



Ministry  
of Justice

## **Delivering The Best for Girls in Custody**

***‘There is no more urgent mission than these girls’<sup>1</sup>***

By Susannah Hancock

March 2025

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from stakeholder interview.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed their time, ideas and perspectives so generously to this review. I have met with over 60 stakeholders (Appendix D), visited 4 secure settings, received evidence and research from academics, charities, think tanks, commissioners and professional associations; met with managers and practitioners from Youth Justice services, secure settings and inspectorates; engaged with staff and officials from the Youth Custody Service (YCS), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Youth Justice Board (YJB), Department for Education (DfE), NHS England (NHSE) and Welsh government, and heard from a number of girls themselves. To everyone involved, I want to express my thanks for all your support and contributions.

I would like to say a particular thank you to Georgia Evans and Maria Atwell from the MoJ Youth Justice Policy Team who have supported me throughout the review and provided such an excellent secretariat. And to the inspiring girls I met with during this review who shared their thoughts and perspectives.

The issue of girls in custody is one that galvanises people to action – that has come across clearly in this review. My sincere hope is that this review can provide a channel through which all stakeholders can come together so we can deliver the best for all girls in custody.

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# 1. Recommendations

**Outcome: A safe, supportive, gender responsive placement that delivers positive outcomes for girls.**

This report makes several recommendations for the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Youth Custody Service (YCS), as well as some wider partnership recommendations including Department for Education (DfE), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), National Health Service England (NHSE) and Local Authorities. I would urge UK Government to consider and respond to the recommendations set out in this report.

The main recommendations in the short to medium Term (2025 to 2030) are to:

1. End the use of Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) for girls with immediate effect.
2. End the use of Secure Training Centres (STCs) for girls by the end of the contract with Oakhill STC in 2029
3. Government policy should move to a position where all girls on remand or sentenced should be placed in Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) or the Secure School, as that is the most appropriate placement for them.
4. To achieve this, the Youth Custody Service (YCS), working with the Department for Education (DfE) and the National Health Service England (NHSE) should work with a small, dedicated group of SCHs and the Secure School to create a 'Girls Consortia' who are supported and resourced to work together, in a coordinated way, to provide placements for all girls. The consortia should be run as a pilot period initiative initially, with evaluation throughout. It should include work with the placements team to test new ways of improving processes. Based on the insights gained, it can then transition into standard practice. This could be formalised through a protocol and / or contractual arrangements. Additional funding should be identified to provide resources to the consortia to support them with girls with very complex needs.
5. A national pathway for girls should be developed in line with the evidence base, which defines the gender-responsive, trauma-informed services that girls in secure accommodation need and the commissioning required across departments to meet those needs. This should include justice and welfare girls in secure accommodation, given that many of them are the same group. The pathway should include the training and support requirements needed by professionals working with girls in secure environments. It can link with the wider work being taken forward through the YCS Critical Care Pathway<sup>2</sup>. The girl's pathway will provide professionals, settings and commissioners with clear, national guidance on meeting the needs of girls in secure settings.
6. Building on national research and guidance, the YCS and NHSE should work with the girls' consortia to ensure greater consistency of good practice in responding to girls who self-harm, so staff in secure settings are clear on *when* and *how* to intervene and de-escalate and are supported and trained to do so. This should include work to ensure restraint is used safely and adequately when responding to self-harm, with appropriate monitoring in place centrally to review this.
7. Wales: Girls from Wales should be placed in the Wales SCH wherever possible. If provision is not available, the wider girls' consortia should assist. In the longer term, provision for girls should be addressed through the Wales Youth Justice (YJ) Blueprint. Wales Government has stated that they want to see youth justice devolved and work to a place where no children are in custody.

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<sup>2</sup> CCP work looking at designing services to meet children's needs in custody.

The main recommendations for governance and leadership are:

8. A Girls Justice Strategic Board should be established to oversee the development and delivery of a strategy for girls across the youth justice system, including girls in the community and in the secure estate. This should link closely with the new Women's Justice Board. The terms of reference for the Girls Justice Board should be published.
9. A Ministry of Justice (MoJ) strategic lead should be appointed, working with DfE, DHSC, NHS, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and across government departments and wider partners, to drive forward the work with girls in the Youth Justice System (YJS), including the development of the consortia and the girls pathway, ensuring that there is strategic buy-in, and that momentum is maintained.
10. An action plan responding to the recommendations from this review should be published within 6 months of this report being published. This should include timescales for action.

