



Debriefing paper for the inspection of

## **HMYOI Cookham Wood**

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

04–20 April 2023

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This paper represents the material presented at the full inspection debrief by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. The material and assessments are indicative only and may be changed at the discretion of the Chief Inspector after due reflection during the report production process or on the discovery of additional evidence. Inspected bodies will be offered the opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies as part of the publication process.

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## Healthy prison assessments

### **Outcomes for children are good against this healthy prison test.**

There is no evidence that outcomes for children are being adversely affected in any significant areas.

### **Outcomes for children are reasonably good against this healthy prison test.**

There is evidence of adverse outcomes for children in only a small number of areas. For the majority there are no significant concerns. Procedures to safeguard outcomes are in place.

### **Outcomes for children are not sufficiently good against this healthy prison test.**

There is evidence that outcomes for children are being adversely affected in many areas or particularly in those areas of greatest importance to their well-being. Problems/concerns, if left unattended, are likely to become areas of serious concern.

### **Outcomes for children are poor against this healthy prison test.**

There is evidence that the outcomes for children are seriously affected by current practice. There is a failure to ensure even adequate treatment of and/or conditions for children. Immediate remedial action is required.

# 1. Leadership

**Our judgements about leadership take a narrative form and do not result in a score.**

- After a six month gap a new governor had taken up post in February 2023. He had inherited an establishment facing acute challenges not the least of which were the setting and maintaining of decent standards.
- Shortages of operational staff, high levels of sickness and a poor retention rate meant that out of 141 operational posts there were about 60 who were able to be deployed.
- In our staff survey 83% of respondents said their morale was low or very low. Many staff commented that they felt unsafe at work and were frustrated by inconsistent leadership and managers that undermined each other.
- There were 44 directly employed managers at Cookham Wood and several more working for partner agencies. Despite this, many aspects of governance and oversight were inadequate and as a result key processes had ceased to function effectively including the deployment of operational and other staff, behaviour management, adjudications and systems for separating children.
- Leaders were not able to deliver a decent regime to most children and many were subjected to what can only be described as solitary confinement while at Cookham Wood.
- Partnership working with GFSL was poor, resulting in significant delays in refurbishment work and repairs.
- While there were staffing shortfalls across the establishment, there were many examples of wasted resources. We were concerned that despite 450 staff in post, outcomes for the 77 children were poor.
- Frontline staff we spoke to were not confident that improvement was possible. Sustained intervention was necessary from the YCS, governor and his team to prove them wrong.

## 2. Safety

**Outcomes for children against this healthy prison test were poor.**

### **Early days in custody**

- Most children arrived to the pleasant and comfortable reception area at a reasonable time.
- Records of first night interviews with children to establish their risks and vulnerabilities lacked depth and were not routinely shared on the electronic case management system to inform others involved with the child's care.
- First night cells were adequately prepared and frequent first night checks took place.
- Less than half of children reported being told what they needed to know about Cookham Wood during their first days. Effective induction was hindered by a lack of private rooms to conduct interviews and assessments. The main induction room had not been in use for five months while waiting for the door to be repaired.

### **Safeguarding of children**

- Links with, and scrutiny from, the local authority were good but internal child protection arrangements had weakened during the second half of 2022. This was now being remedied.
- The safety team was under resourced which hindered many important areas of their remit. The recent appointment of an analyst had resulted in improvements in data being reviewed.
- The self-harm rate had increased compared to the previous inspection and Cookham Wood was now in the midrange of YOIs holding children.
- The number of children supported by assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) processes was similar to the last inspection. Problems with the quality of ACCTs persisted.

### **Behaviour management**

- In our survey, nearly a quarter of children felt unsafe, which was worse than at our last inspection and other similar establishments.
- Levels of violence against children had decreased slightly since the last inspection, however, were still higher than similar prisons. Violence against staff had increased. Some incidents were serious in nature involving multiple assailants and weapons.
- The widespread availability of weapons contributed to poor perceptions of safety amongst staff and children.
- When violent incidents did occur they were not investigated.
- With the exception of Cedar unit, behaviour management was ineffective and children lacked boundaries. More often than not poor behaviour was not challenged, incentives for good behaviour were not delivered and the instant reward scheme was underutilised. As a consequence, we saw examples of poor behaviour in all areas of the establishment.

