



Ministry
of Justice

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The Right Honourable
Dominic Raab MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of
State for Justice

MoJ ref: [MC123456]

11 November 2021

Dear Amanda,

URGENT NOTIFICATION – OAKHILL SECURE TRAINING CENTRE

Thank you for your letter of 14 October 2021, setting out your concerns following the full inspection at Oakhill Secure Training Centre (STC) run by G4S. I am providing you with a response within 28 calendar days of the Urgent Notification as set out in the protocol.

You have raised a number of serious concerns which I find deeply troubling. The safety and wellbeing of all the children is my top priority. The serious issues identified at Oakhill with regard to safeguarding processes and procedures at the centre – concerns the Youth Custody Service (YCS) had identified and separately shared with Ofsted prior to the inspection - are totally unacceptable. As an immediate action, the YCS have bolstered the on-site presence with additional senior management staff to provide enhanced supervision and monitoring.

I have set out below in more detail how the provider, G4S, and the YCS are taking urgent actions to address the concerns made by you and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of all the children at the centre.

Violence and Behaviour Management

Use of force should always be proportionate and justified. G4S will be implementing a revised behaviour management strategy aimed at de-escalating situations and encouraging positive behaviour. The YCS are working with G4S to undertake an urgent assessment on use of force, leadership, practice and governance, with the review making recommendations to improve the safety of children. To ensure staff responses to indiscipline remain proportionate, incidents involving force will be reviewed by a senior leader to ensure action taken is justified.

Safeguarding of children

The management of systems to safeguard children were wholly unacceptable. A backlog of referrals should never happen, with concerns or allegations considered as a matter of urgency. I can confirm all outstanding safeguarding cases have now been reviewed and, where necessary, referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), who will also be providing the centre with further guidance and support.

To strengthen safeguarding oversight, we have agreed with G4S that they will increase the size of their safeguarding team and that all Senior Operational Managers and Duty Directors will receive YCS-approved refresher training on managing child protection referrals. Where cases have not been escalated to the LADO, regular meetings will take place with the LADO to review the decision and a quarterly audit of all cases by the central G4S leadership team will also be introduced from January 2022.

We have also deployed an experienced public sector prison Governor to oversee and, where necessary, challenge the progress made by G4S in addressing safeguarding and other issues at the site. We have also increased the frequency of engagement with the safeguarding team to ensure that investigations of the particularly serious allegations (of which you are aware) are thorough and met with appropriate and robust actions.

Complaints Process

It is vital children are supported to raise concerns and feel they are listened to. As an immediate action, G4S are establishing new processes that will be shared by the child's caseworker or advocate so that they are aware of how their complaints are progressing. This process will be quality assured through measures detailed in the action plan, including sample testing from the Director or Deputy Director each month.

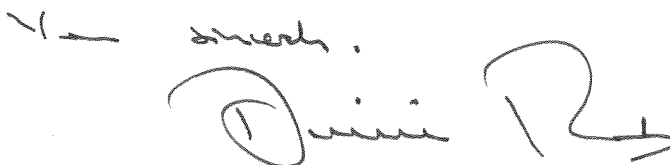
Staffing and senior leadership

The YCS have paused routine placements of children to the centre – thus reducing occupancy - to provide additional stability and ensure a higher staff to young person ratio. To increase staffing levels in the immediate term G4S deployed staff from other G4S-run establishments whilst wider recruitment takes place, as well as enhancing the current salary to look to improve retention rates. Leadership grip is important for the stability of Oakhill, - whilst there is an interim Director in place, a new permanent Director has been identified and, subject to confirmation, will start at the end of December 2021. Our experienced public sector Governor will work closely with these individuals to improve leadership grip and performance at the site.

Time out of room

Children should have the necessary and appropriate time out of room to engage with a consistent daily programme of activities. Although Oakhill has taken steps to increase time out of room, including over the weekend, providing around 25 hours of education each week, the YCS will continue to monitor this position closely to ensure that a stable, engaging regime is delivered to all children at the centre.

I would like to thank you for the continued, independent and robust scrutiny you provide, in the interest of children in custody. I will be monitoring the situation at Oakhill very closely to ensure the provider is taking immediate steps to improve the operation and management at the centre. Looking forward, I am also actively considering the further use of contractual levers and G4S's role running the centre, in order to ensure children at Oakhill are safe and supported.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Raab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP