also set out roughly what percentage are refused annually?

Rachel Ashurst: As I said previously, our refusals are extremely low; we have had none this year. Where we would refuse would be where we did not feel we could meet that child's needs safely or the impact on another child, such as gang affiliations.

Where we might not feel we could meet that child's needs may be that they have a mental illness that would need, say, a tier 4 mental health bed. We do have to consider the other children who are in our population to ensure that those children who are currently living within the setting are not disrupted.

We do look at how we can meet the need and it is not a default that we refuse. Refusals are extremely low, but the reason we would refuse is set out in legislation under the children's home regulations. Like I said, it is extremely low. Certainly, from a Barton Moss point of view, we have had no refusals this year, and we do look at the how.

Q27 **Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:** I take the message you are saying that this is very low. You have given an example that they may go to a secure mental health bed. Of those who are refused, albeit there were none in the last year, what proportion are then pushed into the YOI or the STC estate, where perhaps they are the ones with the most complex needs and that is not the most appropriate setting for them?

Rachel Ashurst: If there is a figure for that we can get that to you. However, my experience would be that we would be looking at another secure children's home. If the level of need is the secure children's home, then we would look at another. It could be, for example, we could not have two children who were co-accused because that could impact on the criminal proceedings and our ability to safely care for each of them, so the YCS would look at a different secure children's home.



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Sometimes when we get a referral we know because of what children are telling us or another professional tells us that there is some affiliation that has been missed, at which point we would go back to the YCS placement team and explain, "We are concerned about this because of". For example, "We are worried about the affiliation with another one of the children in our care, and we do not feel we would be able to offer the same amount of input to all children if we had both at the centre".

Q28 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: Within the secure home estate, you have welfare placements where they often involve children who are a high risk to themselves, whether that is through self-harm or other means. You have justice placements that are potentially children who are high risk to others. How do you manage that balance within the same space?

Rachel Ashurst: At Barton Moss we only do Youth Custody Service. All our beds are to the Youth Custody Service. However, I know from other SCHs that they look at the child's individual needs and assess how they can meet those needs within that setting. Again, it would come down to individual care plans. However, for Barton Moss, we do only take children through the Youth Custody Service.

Q29 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: I think you said in your earlier evidence that you do not have anyone as young as 10 at the moment—

Rachel Ashurst: No.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: —but you can take them?

Rachel Ashurst: We could. However, that would need direction from the Secretary of State, the oversight of that, and that would again only be through the Youth Custody Service. There are different sentencing guidelines that are not available for 10 to 12-year-olds in any event. It would be a very serious offence for a child that young to come to us. I think in the last year there has only been one 12-year-old. In fact, there has not been any 12-year-olds in the last year and certainly none younger than that.

Q30 Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: Would that trigger any specific safeguarding protocols if they are under 12, for example?

Rachel Ashurst: The oversight would have to be right up to the Secretary of State, but we would also work with professionals who know that child best about how to meet that child's needs. We would, as I said earlier, amend care plans and things for what that child needed at that age. However, it is highly unlikely that we would get a child that age. The majority, even in the SCHs, are 15 and 16-year-olds.

Q31 Pam Cox: I want to turn now to the question of girls in custody. Following the 2025 Hancock review, the MOJ accepted the recommendation that the placement of girls in YOIs should end. I would like to ask Mark what lessons were learned at Wetherby regarding the safety of girls and the unsuitability of YOIs for them.



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Mark Scott: Well, obviously we did accept the full recommendations from the Hancock review in March 2025. However, previous to that, at YCS we accepted that potentially Wetherby was not the best placement for girls in a custodial setting. We ceased taking girls into Wetherby in October 2024, so well before the review was published.

My personal experience from that, arriving in Wetherby in May 2024 up until the time in October, is that with the complexities I saw and experienced from the girls it was quickly evident that we had not given our staff the skills and the training, and the environment that we had in Wetherby was not fulfilling to keep girls in.

My understanding around some of that is that the initial decisions that were taken previous to my arrival in Wetherby by the YCS to place girls in Wetherby were potentially a short-term measure, but that ended up taking longer to make a decision and the girls remained within Wetherby. Although some additional resources were provided for the girls, I don't feel as though we gave our staff the tools, the training, and the skills to be able to deal with the complexities and the needs of a girl population within a custodial setting.

They were fundamentally the lessons that I could see, that if we were to have in the future girls within a YOI—and that is not the caveat that we will do—then we would have to do the planning better to make sure we learn the lessons that we got wrong from placing them in YOIs in the first place.

Q32 **Pam Cox:** Thank you. That raises the question of where girls are best placed. At the moment, the MOJ's position is that the secure children's homes are the favoured institution. We know that girls make up around 3% of the overall total in the secure estate but are much more deeply affected by issues around self-harm, trauma, and mental health issues. That has a long history in the justice system. Do you think secure children's homes are better placed to deal with girls? If that is the case, should we stop placing them in STCs entirely?

Rachel Ashurst: I agree that girls should be placed in SCHs, and I think it is because we can provide that smaller environment. Similar to what I said earlier, it is about the model, I guess, rather than the physicality of the provision, and the model being based on smaller provisions, higher staff ratio, and relational practice. I am going to hand over to Phil now, given that we don't currently take girls and Phil does, and he can answer the STC question.

Phil Wragg: Thank you. I have four female children in my care at the moment, all very complex, different to boys entirely—more likely to self-harm, more likely to have suffered trauma, sexual exploitation and so on.

In my time—and I have only been at Oakhill since December 2025—I have already recognised that we need to make the female provision for



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children at Oakhill a centre of excellence, and we have started the work already. It is a super exciting piece of work.

Staff are recruited and trained specifically to work with our female children, removing them from uniform and putting them into clothing that is far more akin to working with those children who require that much more focus from a regular, well-trained group of staff, ensuring that our regime, for want of a better word, endorses and echoes the needs of those female complex children. If people were to turn around and say, "Why would you send a female child to Oakhill?" I would say, "Well, why wouldn't you when my centre of excellence is open?"

As I said earlier on in my evidence, we cannot say no to any child coming to Oakhill, so what we need to do is make Oakhill the best it can be. It delivers a bespoke service, particularly to female children, to ensure that their needs, which are very nuanced, are appropriately met. We are a small unit, yes, but we are equipped to be able to cater for that very complex group of children where unfortunately things like self-harm are very prevalent.

