

Sir Bob Neill MP,  
Justice Select Committee,  
House of Commons,  
London,  
SW1A 0AA

16 December 2022

Dear Bob,

### YOUTH CUSTODY UPDATE

I am writing to you to provide an update on several areas regarding youth custody.

#### Girls at Oakhill STC

I know the Committee has shown particular interest in the placement of the small numbers of girls in the youth custody estate. After conducting thorough evaluations, we have decided to resume the placement of girls at Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC). We believe that Oakhill STC has demonstrated the ability to provide a safe and supportive environment for the young girls in its care, and we are confident that it is well-equipped to meet their unique needs.

In preparation for the placement of girls, significant work was undertaken, including the refurbishment of dedicated girls accommodation to provide a safe and supportive environment. This transition has been positive and the girls onsite are engaged in an integrated regime of education alongside boys. We have also undertaken a lessons learned exercise with HMYOI Wetherby to draw on its experience with girls and to help prepare our staff and facilities at Oakhill STC. In 2023, we will evaluate the ongoing placement of girls at HMYOI Wetherby.

We will closely monitor the performance of Oakhill STC and continue to work closely with its provider G4S. We are committed to improving the performance of Oakhill and providing the best possible support and care to the young people in their care. This decision is an important step in achieving those goals and we continue to see positive progress in the overall operation of the site with good work done to address the concerns identified in the Urgent Notification.

#### Rainsbrook STC

I wanted to update you on the status of Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre. After careful consideration, we have decided not to reopen the centre for young people; wider work is taking place to determine how best the site can be utilised in the future. We believe that this decision is in the best interest of everyone involved and will allow us to focus on other areas of our work. I am aware that the future of Rainsbrook STC has been of interest to the Committee, and we appreciate your understanding and support in this matter.

## Prison Capacity Pressures

As I set out in my oral statement in the House on Wednesday 30 November on Operation Safeguard, the adult prison system is currently experiencing an acute surge in demand. This is specific to the adult male estate; there is ample capacity in the youth estate. Despite this not directly impacting the latter, these challenges require a system wide response, which is why we are both taking immediate action to provide additional capacity and support for the adult estate.

First, this allows us to take the opportunity to consider the transition of young people to the adult estate to ensure that this is safely managed, making best use of our estate capacity whilst considering the individual and moving away from the practice of presuming the automatic transition of a young person at their 18th birthday. Instead, we will look to transition young people up to their 19th birthday where appropriate. We have always taken a case-by-case view of transition from the children and young people's secure estate to the adult estate, as reflected in our [published transitions framework](#). Indeed, we already manage a number of young people aged 18 years within the youth estate as that is the most appropriate location for them, often informed by their date for resettlement back into the community. This case-by-case approach will continue – there may still be circumstances where transitioning a young person upon them turning 18 is the better option for the individual or wider population.

Secondly, we will also be increasing the number of places at HMPYOI Feltham B (a site that already holds young adults) by bringing back online some capacity in the coming weeks. This process will be completed gradually over several weeks balancing operational demands and considering the allocation criteria for young adults into the prison.

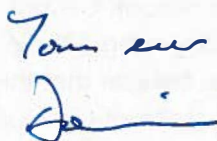
I want to reassure you that the wellbeing and safety of our staff and young people remain our main priority and at the heart of decision making. The YCS continues to remain focused on the outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

## Secure School Update

Finally, I felt it prudent to provide an update on the secure school. I am pleased to report that the construction work continues on track and is due to conclude in Autumn 2023. Oasis Restore has recently become a registered charity with Companies House - the first ever "secure academy trust" - and has appointed its trustees. We are also on track to sign the funding agreement with them in February 2023, which will enable Oasis Restore to begin preparations for the school's opening, including recruiting its full workforce.

Oasis Restore is continuing to develop its integrated education, health, and operating model for the school, including its safeguarding practices. They will also continue to engage with Ofsted and other key stakeholders throughout this process. Overall, the school is on track to open in Spring 2024, and we are currently exploring options for a potential second school, cogniscent of the need to take learning from the first.

I hope these updates are helpful to the committee and I am publishing a copy of this letter on gov.uk.



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