The main recommendations for wider considerations are that:

11. The MoJ, DfE and DHSC should use the opportunities presented by the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to develop new 'community secure' provision, which could deliver a system change for welfare and justice girls – and indeed all children in secure settings. Once introduced, the Bill will provide a statutory framework to place children in new types of accommodation, including developing and testing new models of care and providing more flexible provision that is better able to respond to children's needs. MoJ should work closely with DfE, DHSC, NHSE, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and local authorities as the bill progresses, to ensure that the new legislation delivers the step change needed for girls in justice and welfare secure settings.
12. Linked to the above, the Government should consider designating alternative provision (i.e. multi-dimensional, intensive fostering placements) as approved places of detention for girls. This already exists in legislation but is rarely if ever used. This could be an effective and cost-effective means to provide a safe, supportive and diversionary (away from custody) environment for some girls.
13. To ensure that custody is only used as a last resort for girls, MoJ should work with YJB, DfE, DHSC, NHSE and local authorities to develop wider supported accommodation provision in the community as alternatives for girls. This could build on learning from existing pilots and models such as the London Accommodation Pathfinder (LAP) and the [Hope Street women's hub](#). Funding could be secured through channels including the remand budget, with the potential for additional investment from philanthropic bodies and charitable trusts.

## 2. Executive summary

***'The girls are not the problem. If anything, we - the professionals, are the problem. We need to come together to find a solution'<sup>3</sup>***

This independent review was commissioned by Minister Dakin, Youth Justice Minister, in November 2024. The terms of reference are attached [Appendix B]. As reviewer, I have been asked to consider the short-to-medium term placement options for girls in the Children and Young People Secure Estate (CYPSE) and to make recommendations about the most appropriate placement and care for girls in the CYPSE.

Over the past 15 years the number of children (aged 10 to 17 years old) in custody has fallen significantly, down from 2180 in March 2010, to around 420 in November 2024. This has been one of the big successes of the youth justice system, delivered through a range of factors including effective prevention and diversion schemes and a strong focus on reducing the numbers of children entering the YJS. The number of girls in custody has also declined, with only about 10 in the CYPSE currently, making up less than 2% of the overall CYPSE population.

These small numbers should have driven agencies to resolve the long-standing issue of appropriate placements for girls, yet the opposite has occurred. The system remains overwhelmingly designed for boys, leaving girls without strategic planning or gender-responsive services. While the new Women's Justice Board, chaired by Lord Timpson, addresses women's justice issues, it does not include girls, leaving this highly vulnerable group overlooked.

Despite positive moves towards a child-first approach in the Youth Justice System, girls' distinct needs (including education, health and equality protections), are often neglected. Many have experienced significant trauma, gendered violence, and abuse. Lacking proper community support, their trauma-driven responses can lead to justice system involvement. Many of these girls should not be in custody in the first place but instead require intensive therapeutic care through social and health services. For those who do require placement into custody, evidence shows that small, trauma-informed, gender-responsive settings have the best outcomes.

It is important to state that this is not about ignoring the needs of boys, many of whom are also highly vulnerable. But with 98% of the secure estate made up of boys, the needs of girls are too often overlooked.

This review is clear that, despite the best efforts of committed staff across secure settings, YOIs are not able to provide girls with the therapeutic and trauma-informed environment and services that they need and that girls should no longer be placed in YOIs with immediate effect **1]**. This should be clearly stated in YCS policy and strategy moving forward.

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<sup>3</sup> Anonymous. (2024) Quote from stakeholder interview.

Similarly, STCs, despite the positive work of committed staff at Oakhill and more widely, are not best placed to meet girls' needs and placements into STCs should cease by the end of the current contract of Oakhill STC in 2029, if not before **[recommendation 2]**.