Q33 Pam Cox: Is it possible, though, to deliver the service that Rachel has described in that smaller unit setting within that larger setting?

Phil Wragg: Absolutely it is.

Pam Cox: You think it is?

Phil Wragg: Yes, absolutely, it is.

Q34 Pam Cox: Thank you. I am going to move to the question of remand now. Around 44% of children, I think, in the secure estate are on remand. Waiting times for them are at their highest for many years. I think the average time from offence to completion reached a record of 230 days recently. How do these delays affect children and their ability and willingness to participate in your activities?

Rachel Ashurst: In terms of participating in what is on offer at the centres, not so much in reality because they do still go to school. They do still get the health. What is impacted is what we touched on earlier, our ability to look at offence focus work and move on with other support and assessments that could support them in moving on because we are still waiting. We have to be careful about what work we do because it could impact on the criminal proceedings. So that is the biggest.

I will say that you would not know whether the children, certainly in my care, were on remand or not, other than that the interventions look very different. They do settle and they do get the same provision. The biggest impact is on their own mental health and anxiety because, as was touched on before, how do you keep somebody engaged when they don't know how long they are going to be there? A lot of our children do feel, "At my next court date that will be it". You are reassuring them that we are going to be here for you, but yes, we don't know what is going to



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happen when you go to your court date. However, the biggest is the interventions and the anxiety to that child.

Q35 Pam Cox: Black and mixed-race children are more likely to be remanded. Could you say something around the concentration of children from those groupings in your establishments?

Mark Scott: For me, I do not see a significant difference with that. Just going back to the remand population, and you quoted the figures, we are saying that nearly half of our population within the youth custody estate is on remand. To put that into context, the data shows that 62% of those who are on remand do not receive a custodial setting.

I think the disruption that that causes—disruption to the child as well as disruption to our institutions from the churn of those coming through on remand—can create instability. I certainly see within Wetherby that some of my children get really anxious about the unknown of what a court experience means for them. I do see children who start to withdraw when they know that they are approaching a court hearing, a court date, and that causes them anxiety and unrest and sometimes can result in self-harm, violence and so on.

Phil Wragg: From an STC based in the Midlands, many of our children on remand come from a great distance. I have already mentioned Plymouth. They are going to go back to courts in vehicles for which the duration of the journey is significantly long. That is a very early start in the morning. It is a late return of an evening. We are pride ourselves on giving all of our children—a bit like Rachel said as well—that you would not really know the difference between a sentenced and a remand child in relation to the activities that they are able to partake in.

However, the inconsistency of the approach of going to and from court really does raise the anxiety. We can see self-harm increasing and the anxiety levels for that child increasing, too. Being far from home and far from a court to hear one's case is a real challenge for a child to manage, and we often have to calm that child down and get them back to base level sometimes daily while they are going through that court experience.

To answer your question about children, the make-up for black African children and so on is 15% in Oakhill.

Mark Scott: I do have some data on the make-up. BAME on remand within Wetherby is 41.7% and of a white background is 58.3%.

Q36 Pam Cox: The final one from me is around a new funding formula that the Government are introducing to reward local areas that reduce custodial remands. Do you expect that new incentive model to have an impact on your daily populations? If not, what would be the single most effective alternative to remand that you would like to suggest to us?

Mark Scott: I would like to think it is going to have a significant difference. Otherwise, what is the purpose of us doing that? The Minister



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has certainly identified that remand is a huge problem, and I think we have to get the services right in the community, the placements for children, the accommodation that is available for children, as well as fostering and what the best outcome for that child is. If they can be managed within the community I think that is fundamentally the best option for that child.

I was listening to Rachel earlier when we were talking around some of this, where a child came into your environment who was then acquitted and released and then lost their placement within the accommodation that they had in the community. That was four days before Christmas, and that child did not have anywhere to go. That fundamentally cannot be right.

We have to improve on making sure that we have secure placements in the community for children, that we can manage the risk in the community, the risk to themselves and risk to others, and then we use that as a fundamental option before we put them into a custodial setting.

Q37 Pam Cox: Would those secure placements include privately run children's homes, which can be problematic?

Rachel Ashurst: Not for profit would be more beneficial. It is looking at where the children are coming from and where they are going out to. It is a whole system approach. We are in the middle, and Phil said earlier that when children are released we want stability for them. It is not for the lack of will for anyone working with that child. It is an issue across the social care setting, isn't it, all services?

Every school needs to come together, every social care, to make sure there is the right package for that child. Hopefully, that does reduce children coming in on remand, because we can manage that risk in the community with the child being around people that they do trust and can be cared for safely without having to come into the system.

Q38 Pam Cox: Would you say that children's social care services needs to do better on this?

Rachel Ashurst: There needs to be a better look at the whole system approach. I do not think it is that there is an individual or a certain service that is not doing their bit. We know there is placement crisis; there is not enough that can meet these children's needs. If we can get some stability for the children in the community that will benefit and reduce the likelihood of children coming into secure care.

Phil Wragg: There has to be a healthy appreciation that we are receiving the most complex children into our care. Mark gave the figures earlier on about the number of children who do not go on to receive a sentence, therefore, we are discharging the most complex children back into the community.

As it feels at the moment, the community is ill-equipped to be able to



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deal with these complex children. I spend my time on the telephone speaking to directors of children's services campaigning to get accommodation for a child who is to be released into their care, and it is challenging. Sometimes we are at the wire of the child about to be released. That is very difficult for the child to accept too, and the anxiety level that I spoke about a minute ago increases exponentially because the child does not know where they are going and we are battling to try to get the community to take a place on for that child.

Chair: Thank you. Vikki, do you want to come in?

- Q39 **Vikki Slade:** Thank you. I have one point of clarification from Rachel and then a question more directly towards Mark. Earlier on you talked about your children going to school. We were hearing about the children having this routine in their larger institutions but you have four to six children—when you say “go to school” is that a tutor coming in or do they physically go to school?

Rachel Ashurst: We have four homes of up to six children, so we can have up to 24. There is a school on site so, yes, it is the same scenario, up in the morning, that routine, breakfast, and then they go to school and they are in a school environment.

- Q40 **Vikki Slade:** That is helpful to know because I was thinking they are literally going out into—

Rachel Ashurst: No, into.