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- The adjudication system was ineffective, many charges were remanded for long periods before being dismissed.
- In the absence of effective systems, 'keep apart' and separation were used as the main methods to manage and contain conflict. At the time of the inspection 90% of children were on the keep apart list and staff were managing a total of 583 conflicts. This negatively impacted on, and dominated, day-to-day life for all children at Cookham Wood.

### **Use of force**

- Rates of force used had increased since the last inspection but was lower than similar establishments.
- There was reasonable oversight in place, including appropriate scrutiny but children were not always debriefed adequately.

### **Separation from normal location**

- During our inspection more than a quarter of the population were living in separated conditions. The very high levels of separation had overwhelmed the resources available to provide basic entitlements for these children.
- Separated children received an inadequate regime that amounted to solitary confinement for most. The most consistent element of a child's day was a 30-minute period of exercise, but on many occasions even this was not delivered and children could spend days without leaving their cell. Most separated children received no education.
- The average length of time children spent separated had increased to 15 days and two children had been subject to this treatment for over 100 days.
- Oversight of separation was poor, reintegration planning was weak, and work to reduce a child's risk rarely took place.

### **Security**

- 228 weapons had been found in the last six months, a higher rate than other similar establishments. Procedural security to support the reduction of weapons, including the quality of searching and accounting for tools and materials was inadequate.
- The flow of intelligence had increased since the last inspection, although we had evidence to suggest some significant intelligence was missed. However, follow up actions were rarely conducted.

### 3. Care

**Outcomes for children against this healthy prison test were not sufficiently good.**

#### **Relationships between staff and children**

- In our survey only 60% of children said staff here treated them with respect. This was worse than at our last inspection (82%). Children at Cookham Wood were more likely to report victimisation by staff and less likely to say they were being supported than those at other YOIs.
- The impoverished regime and staffing shortages meant that staff did not have the time to develop positive relationships with children. This was exacerbated by staff lack of confidence in challenging inappropriate behaviour by children, which further eroded trust.
- Relationships on Cedar were much better where staff had time to engage with children and get to know them.

#### **Daily life**

- Cells were generally in a reasonable condition but there was little encouragement for children to maintain their cells to a decent standard. Similarly, some landings and communal areas were dirty.
- Units that were awaiting the much delayed refurbishment programme were tired.
- Gang related graffiti remained an issue.
- Too many maintenance tasks were outstanding which negatively impacted on basic living conditions for children, for example five of six washing machines had been out of service for over a year.
- Complaints were well managed and we saw good evidence of effective challenge by leaders when complaints were poorly answered.
- There was little consultation. Those forums that did take place were sporadic and unrecorded.

#### **Equality and diversity**

- More work was needed to embed and promote equality and diversity across the YOI. Until recently, staff redeployment had reduced the resource available to the small, enthusiastic diversity and inclusion team.
- Discrimination incident report forms were not always responded to promptly. Internal quality assurance and more recently from the Zahid Mubarek Trust was being used to improve the level of enquiry made.
- Regular consultation to inform work with different groups within the population was not happening.
- The chaplaincy team was active around the site but operational staff constraints and mixing issues between children limited chaplains' ability to hold large group worship and classes and provide ad hoc one to one support.

## Health services

- CNWL monitored their performance indicators and maintained their governance processes, but the lack of a robust embedded prison-led local delivery board meant the prison did not have effective oversight of services.
- All healthcare services were well-staffed with skilled and knowledgeable clinicians who were committed to the delivery of a child-focused service.
- A well-resourced service meant access to healthcare services was good.
- 82% of the children were on the mental health caseload. The poor regime meant that clinical expertise was not fully utilised and too many children missed their appointments.
- Medicines continued to be administered at intervals which did not meet national standards to ensure that the optimum therapeutic effect was reached. None of the children had ID cards but staff conducted an identity check with full name and date of birth before administering the medication.
- Vaccination and immunisation rates were low which meant children were not fully protected from a range of infectious diseases.



