



Jake Richards MP
Parliamentary Under-
Secretary of State for Justice

Helen Hayes MP
Chair, Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

10 August 2026

EXTENSION OF THE USE OF PAVA (INCAPACITANT SPRAY) IN UNDER 18-YEAR YOUNG OFFENDER INSTITUTIONS FOR A FURTHER 12-MONTHS

Dear Helen Hayes MP,

I am writing to inform the Committee of the decision regarding the continued use of PAVA incapacitant spray in HMYOI Feltham A, Werrington and Wetherby. The current authorisation was due to expire in August 2026 and, following a full review, the Government have decided to extend it for a further 12 months until 13 August 2027.

Violence within the children and young people's secure estate continues to present serious challenges, with consequences for both safety and rehabilitation. High levels of violence contribute to reduced time out of room and restricted access to education, compounding the difficulties many young people already face. Those held in Young Offender Institutions are often remanded or sentenced for serious and violent offences, and many bring complex needs and histories of violence into custody. Incidents can escalate rapidly, sometimes involving multiple assailants.

Staff must be equipped to respond effectively to the most serious and dangerous incidents, and the extension will allow PAVA to continue as a tool of last resort to prevent serious harm, while further evidence is gathered on its effectiveness. This will be accompanied by strengthened training, monitoring and operational oversight. A full review will be undertaken during the extension period to inform any longer-term decision.

Our long-term ambition is to significantly reduce the use of force across the youth secure estate. Achieving this will depend on our ability to deliver a sustained reduction in violence across the youth estate.

This is a key objective of the Youth Custody Transformation Plan, which is due to be published in autumn 2026. Alongside this, we will continue to drive progress on improving standards for children in custody.

I am clear that PAVA must only ever be used where it is necessary, proportionate, and a genuine last resort by specially trained staff. All use will continue to be subject to strict reporting and oversight, including local and central reviews of every incident and regular scrutiny by the Independent Restraint Review Panel. The Panel's most recent annual report, available at [Independent Restraint Review Panel \(IRRP\) - reports - GOV.UK](#), sets out its findings in detail, including on the limited use of PAVA across the estate. Where issues have been identified, including one instance of unjustified use and minor policy breaches, prompt

management action has been taken, including targeted retraining and, where necessary, withdrawal of PAVA authority.

Given the sensitivity of this issue, particular attention will continue to be paid to issues of disproportionality, including any impact on Black children and children who are neurodiverse.

- Disproportionality will be closely and continuously monitored, including seeking expert advice and challenge throughout the 12-month period.
- Existing oversight mechanisms will remain in place, including senior official review of incidents and regular Ministerial scrutiny of data.
- The Children's Rights Impact Assessment and associated operational guidance will be updated to capture these concerns and set out the mitigating actions being implemented.
- We have also agreed with the Department of Health and Social Care that we will monitor health impacts and emotional and behavioural wellbeing impacts following PAVA use.

This decision has not been taken lightly. I remain of the view that retaining PAVA under strict safeguards is necessary to protect both staff and young people from serious harm, while we continue to strengthen the evidence base and improve practice across the estate. I welcome the Committee's continued scrutiny of this work and am committed to ensuring that any future decision is grounded in robust evidence and the best interests of the young people in custody.

It is our intention to publish a Written Ministerial Statement after the summer recess setting out this position transparently.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Richards', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JAKE RICHARDS MP