- Q41 **Vikki Slade:** Great. My more substantive question is around the 60% of the children in the YOIs who do not receive a custodial sentence. We visited a YOI a few months ago and it was quite mortifying as to how little education some of those young people were getting, for various reasons.

The report I have read says that only 12% of young people on remand take part in interventions, which means that no meaningful work is done with the vast majority of the young people you have. Then they are going back out into the world even worse equipped than they were when they went in. What work is being done to work on the 88% of young people that are not taking part in interventions?

Mark Scott: Can I clarify what you mean by interventions; is that offence-related interventions?

- Q42 **Vikki Slade:** As I understand it, that is to do with education and training. If no meaningful work is being done with those young people, and we heard young people telling us, “Well, I don’t know how long I will be here for, it’s not worth starting something you will not finish”. That is a completely understandable mindset, but these are children who, if they were not in custody, would either be in education or training. Therefore, they are leaving in potentially a worse position than where they started, despite your best efforts. This is not a criticism of your work; it is the



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system that does not seem to be moving those children forward, because they are—whatever they have done—still children at that stage.

Mark Scott: Can I ask where the dataset is from?

Vikki Slade: From the paperwork we have.

Chair: From the Prisons Inspectorate.

Vikki Slade: From the Prisons Inspectorate, no less.

Sir Ashley Fox: Which page, Vikki? Was it a particular establishment?

Vikki Slade: It was in our papers for this brief, apologies. If I search 12% we might find it.

Q43 **Sarah Russell:** It is on page 32. "HMIP's Children in Custody 2023-24 report found that only 12% of unsentenced children took part in any interventions, such as offending behaviour programmes and in some establishments, interventions were limited to sentenced children in some establishments. This means that no meaningful work would have taken place while they were in custody to reduce their chances of reoffending".

Vikki Slade: That is very helpful, thank you, Sarah.

Mark Scott: It was offending behaviour interventions?

Q44 **Vikki Slade:** Offending behaviour, yes.

Mark Scott: The 12% that is quoted I assume is across the whole estate. In terms of Wetherby specifically, for clarity, we cannot provide offender behaviour interventions to any child that is on remand. Legally we are not allowed to do that.

Sarah Russell: It makes sense because they have not been found guilty.

Vikki Slade: They have not been found guilty, okay, but—

Mark Scott: If we provide those then we assume guilt.

Q45 **Vikki Slade:** If 60% will not get a custodial sentence that presumes that there is a significant number of young people who are guilty, are deemed to have served their sentence because they have been on remand for up to 230 days; they are the ones at risk presumably of reoffending behaviours. I suppose my question is: if you cannot legally do anything about offending behaviours, what can you do from an educational perspective that may improve their likelihood of not reoffending if perhaps they were on the path towards reoffending?

Phil Wragg: Can you teach them to read and write, for example?

Vikki Slade: There is obviously that—

Q46 **Sarah Russell:** Also emotional control, for instance: you do not have to admit an offence to accept that you might have a problem with emotional



control.

Rachel Ashurst: Yes, so we cannot do 100% offence focused work like, “This is what happened and, therefore—” but we absolutely can and do those other bits. They do attend education, they absolutely work with an SCH’s interventions workers around emotional regulation, what you could do in this scenario, learning about your triggers, learning about what—

Vikki Slade: De-escalation processes.

Rachel Ashurst: Yes, exploitation and the risk in the community. That is all still done, we just cannot do defence related work about the specific offence. We can do work around risk, and we can do work around exploitation and emotional dysregulation, and that is done, so it is probably just the way that data has come across.

Vikki Slade: That is helpful, thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much. Tony Vaughan.

Q47 **Tony Vaughan:** Thank you, Chair. I would like to ask questions about violence and safety. Apologies for being late; my name is Tony Vaughan, the MP for Folkestone and Hythe. For completeness, my interests are as per the register: I am an associate tenant at Doughty Street, and I used to practise in public law.

I will start by asking each of you individually about the incidence of violence and the breakdown of that at each of your establishments, and then talk about some wider themes. Starting first with Mark Scott, what is the incidence of violence generally in your establishment?

Mark Scott: Generally we have seen incidents of violence reduce to significantly lower levels than they were 12 months ago. Levels of violence were high within Wetherby and within YOIs. Unfortunately I am unable to give you the data around that at the moment because it has not been published.

Q48 **Tony Vaughan:** You will subsequently in a letter?

Mark Scott: Yes, absolutely, we will be able to provide that to you. I have certainly seen within Wetherby a significant reduction in assaults, both peer-on-peer and on staff, which is pleasing to see. There are many reasons why we are seeing that and certainly when I started my journey within Wetherby I could see that the staff were potentially burnt out with the constant levels of violence that they were experiencing, witnessing, and having to deal with.

We had what we call groups, families within Wetherby, which did not allow us to provide purposeful regimes, which did not allow time for staff to build relationships with the children, and did not allow staff to deal with the issues that the children had. I use an example where one of my units had six separate groups on there and then trying to meet the minimum of two hours out of a room each day was a logistical problem.



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You cannot physically do that and give decent access to regime and provision. It was a vicious circle we were on; the children were getting frustrated with the lack of engagement with staff and the lack of regime delivery, which then resulted in high levels of assaults against staff and each other because we are keeping these individuals apart.

We have done a lot of work at Wetherby to make sure that we can have communities within each unit and we have successfully achieved that, and that is from working through conflict resolution to build some of those bridges on the conflict that some of the children have had together, and making sure that the staff have had adequate training to be able to deal with the incidents of violence that occur as well.

If I put it into perspective, when I arrived in Wetherby I understood quite quickly something about our training around MMPR—that is, managing and minimising restraint; we have to train our staff every six months in a refresher to be able to keep themselves and others safe. We have a target of a minimum of 85% compliance against that, and we were at 23%.

Q49 **Tony Vaughan:** Compliance with the MMPR protocol?

Mark Scott: That staff are trained within that six-month period. I was a couple of months into arrival at Wetherby and that was at 23% and it was clear that we were not giving our staff the adequate development to be able to deal with some of these incidents. We put a robust training plan together to make sure that we could train our staff and upskill them in doing the MMPR, the restraint process, which also includes de-escalation as well, and how they can deal with that de-escalation before it results in either restraint or violence.