The most appropriate placements for girls in the CYPSE are Secure Children's Homes and the newly opened Secure School. The evidence I reviewed and most of the professionals and girls I spoke to pointed to SCHs as being best placed to meet the needs of girls, including the most vulnerable girls. While the Secure School is still in its early days, given the trauma-informed, whole system model in place, it should be well equipped to deliver for girls. Ongoing investment and coordinated support are essential to sustain and enhance these provisions. Therefore, this review recommends that the YCS transitions to a model where all girls are placed in either SCH's or the new Secure School **[recommendation 3]**. It proposes that the YCS collaborate with a dedicated sub-group of SCHs and the Secure School, using a consortia model, to pilot a new approach for placing girls **[recommendation 4]**.

I recognise that a bottom line for this review *must be* that the YCS are able to provide placements for every girl remanded or sentenced. This is critical for public protection and for the safety of the girls. Any new solution must be able to deliver this. And while SCHs and the Secure School are legally permitted to decline a placement if they cannot meet a child's needs or those of the wider home, my conclusion is that, by collaborating as a consortium, we can reach a point where every girl in the CYPSE has a suitable placement. A similar model is in place in Scotland that we can draw learning from.

Although improving placement processes and options for girls is critical, this alone is not enough. Urgent cross-government action is needed to further reduce girls in custody, using it only as a last resort for the shortest possible time ([Article 37 of the UNCRC](#)). Girls who have committed serious offences and are serving longer sentences for public protection should remain in the CYPSE, but others – given their high levels of vulnerability and victimisation – should receive support outside of the justice system.

I also want to acknowledge upfront the victims of crimes committed by girls. For victims and their families, reviews such as this must be difficult. It is important that we acknowledge the harm that victims of crime experience because of offences committed by children and listen to their voices on what they want to see change. There are many studies which suggest that victims want rehabilitation and restoration and, above all, for crime to stop and for the perpetrator to stop committing further offences – they don't want others to have to go through what they have. This means all efforts should be focused on preventing offending and reoffending and stopping crime from happening in the first place. The recommendations in this review must above all be about supporting girls out of crime and into positive and productive lives, and in doing so keep communities safe and ensure less victims.

Finally, I recognise that I am not saying anything in this review that has not been said before, often many times, by professionals, researchers, organisations and girls themselves. I am grateful to so many people for contributing so constructively to this review, and to everyone who has shared reports, evidence and insights to inform it. The fact that there was a strong level of consensus about both the issues and the potential solutions is very encouraging. But now is the time for action. We owe it to the girls themselves, to the victims and communities who suffer because of crime, and to the professionals who work so hard across the CYPSE and wider youth justice system. We have a real opportunity to be innovative, imaginative and do things differently – and we should seize it without delay.

### 3. Assumptions and dependencies

I have made a key assumption in this report, that is important to record upfront. This is that the numbers of girls in custody will continue to remain broadly the same or decrease, and that future Government policy will not result in an increase in children and therefore girls going into the YJS. Numbers of girls in the YJS can be particularly susceptible to fluctuations in trends<sup>4</sup>, and it is vital that this does not result in custody inflation.

An important dependency is funding. We are operating in an incredibly tight fiscal environment, and one that is likely to get worse rather than better in the short term at least. We will need to be able to make a strong business case for any additional investment required, linked to outcomes and good value to the public purse. The review recommendations will require some additional investment, although I don't anticipate it being excessive. The business case can be based on delivering better outcomes for girls, and through this reducing reoffending and creating safer communities.

### 4. Overview of the current system: Data and evidence

#### 4.1 What the data tells us about girls in the criminal justice system

We know that:

- girls commit fewer and less serious offences than boys and are less likely to enter the YJS<sup>5</sup> (Smith 2006), where they make up around 12% of the YJS population (MoJ 2021)
- in custody, this is even lower with girls currently making up less than 2% of the CYPSE population
- an important factor for girls entering the YJS is the link between their offending and their experiences of multiple trauma and victimisation
- the number of girls entering the YJS has dramatically reduced over the past 10 years and at a faster rate than boys
- girls grow out of crime faster and are less likely to reoffend<sup>6</sup>.

Girls' offending is often linked to their experiences of trauma and victimisation. This is different to boys. Because of this, their contact with the law and YJS can serve to compound this further. An overt focus on risk management has faced widespread criticism in youth justice, particularly when it comes to addressing the needs of girls.

