

Minister Argar

Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation

12 April 2024

Dear Minister

**Independent Restraint Review Panel (IRRP)**

As the Independent Chair to the above Panel, I wanted to share with you a summary of our work to date which in due course will be published. Also attached are revised Terms of Reference for our work, which the Youth Custody Service have developed to take account of learning since the Panel was established. These seek to ensure that our work is as impactful as possible without being overly prescriptive about the approach.

IRRP was established by the Government in response to a review of the use of pain inducing restraint techniques (PIT) used with children to:

- provide independent oversight and assurance on the use of PIT; and,
- to support focus on behaviour management and use of restraint on children to ensure that use of force is minimised and that when used, it is reasonable and proportionate.

As a soon to retire CEO of the Youth Justice Board, I was asked to establish the Panel by the Youth Custody Service and, following a subsequent open competition, I was appointed formally as the Panel's first Chair, a public appointment for 3 years from January 2023.

The attached summary of our work, when published, will discharge the commitment, periodically to report publicly on our findings.

The report is relatively short (the final section captures our findings), but to draw out a few key points:

- Our work and the approach we have taken has been supported by the Youth Custody Service, Governing Governors and Directors of the Secure Training Centres.
- PIT, when used has generally been found to have been appropriate and justified – though not in all cases. We have also noted instances where PIT was used but not recorded.
- In the early days, in part a Covid legacy but also due to staff shortage and inexperience, we identified confidence and competence deficits amongst staff.
- Use of body worn cameras has increased. Effort to de-escalate levels of restraint earlier is now more evident. De-briefing of children after restraint, although not perfect, has improved. We find prison managers are generally constructive and objective in reviewing incidents and this in turn is filtering down to front line staff.
- We have seen increased healthcare staff attendance and advisory support in restraint incidents.
- When talking to children, inevitably we get mixed responses but, in most establishments, they acknowledge force as being necessary and that it is used appropriately.
- We have seen outstanding bravery and professionalism.

Whilst the above is largely positive and there has been clear improvement, we also hear from the children of individual staff that they have less confidence in or that they steer clear of (though names are rarely forthcoming). We have seen instances where in our view force was deployed too quickly or forcibly or where PIT was not justified. We see incidents which might have been avoided with better focus on behaviour management or which might have been better managed. And, some children tell us that there is little point complaining because they are “in jail” or that they fear that they will be treated differently if they do so.

I would of course be happy to discuss our work if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Colin Allars

Independent Chair IRRP

cc Ed Cornmell, Executive Director YCS