Q50 **Tony Vaughan:** Is there a protocol to ensure that training is implemented in the real world? It seems you have done a good job in getting people to know what they should know; is there any process to ensure that when there are violent incidents that they are essentially audited against what should have happened?

Mark Scott: Yes, so what I quickly understood as well is that we have what we call conflict resolution practitioners—staff trained to deal with a conflict that has occurred with the children—but what we were doing was reacting to these violent incidents and then trying to address the conflict. What we were not necessarily doing is doing the learning from what was the cause of the incident.

Within Wetherby specifically I have developed a violence reduction team; we have a violence reduction hub and incidents of violence are now fully investigated, the children are spoken to, to understand what the root causes were of that violence, what lessons can we learn and what can we put in place to prevent that happening again.

The communities that were created helped the children to build relationships with each other and stop using violence. I am not saying



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that we do not still see incidents of violence, but we have certainly seen a reduction in violence and more prolifically we have seen reduction in items like weapons being used when violence has been used.

Q51 Tony Vaughan: Do you have a figure on the degree to which the incidence of violence has reduced in the last year, for example?

Mark Scott: We can share that with you after.

Q52 Tony Vaughan: Yes if you could also write to us.

Mark Scott: It will be published I think in the next 10 days.

Q53 Tony Vaughan: Can I double-check that your mechanisms mean that when there has been a violent incident that you will then assess whether the correct procedures were followed?

Mark Scott: Yes, every incident of violence is investigated, we do a thorough review on what has occurred, what lessons have been learnt from that, and have we done things correctly.

Q54 Tony Vaughan: When you write to us with the figures could you break that down to whether or not violence was used in relation to children of protected characteristics, including race and, if appropriate, neurodivergence so we can see how that breaks down?

Mark Scott: Yes.

Q55 Tony Vaughan: Do you have data around the use of the PAVA chemical irritant spray mechanism? Will you be able to provide statistics about how that has been deployed after the guidance changed?

Mark Scott: We can, yes. We can certainly provide that. I can provide you that for Wetherby now. Since we introduced PAVA in April 2025 I have 36 staff that are trained and equipped to carry and use PAVA should they need the requirement to. In the time since that has been implemented in April 2025—and I can only speak for Wetherby—we have drawn PAVA on one occasion for one serious incident; however, it was not deployed.

Q56 Tony Vaughan: You have not deployed it at all?

Phil Wragg: We have not deployed it.

Q57 Tony Vaughan: I will move on, because of the time, to Rachel Ashurst. What are your comments generally about the extent that violence has increased or reduced at your institution in the last year or so? Can you provide all the data subsequently if you cannot do it now?

Rachel Ashurst: Yes, again we will provide it subsequently, but I do have to say because of our model—similar to what I have said previously—our rates are extremely low. We work on a preventative level so we work with our children around what the triggers are, what we can do, and how can we help when children do get in a state of dysregulation.



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Children have a relationship with staff so when they do get heightened for the most part they can be de-escalated. Where we do have to physically intervene with what we call an RPI—that is Restrictive Physical Intervention in our model—every single incident is reviewed by service managers and our LADO, Local Authority Designated Officer, comes in to look at what happened before, during and afterwards.

We also do hot and cold debriefs with staff, and the children also complete what we call a My Thinking Report where they are presented with the information of what the staff felt happened before, during and after, they say what their view is, and we can change the child's care plan then about what they feel we could have done better and how we could have prevented it. We ensure the oversight but, to put that into context, since January we have had two physical interventions.

Q58 Tony Vaughan: What proportion of your staff have had the required training? Mr Scott talked about 85% ought to have had that every six months.

Rachel Ashurst: Again, we can get the figures, but it will be very close to 100%.

Tony Vaughan: That is helpful. I do not know whether PAVA is relevant at your—

Rachel Ashurst: No, we would not use PAVA. There is a caveat in other secure children's homes if it gets to a point where the police are involved the police could come in and utilise it, but it is certainly not something that is in our toolbox to use.

Q59 Tony Vaughan: Do you have specific measures in place to reduce the risk of injury to the staff of the centre, and what sort of equipment have they got available to them?

Rachel Ashurst: Again, we do not use restrictive equipment on the children, but the high staff ratios allow for staff intervention to be as safe as it possibly can with the numbers. Part of the training is the change of face, so if a staff member is struggling or they are getting tired they know how to move in and out of physical interventions. They are that low; it is quite unusual. Where staff have been injured, again very low, has mostly been accidental, and again we do restorative work between the children and the staff in that.

Q60 Tony Vaughan: You said the rates are low and I think you gave two incidents in the last year or so. Is that—

Rachel Ashurst: No, sorry, in the last couple of months.

Tony Vaughan: The last couple of months. If we look at the figures as a whole, are they going down or up?

Rachel Ashurst: They are reducing, yes. Again, similar to what my colleague said, continuing to work with staff around trauma,



understanding the children and getting that care plan right so we know what to do. When you know the children you can see the early triggers. We also have a weekly safety forum as well where we might discuss themes, or if some children have said things, so we can nip those things in the bud before they escalate.

Q61 Tony Vaughan: Thank you. Phil Wragg, obviously you have come in I think in December—

Phil Wragg: December last year, yes.

Tony Vaughan: —to quite a difficult situation with the urgent notification from the Chief Inspector highlighting safeguarding systems in disarray, with failures to report serious matters. Obviously, there is a very serious situation there.

What are the most important things that you have done to address some of the systemic problems that Ofsted identified were causing such high incidences of violence, specifically around delays by staff in notifying internal safeguarding teams, leadership failing to report serious matters to HR, delays in alerting external safeguarding agencies, and serious allegations about staff not properly reported or escalated? They go on in the themes of the internal scrutiny mechanisms not working at all. What have you been doing to address those matters?

Phil Wragg: Obviously I reviewed the urgent notification and the Ofsted report on taking up my position. A lot of good work since the Ofsted report had taken place pre-me arriving, and what I have led to do now is build upon that work. You mentioned the fractured engagement with the community, for instance the LADO. I am pleased to report that is now a clean bill of health, a very good relationship with LADO. I sit on the Milton Keynes safeguarding partnership meeting that meets regularly. We have the safeguarding team from the community coming in to view what we do and how we are doing it.