#### Numbers in the CYPSE

Over the past 15 years, the number of children in custody has fallen sharply. In March 2010 there were around 2,180 under 18-year-olds in custody. In November 2024, there were just 422 under 18-year-olds in custody.

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<sup>4</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2024) *An exploration of factors influencing the recent levels of incarceration of girls in England and Wales: A Thesis*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Factors\\_Influencing\\_the\\_Recent\\_Levels\\_of\\_Incarceration\\_of\\_Girls\\_in\\_England\\_and\\_Wales](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853_An_Exploration_of_Factors_Influencing_the_Recent_Levels_of_Incarceration_of_Girls_in_England_and_Wales)

<sup>5</sup> Smith, D., Leve, D., Chamberlain, P. (2006) *Adolescent Girls Offending and Health-Risking Sexual Behaviour: The predictive role of trauma*. Available at: [Adolescent Girls' Offending and Health-Risking Sexual Behavior: The Predictive Role of Trauma - Dana K. Smith, Leslie D. Leve, Patricia Chamberlain, 2006](#)

<sup>6</sup> Bateman, T. (2019) *The State of Youth Justice 2017: An overview of trends and developments*, National Association of Youth Justice. Available at: [The State of youth justice 2017: an overview of trends and developments](#)



Since January 2022, the average number of girls in custody was 11 (including 18-year-olds.) This is in comparison to December 2015, when there were 42 girls in custody (including 18-year-olds).

The significant reductions in overall numbers of children and young people in custody is due to several factors including successful programmes of prevention and diversion undertaken across the YJS, reducing numbers of first-time entrants to the YJS, the development of more intensive alternative community sentences, and wider policy changes. All of this is to be welcomed.

### Legal basis

For the year ending March 2023, half the average monthly custodial population of girls under 18 were on remand<sup>7</sup>. The remand figure has increased year on year.

The number of boys remanded looks to be less – currently at around 40%. Goodfellow (2019) found that of all the boys and girls remanded to custody, 63% did not receive a custodial sentence<sup>8</sup>.

The reasons for the high numbers of remands for girls can be linked to several factors including lack of appropriate accommodation in the community, but for some girls it also appears to be linked to high levels of assault on care and/or emergency workers which can then escalate to a custodial remand. The HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) thematic report on girls (Sept '22) also found examples of girls remanded in custody simply because of no other suitable placements available in the community<sup>9</sup>.

Overall, the figures suggest that a significant number of the girls in custody, particularly those on remand, would not be there if appropriate community alternatives were available.

### Types of Sentences

Custodial sentences for children can include the Detention and Training Order (lasting 4 months to 2 years for 12- to 17-year-olds); section 250 of sentencing code 2020 (formerly sect 91) which provides for longer sentences for specified serious offences (10 to 17 year olds); sect 259 mandatory life sentences for murder (10 to 17 year olds), or section 254 sentence of detention for life (10 to 17 year olds).

Data held internally by the YCS includes information on girls' sentences, which I accessed during this review. As there are so few girls in custody, this data cannot be shared as it risks identifying individual girls. Reflecting the wider overall population trend, the data could suggest an increase in proportion of girls on more serious sentences from previous years.

### Length of sentence

Girls are often in custody for very short periods, which can be highly disruptive. MoJ published data shows that from June 2023 to June 2024, the average custodial sentence

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<sup>7</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2024) *Youth Justice Statistics 2023-2024*. Available at: [Youth Justice Board Annual Report and Accounts, 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>8</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2019) *Outnumbered, locked up and overlooked? The use of penal custody for girls in England and Wales*. The Griffins Society. Available at: <https://thegriffinssociety.org/outnumbered-locked-up-and-overlooked>

<sup>9</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) *A thematic review of the outcomes of girls in youth custody*. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

length was 7.1 months for girls<sup>10</sup>. During the course of this review, I had access to data related to girls on the YCS Critical Care Pathway (CCP). Though the specific numbers cannot be shared, I found that only a very small proportion of these girls were on longer sentences.

Analysis of sentencing data (Goodfellow 2019) shows prevalence of short sentences with around 75% of girls at that time being sentenced to a custodial period of 6 months or less, and 90% of girls sentenced to a period of 12 months or less<sup>11</sup>. Evidence shows that short sentences are comparatively ineffective, and can be very disruptive, for adults and children<sup>12</sup>.