## 4. Purposeful activity

**Outcomes for children against this healthy prison test were poor.**

### **Time out of cell**

- Children spent far too long locked in their cells with little opportunity for social interaction with their peers. No association was delivered on weekdays but an hour was delivered during the weekend.
- In our roll checks, 41% of children were locked in their cells. If they did not have access to education, their only time out of cell was likely to be only 30 minutes exercise per day during the week.
- Children who attended education had access to the library at least once per week, those separated could only order books via their laptops.
- The library supported learning in the various pathways with themed books and there was some promotion of literacy.
- The gym was understaffed and there was regular redeployment of the remaining staff to provide cover on the wings. This limited access.

### **Education, learning and skills**

- Prison leaders had presided over a largely impoverished regime that did not offer children the education, skills and work opportunities to which they were entitled. Chronic staff shortages in both the number of prison officers and college tutors had resulted in children too often being confined to their cells because there were insufficient officers to escort them to activities where there was a lack of qualified tutors, especially in English and mathematics.
- College leaders had been unable to offer vocational training in barbering, horticulture, construction, painting, and decorating, largely as a result of difficulties in recruiting staff to these roles. In our survey, children rightly complained of the limited opportunities available to them to gain useful vocational skills in these subjects.
- Provision for children on vocational training pathways in music and radio production was effective. In these sessions, attendance was generally good, and children learned useful new knowledge and skills to support their next steps.
- The overall quality of education was inadequate. Too many lessons were marred by teachers' inability to manage disruptive behaviour in class. Children were often late to sessions, not always willing to learn, frequently confrontational and routinely used abusive language when communicating with teachers, peers and prison staff. As a result, children failed to develop significant new knowledge or skills.
- Too many children were routinely allocated to courses on the basis of which children they could or could not mix with, rather than on their chosen curriculum pathway. As a consequence, these children were often disengaged and demotivated.
- Children's development of personal, social and employability skills was inadequate. Few demonstrated respect for their peers or for their tutors. Prison leaders did not offer young adults aged 18 any opportunities to

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participate in paid work in the prison. This limited their development of skills likely to benefit them on release or transfer to the adult estate.

- Opportunities for children separated were extremely limited, which significantly impeded their educational and personal development. As a result, these children were ill prepared for release or transfer to another establishment.
- The proportion of children recruited on to educational or vocational training courses who completed their studies was too low. However, those who did complete their course generally achieved well.
- Prison and college managers had identified accurately many of these concerns, but action to address them had yet to have an impact.

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## 5. Resettlement

**Outcomes for children against this healthy prison test were not sufficiently good.**

### **Children, families and contact with the outside world**

- In our survey only 46% said they had been helped to keep in touch with family and friends which was worse than other YOIs (68%).
- The visits hall remained uninspiring. While more visits slots were now available for children, we were concerned that visits had been cancelled by the establishment because of shortages of staff.
- Video calling was not well advertised and as a result was a wasted resource.

### **Pre-release and resettlement**

- The resettlement team were enthusiastic and knew their children well but staffing shortfalls from within the team meant their time was used reactively, which impacted on the continuity of engagement with children.
- There was no needs analysis in place to enable leaders and managers to identify and address gaps in provision. In addition, oversight of reducing reoffending had deteriorated.
- ROTL was well utilised: 19 children had received 478 episodes of ROTL in the last 12 months. The use of special purpose licence for education purposes was innovative and had enabled children to access college placements in the community.
- Transition to adult prisons, Home Detention Curfew (HDC) and early release were well managed.
- Support for looked after children remained limited to the provision of pocket money and regular review meetings.
- Staffing shortages meant many offending behaviour interventions had been cancelled in the previous 12 months.

### **Training planning and remand management**

- The resettlement team made early contact with the child, whether sentenced or on remand, shortly after reception. The vast majority met their case manager within a week of their arrival at the prison.
- Most children knew they had a sentence plan. Plans we reviewed contained achievable targets identifying the intended outcome. While this was positive, the objectives needed to be more specific.
- Some initial and subsequent planning reviews were late, sometimes by a number of months.
- The child's YOT and social worker attended planning meetings in person wherever possible or otherwise contributed a written report or electronically. Parents were also invited to attend where appropriate, and often did so.

## **Public protection**

- Management of risk of harm had improved. The introduction of a screening assessment ensured that the information known about the child was shared with appropriate staff.
- The IDRМ meeting was now operating well. Meetings were frequent, well attended and reviewed relevant children.

## **Reintegration planning**

- No children had been released without accommodation but 77% of children released in the last 12 months did not have an education or training place secured.

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