Since that report, a lot of things have changed. For example, we now have a new head of safeguarding on board, a professional from the community whose role is completely safeguarding. That was not the case previously, it was—

Q62 Tony Vaughan: Was it shared between various different staff previously?

Phil Wragg: It was one person who had two roles, safeguarding and another role. This is now a bespoke position. The safeguarding team is now four members of staff, all at a very high level, and safeguarding referrals equally at a very high level.

I am pleased to add that Ofsted came back into Oakhill in February this year. Clearly they would go and have a look at safeguarding, and they did very much have a look safeguarding. They came back and said across the board there were no areas of significant concern.



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We have not stopped there; we have independently sought our own assurance. We had the National Youth Advocacy Service on board carrying out their own audit of what we do. We are asking people to come in who are professionals in their own right around this particular topic, and saying, "Please come in, have a look at our centre, have a look at where the children live, have a look at education, look at safeguarding, and assure yourselves - but importantly assure us - that the actions we have taken to date are the right actions and they are sustainable".

I am not sure you were in the room when I mentioned 80% of children in my care have violence in their background. I cannot say that is going down; what I can say is it is very child dependent. Some children are more likely to self-harm and more likely to be violent. When they are no longer in the centre one will see correspondingly there will be a drop in those too.

Our use of force is reviewed personally by me in a multidisciplinary team weekly. All of our staff wear body worn video cameras; they activate those body worn video cameras when there is an incident. We take the frames of those, and Ofsted actually put this into my head when they were here in February, they said, "Phil, you need to have professional curiosity, you need to ask yourself those questions about why and how and who". We do that.

I chair that meeting every week, we look on the big screen, we go through and say, "Was that appropriate? Was it not appropriate? Is there a learning requirement there?" That is number one audit. Number two, every—

Q63 **Tony Vaughan:** Pausing there. Do you then discuss the incident with the officers who were involved in that actual incident, and then—

Phil Wragg: Yes, and put them back into retraining. If there was an incident of concern we would suspend that member of staff and we would automatically refer it to LADO, and potentially LADO would refer it to police.

Q64 **Tony Vaughan:** Previously was there not the body worn camera safeguard?

Phil Wragg: I believe body worn cameras were worn but I cannot say how long they were introduced before.

Q65 **Tony Vaughan:** Did they have this process whereby you would look at the footage together afterwards?

Phil Wragg: I do not know at the time. This is something that I have personally said that I will chair. In addition to a quality assurance check of all of the paperwork that has been put in place. It is an A to Z: incident occurs, all the way through the decision making process of what has been applied, how that child has been moved from one place to another, finishing with the child's voice at the end, do they understand what



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happened, are they aware of what happened, and how do they feel about what happened.

The independent review of restraints panel—which is made up by YCS employees—attend about every four to six months and they will randomly select a number of incidents over that period of time, and they will go through the body worn video camera in detail, and they will provide levels of concern, scrutiny, or otherwise to us. We sit there with them going through that. They will turn around and say to us, “That is an appropriate use of force. That gives us a bit of a concern about how that was applied”.

Q66 Tony Vaughan: You say you do not know what happened before, but do you feel those sorts of conversations have improved staff ability to know where the right turn or the wrong turn could have been reached during an incident?

Phil Wragg: What has improved is the staff reporting of issues of concern that may well have occurred is better now than perhaps it previously was.

Q67 Tony Vaughan: There was a point raised in the Ofsted report about keeping investigations in house rather than externally referring them. Is that something that has changed in terms of the process?

Phil Wragg: Absolutely. The relationship with LADO and my safeguarding team is very professional, we refer out sometimes daily to LADO so that is very clearly in place, as was witnessed by Ofsted in February of this year.

Q68 Tony Vaughan: In relation to staff who have complaints against them, one of the things they flagged was that you would have staff who had serious allegations made about them and they were still continuing to work. What is the process there?

Phil Wragg: I do not want suspension to be seen as an implication of guilt, but we will suspend straight away if we believe that there may well be something that requires that person not to be on site. It safeguards the child, but it also safeguards the member of staff, and it allows the investigator to investigate with impunity.

Q69 Tony Vaughan: Are you able to provide a breakdown of the use of force in the establishment, including in relation to how it has impacted minority groups?

Phil Wragg: Absolutely, yes, we can do that in writing.

Q70 Tony Vaughan: Thank you, and would you also include the use of the PAVA restraint if you have used it.

Phil Wragg: We do not use PAVA.

Tony Vaughan: Okay, thank you.



Chair: Thank you very much. I would love to get through two more sections but that will mean we have to keep to under 15 minutes each, starting with Warinder Juss.

Q71 **Warinder Juss:** I will ask questions on purposeful activity, education, and training. Could each one of you describe what the daily regime looks like in your establishments?

Rachel Ashurst: At Barton Moss the children come out of their rooms in the morning—similar to what I said before—breakfast, and then they go to school. Monday to Friday the children go to school 9.30 am to 3.15 pm. After that they have after school club and that could be a variation of reading, it could be for example black history month or something like that, and that is run about the residential until 4.30 pm. Then there is evening meals and then evening activities. Children are in their rooms by 10.00 pm when night staff come on.

During the school hours children are in groups depending on ability. There is a focus on literacy and numeracy but also music, DT, food tech, and science. It is a full curriculum, and children do sit GCSEs with us. In the evening activities could be football, we have also got an onsite gym; we look at the child's needs and what they enjoy but also what they need to support their outcomes.

Phil Wragg: To provide you with some curriculum outturns; we obviously have English, maths, pre-entry up to A Level, science, art psychology, business, PE, PE theory, hair and beauty, hospitality—which includes cooking—construction, multi skills, music technology, and production, plus we have the library of course.

Ten students at the moment are entered in for GCSE exams and two in for A levels. Figures of note: 95% of children who arrived with us were below the national average in English and the cohort is now at 87% so we have already increased the English provision. With maths it was 89% and that is now 88%, so again we have increased.

The attendance in the community is at about 94% for children. In my school it is 98% for children in education. As Rachel said, we start our day at 7.30 am in the morning by waking the children up. I do my rounds at 8.00 am in the morning, every single unit is walked to see my staff and my children. We are encouraging them to be up, breakfasted, showered, and ready to go to school. We start moving to school at 8.30 am. Some of my staff even walk children to school. We aim to be in school for around 8.45 am to 9.00am. We are in school until 12.00 pm and then from 12.00 pm until 1.00 pm it is lunch back on the units. The children do not go back to their rooms, my staff rotate. Then at 1.00 pm we prepare to return back into education and that then ceases at 3.30 pm.

In the evening, it is a regime mixture of activities on the astroturf or in the sports hall. We are looking to provide at least the 25 hours of week



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education provision, but in addition to those 15 further hours of regime. Education is 25 and then regime provision 15 across the week.

Q72 **Warinder Juss:** With the STC, Mr Wragg, there is a statutory requirement to provide 30 hours of purposeful activity per week. Are you achieving that?

Phil Wragg: It is 25 and 15; yes, we are doing 40, 25 in education and 15 with the regime. That is only Monday to Friday, so then we have the weekend as well where you have no education, but you have outside and additional activities on a Saturday and Sunday.

Mark Scott: Within Wetherby it is not too dissimilar to what Phil has described. We start our day off at 7.50 am in the morning. All our children have breakfast and then they start their day per their timetable, which could include education and learning, enrichment, access to health services, physical education, time in open air, access to library, family visits, professional visits, resettlement engagement, release on temporary licence if they are eligible for that, any court attendances either in person or via video link, video visits. We also do employment opportunities within Wetherby, which are vocational elements, and also access to faith services.

We then return our children back to the units and staff go off for lunch at 12.30 pm, so they are in their rooms from 12.30 pm until 1.50 pm where they then start the afternoon, and then they are out until 7.00 pm where they will do again the same things that I have described there throughout their core timetable as well. That is Monday to Thursday.

We do the same on a Friday morning as per Monday to Thursday and then in the afternoon we do activities around enrichment, wing activities, and physical education visits. We do not do education and learning on a Friday afternoon; it ceases at lunchtime on a Friday. Then Saturday and Sunday we start the day at 8.15 am until 12.30 pm, and then 1.50 pm to 5.00 pm in the afternoon, and it includes all that I described with the exception of education and learning, professional visits, and any court attendance.

Q73 **Warinder Juss:** I think you mentioned earlier, Mr Scott, that you do not have an issue with recruitment and staff shortages?

Mark Scott: No, I do not.

Q74 **Warinder Juss:** What about Ms Ashurst and Mr Wragg; do you have any issue with staff shortages or not?

Rachel Ashurst: No, we do not. Staff sickness causes some issues, but we are working on that. We do have enough cohort of staff to care for the children.

Phil Wragg: We have a 71% retention rate for frontline officers over 12 months, 77% for all members of staff at Oakhill. Recruitment is not an



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issue to us. We do find that we get a very buoyant level of recruit applicants coming through for what is a very intense eight-week training course. Not everybody makes the training course so we are not afraid to turn around and say, "Unacceptable". We will not put anybody who is not at the required level out to care for our children.

Q75 Warinder Juss: Thank you for that. Mr Scott, we did hear earlier that the population in YOIs has decreased because of diversification, but it is understood that we still have children who are spending less than two hours outside their cells in an unlocked environment. In your view why has the reduction in the population not translated to children spending more time out of their cells?

Mark Scott: We have also seen a reduction in children that are spending less than two hours at a time out of room. I have significant oversight of that on a daily basis, and I enquire and am curious for every child that has not achieved two hours out of a room for the previous day. We discuss that in our daily managers' meeting to establish what has occurred, why it has occurred, and what do we need to do to prevent that.

There are some of our children that regardless of what regime we offer them they choose not to come out of their rooms. I do have children that refuse to come out of their rooms and get that two hours out of a room despite the offer being there.

Significantly on a weekend—the weekend that has just passed—10% of my children declined the regime on the weekend and did not want to come out of their rooms. I cannot force a child to come out of their room, but I can offer them a regime that allows more than two hours out of room, but I am not going into a position of forcing children to come out of their rooms. I think we have to reflect that in society as well teenagers sometimes want some time on their own, and that is what they tend to do. They choose to not come out, and refuse the regime.

Q76 Warinder Juss: Thank you for that. Ms Ashurst, secure children's homes do perform better at delivering education than YOIs and the STC. Are you doing something different, which is the reason for that?

Rachel Ashurst: Similar to what I have said before, the model and the smaller community, and the staff do get to know the children because we have smaller numbers that they are able to. We are able to do bespoke timetables as well to reintegrate children back into school and give what is necessary when children come to us. As we have heard previously, a lot of our children have not attended school regularly or had a good experience in school, and they might fear that rejection as well. We can work together with the residential staff, the education staff, and health to work out what is going on for that child, to get them in.

Similar to my colleagues, there is an expectation that children go to school, so we work on that, and there is a lot of peer support in that as



well. We put in bespoke plans where children struggle, for example, we had a child that was struggling to come out of his room through lots of reasons—anxiety, probably feelings of safety—and so we took some of the classes onto the home and the other children went on, and then he could see that, “This is not actually so bad”. It was gradual but we put in that bespoke package to get him to engage in education and see what it was about and that it was not as scary as it was, and taking those steps.

Q77 Warinder Juss: Mr Scott, we are told that inspection reports suggest that some children are not able to attend classes because they have a difficulty in mixing with other children. Have you experienced that?

Mark Scott: Absolutely I have experienced that, yes. That goes back to the issue I spoke about earlier where we have created these groups to keep people safe, and how we have opened up those groups to make a bigger community, which has helped us to deliver better education provision. We still have what we call our communities that we have to timetable to make sure that they have a viable access to education. We introduced a revised timetable mid-January to ensure that it is a timetable that each child, each group, and each community has equitable access to education, which is working extremely well. That has seen significant improvements in education outcomes for our children.

Also what we discovered is that some of our own interruptions from a prison perspective and our professionals, where they were seeing children at educational timetable times, we have eradicated that and changed the model in how we do that as well. Professionals are not able to see a child when it is their allocated education time. That has seen a significant increase in attendance to education and outcomes as well for our children. The model that we introduced back in January, having heard the feedback from Ofsted and the HMIP, we put processes in place to ensure that we can adequately make sure that children have access to education and learning.

Q78 Warinder Juss: As regards the need to keep certain groups separate, you feel that you have done enough to make sure that they still get their hours of education?

Mark Scott: Yes.

Q79 Warinder Juss: I will move on to neurodiversity in your establishments, which we touched upon in the beginning. We understand that many children come to your establishments when they have undiagnosed neurodiversity conditions. Are you able to take any steps in your respective establishments in order to identify those needs, and how are you able to deal with those needs as early as possible?

Rachel Ashurst: Our health is commissioned through NHS and, therefore, we have psychiatrists and psychology services. Children can get assessed for any outstanding health need, including neurodiversity, while with us. There are obviously some implications with that in terms of how long they will be with us, however, we get those assessments



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underway and we pull together a plan to meet the children. Children do undergo assessments while they are with us, and then that informs their plan.

Children also receive a psychological formulation within two months of being with us that also informs their plan, which helps to care for them while they are with us and when they move on.

Phil Wragg: Our services via the YCS are contracted through NHS England. We have a provider onboard, DrPA, whose service is excellent. In respect of mental and physical health many of our children who come into our care have issues with both, and sometimes it can be quite serious issues. The clinicians—psychiatric, psychological, et cetera—are at pace to ensure that they can diagnose and provide a treatment plan, which I think far outstrips that in the community. Our children will get access to that level of care much faster than a child equivalent in the community.

Mark Scott: We are very similar. Our provision and interventions are far better than what they are in the community in terms of mental health, substance misuse, and health provision generally. Our education providers do numerous assessments to meet the needs of that child and put a formulation plan in to make sure we understand the needs of that child. It is significantly good.

Q80 **Warinder Juss:** Ofsted has said that there is a decade of declining quality in SEND support, but I think all three of you are saying that you are doing better in being able to have individual learning plans being followed in your establishments than is happening in the community.

Phil Wragg: Yes. I can only rely on my Ofsted report from February, which was a moderator visit, and they were with us for two or three days. From everything they saw—and they looked at health and we had a CQC representative on board—they were very much into the detail of the provision of service that we were offering to the children. No significant concerns were highlighted at that time.

Q81 **Pam Cox:** A point of clarification. We have talked about neurodiversity and mental ill health; am I right to assume that given the nature of the children under your care some of them may be exhibiting signs of things like early onset schizophrenia and early onset personality disorder, so severe mental ill health. Just because they are children does not mean they do not suffer from these things and often we do not discuss it in those terms. Is that a fair point?

Phil Wragg: Yes, I think it is a very fair point. Throughout this afternoon we have been talking about the severe complexity of our children, and all that you have referenced there absolutely are in play. The children that we have in our care are not the same children that you would find in the community.

Chair: That segues very nicely.



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Q82 Vikki Slade: It does, because I will talk briefly to mental health and then move on to transition. When we visited Feltham in January we learned that the enhanced support unit only had six beds available for children with mental health needs. First, in regard to YOIs, is the ESU at Wetherby still closed and when is it expected to reopen? If it is, how much capacity does that have?

Mark Scott: The capacity at Wetherby is the same as Feltham. Currently we are closed and the reason that the ESU at Wetherby is closed is for refurbishment. We suffered some significant damage from some of our young people that were located on there, which meant that it was not decent to occupy young people on there.

We are currently in the process of refurbishing that unit to make it fit to use again and make it decent. I cannot give you the timeframe for that at the moment, however, what I can say is that the children that were located on our ESU and in our support terms are particularly doing well on normal locations that they are located on with still the full wraparound support that they would have received while they were in our support unit at Wetherby.

Q83 Vikki Slade: Can I challenge then; if they are doing well what is the added value—given that you have to spend a whole load of money—in segregating those children further? I am assuming, as with Feltham, they are in small groups of living anyway.

Mark Scott: That is the work that we need to do to understand the benefit. What I have requested is that we do a review to understand what the benefits of the enhanced support unit were, and can we do some learning from the previous occupation with children on the ESU to make sure that the model is right and we are getting the service right for the children, but also value for money.

That is work that I have requested from the central team, so some work is taking place from YCS central team to understand is there any learning that we need to think about for when we are ready to open the ESU, and what do we need to do to make it a bespoke enhanced service.

Q84 Vikki Slade: It is not an imminent reopening?

Mark Scott: No.

Q85 Vikki Slade: In terms of the secure children's homes and the training centre, what sort of mental health provisions do you have? I am talking about some of those severe mental illnesses that my colleague has referred to. What level of access do you have to those very highly skilled professionals that you might have in a mental health institution?

Phil Wragg: We have a psychiatric team on board that goes through from psychiatrist right the way through to RMNs who are working with all of our children. In the event that we have a child who triggers as potentially being at the more challenging end of mental health with



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schizophrenia and so on and would need to go for bed space provision in the community, we will manage that child while there is a fast-paced assessment and application in process. That in fact is happening today. I have a child who is in exactly that place, and we have managed to get a bed for that child and that child will be moving on very quickly.

We have to go through the same hoops as anybody else would, so we need to have psychiatric assessment referral, judge's decision, rule 48s, et cetera, but we can move at pace to ensure as long as there is a bed available we will get that child into that bed. There will be a bed available, but it might well be nationally, somewhere far removed from us.

The screening process that takes place on initial introduction into the centre, the ongoing assessment that takes place with my medical team and my RMNs, defines and ensures that anybody who presents as requiring further investigative work up to the level of a psychiatrist, it will happen. As I have indicated, should there be a need to accelerate that person into community care that will occur.

Q86 Vikki Slade: What about secure children's homes?

Rachel Ashurst: Yes, similar answer. In terms of mental health we have a psychiatrist and psychologists; however, if it got to a point where that child was best placed in a hospital provision then we would move forward with that. We have a health team with us Monday to Friday, so we would not be able to manage a child that needed a hospital bed seven days, but we would look at what is best for that child. Similar to what Phil has said, we would balance the needs and work with colleagues to make sure we made the right decision for that child.

Q87 Vikki Slade: In terms of broader mental health provision across those two types of setting, are they similar to what you would find in a YOI?

Rachel Ashurst: It works starting from the basis of having strong relationships with the child so, yes, the expertise is needed and they are on site Monday to Friday. However, a lot of the mental health issues our children have are in relation to trauma so actually it is a longer piece of work. It starts with the relationship, knowing that child and knowing how best we can deal with what is going on for them and, yes, having access to mental health support along the way.

Q88 Vikki Slade: Talking to transition, obviously you have two options: transition to adult custody or transition and resettlement back into the community. Particularly thinking about the secure children's homes, how do you prepare a 17-year-old who has been in your type of setting to transition into an adult prison, given that it is a very different regime? Or is there a process that takes you from your setting into the YOI and on?

Rachel Ashurst: Children do transition from us to an adult setting and, as you said, it is tricky because there is a stark difference. However, for children that are with us it is open conversation, again down to the



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relationship with the staff, that the transition starts from day one. They know that is where they will go, so conversations will happen.

We have staff who have worked in prisons and will do key work sessions of kind of what to expect. They are completely part of the transition process, so about three months before they are 18 that is when it starts with moving into an adult provision. Once we know where that young person is going we then work with them around what that looks like, what the regime is, and what they might need to help with that transition. We also ensure that in the handover to the adult prison they have as much information about that young person as possible. Yes, children do move from secure children's home to an adult prison.

Q89 Vikki Slade: Is there anything different from the secure training centre?

Phil Wragg: Very similar, apart from we will engage telephone calls between the receiving establishment and the child, so they will get to know each other. My staff will help the child pack, so they will enter into the conversation, they will make it something that is okay to be talked about, so they will help them get used to the idea of moving on.

It becomes slightly more challenging when we are moving a more complex child into the community. In preparation for them moving on from us we will want to make that a fun event. For instance, a very challenging female child we were moving on recently, we will want them to be able to see their favourite film, to have a pizza night or something like that, so when the receiving staff come down and pick the child up to move them on to the next place it is not turbulent, it is not traumatic, and it does not raise the anxiety. Whether that child is going into the community or into one of our other establishments, the care taken to ensure that is a seamless journey will always take place.

Rachel Ashurst: We also use release on temporary licence, if they are going out into the community to visit where they may be going, to assist with that transition as well. We also keep in touch with the provider, wherever that child has gone.

Q90 Vikki Slade: Before I go on to the community release, in terms of the digital record we know there is quite a seamless transition from YOI, in theory, into the adult population. Is it similar, does the data and other information seamlessly transfer or are there any learnings to be gained?

Rachel Ashurst: For us it is via email or physically given. There is no data system we can seamlessly transfer, but we ensure that all the information goes with the child and it kind of starts with that first meeting with the provider. We go through everything that the child needs and wants, and then we can also follow up with any paperwork, but it is via email.

Phil Wragg: It is the same with us. We have different systems that talk to different systems so, digitally, no, but via email and paper transfer, yes.



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- Q91 **Vikki Slade:** Let me turn to children and young people being moved back into the community—obviously prior to 18 at the end of their sentence, or potentially if they stay with you until 18 and then go on if they have a very short overlap. When we were at Feltham, I was concerned to hear about some children who were being released without somewhere to go.

Coming from a local government background, my understanding is that, therefore, every one of the young people you have had will become a child in care. Lots of councils will have a policy where a child in care is housed automatically. How does it work between you in terms of making sure that young people have a suitable place to go, and how often does that not work? Does it depend on the council or is it about your relationships that you build?

Mark Scott: If I speak on that in my experience from Wetherby, I have seen some instances where it has been difficult to arrange suitable accommodation and supervision for a child. However, we have never been in a position where we have released a child into the community who has not eventually been placed into suitable accommodation, but sometimes it does become where it feels as though it is the last hour.

It is geographically what community that child is being placed into. I know there are some real difficulties down in London's south-east area in terms of available and suitable accommodation for children. It all depends on what community that child is being put back into and placed, and what the local council is doing. There is a real shortfall, not only for children but for adults as well.

- Q92 **Vikki Slade:** Yes, we have done a piece of work on that.

Mark Scott: There is a huge deficit in terms of suitable accommodation. That is a real challenge.

Phil Wragg: We have always been successful and always got a child out of the gate into a proper placement, but I will not turn around and say it has been easy. I have had to invoke the utilisation of my Child Services Director from Milton Keynes, who has been very supportive in speaking to his equivalents elsewhere, where we need that level of support.

What I have found though is that it is not only that there seems to be a shortage of registered accommodation in the community—children may well be placed into unregistered accommodation; that worries me greatly—but in addition the complexity of the child, I think, is sometimes the precursor to saying, "We do not want that child—we have some complex children already here, and we cannot take another one".

While there may well be spaces within the estate in the county council jurisdiction, once they know what the complexity of the child is sometimes they say no, and that gives us an added concern: then we are saying to the council, "What else will you do to provide suitable accommodation and staffing for this child, because they are coming to you very shortly?" As I said previously in evidence, that level of anxiety



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for the child only but increases because they know the date that they are going out of the door, so that increase their anxiety.

- Q93 **Vikki Slade:** We are running out of time, but could each of you in one sentence say either what is the biggest barrier, or what is the change you would want to see in terms of the youth estate?

Mark Scott: I will say the biggest change and that is around investment, particularly in youth offender institutions in terms of capital, and how we can get some of the improvements that are required to deliver better, decent accommodation and facilities for young people in custody.

Rachel Ashurst: To finish and round up what we have been saying, it is about the front loading of services as well to prevent them coming in, in the first place. That is very important for children who do end up in the youth estate. We have talked about when they come out and the resettlement, and that is important, but ideally they would have a safe provision prior to coming in, which would result in children not needing—and having provisions that understand the complexities, trauma, and exploitation, so we prevent it in the first place.

Phil Wragg: I would say let's modernise the youth estate because at the moment it feels like it is way back in time.

- Q94 **Vikki Slade:** In terms of physical buildings or in terms of the way it operates?

Phil Wragg: The way it operates. We have 1998 STC rules, YOI rules and SCH is different completely. Let's strip that back, look at it, review the whole lot. It is primary legislation. Let's make sure that society is fit to deal with the most complex children that we care for 365 days a year.

Chair: That is a very good point to end on, and we are for once exactly on time.

Pam Cox: Chair, may I ask one question?

Chair: You have one minute to do it, Pam.

- Q95 **Pam Cox:** Would you be good enough to send us your outcome metrics, whatever they may be—reoffending rates, better ability to self-regulate? Whatever outcome metrics you use, please send us a copy.

Mark Scott: Yes.

Rachel Ashurst: Yes.

Chair: Very good. Thank you very much to the Committee, but thank you most of all to our witnesses. Thank you for coming today and for giving such comprehensive answers.