Sentencing data for children is not currently broken down by gender in combination with other variables, making it more difficult to gain a full understanding of sentenced girls. That said, research suggests that women and girls who offend are less likely to end up in court but when they do, they receive differential treatment from male counterparts<sup>13</sup>. On the one hand girls and women can be treated more harshly for not behaving how females are supposed to behave (based on gender expectations). Conversely, sentencers can treat women more leniently because they generate more concern and understanding, and a more tolerant response.<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> A 2019 study found that one third of crimes for which girls are sentenced to custody were non-violent, such as theft, drug-related offenses or breach of orders<sup>16</sup>. The 2012 APPG Inquiry on Girls found magistrates often lack awareness of girls' gender-specific needs, confusing high welfare needs with high-risk offending, leading to harder treatments and criminalisation when welfare interventions are really needed.<sup>17</sup>

### Offence type

YJB data 2024 shows that the most common offence committed by girls is violence against the person<sup>18</sup>. From discussions with a wide range of professionals, the majority of these appear to be directly related to violence against care workers and emergency workers or assaulting a police officer.

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2024) *Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2024>

<sup>11</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2019) *Outnumbered, locked up and overlooked? The use of penal custody for girls in England and Wales*.

The Griffins Society. Available at: <https://thegriffinssociety.org/outnumbered-locked-up-and-overlooked>

<sup>12</sup> UK Parliament Post (2023) *The Use of Short Sentences in England and Wales*. Available at: [The use of short prison sentences in England and Wales - POST](#)

<sup>13</sup> Gelsthorpe, L., Hedderman, C. (2012) *Providing for Women Offenders: The risks of adopting a payment by results approach*. Available at: [Providing for women offenders: the risks of adopting a payment by results approach - Loraine Gelsthorpe, Carol Hedderman, 2012](#)

<sup>14</sup> Gelsthorpe, L., Sharpe, G. (2015) *Women and Sentencing: Challenges and choices*. Available at: [Women and Sentencing: Challenges and Choices | SpringerLink](#)

<sup>15</sup> Sharpe, G. (2013) *Offending Girls: Young women and youth justice*. Available at: [Offending girls: Young women and youth justice | Request PDF](#)

<sup>16</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2019) *Outnumbered, Locked Up and Overlooked? The use of penal custody for girls in England and Wales*. The Griffins Society. Available at: <https://thegriffinssociety.org/outnumbered-locked-up-and-overlooked>

<sup>17</sup> Howard League for Penal Reform. (2012) *All Party Parliamentary Group on Women in the Penal System Inquiry on Girls: From courts to custody*. Available at: <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/From-Courts-to-Custody.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2024) *Youth Justice Statistics 2023-2024*. Available at: [Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

There is a consensus across many academic studies that girls offending behaviour is typically linked to experiences of trauma, abuse and loss. Girls are therefore much more likely to come into the youth justice system because of their vulnerabilities and victimisation than the seriousness of their offending<sup>19</sup>.

### Ages

While there are reasonably consistent patterns of girls in relation to age in the CYPSE over the past 10 years, discussions with practitioners suggest girls in the wider YJS are getting younger.

In terms of custody, during this review I had access to internal data on ages of girls in custody. I found that in the year 23/24 the majority of girls in custody (just over half) were aged 15 to 16, and just under half aged 17 and 18, with the remaining girls under 15. However, with numbers so small, it is difficult to make any conclusions, and the data can vary greatly month to month.

### Ethnicity

Girls and boys from racialised communities (described in data analysis as ethnic minority communities) are over-represented at every stage of the YJS and in the secure estate. This was set out in the 2017 Lammy Review and in wider research and evidence<sup>20</sup>.

YJB annual statistics '23/24 show that while all ethnic groups have seen decreases in the average under-18 custody population over the last 10 years, as the whole custody population has decreased, they have been falling at different rates. The data confirms that over the last 10 years the proportion of black children is now slightly higher, going from 22% to 24%, with mixed children increasing the most from 9% to 18%. The proportion of Asian or other children has also increased from 8% to 9%.

In terms of girls in the CYPSE, in 2023/24 approx. 30% of girls were from racialised communities.

Analysis by Khan, Harris and Sinclair 2021 revealed that at the time, a higher proportion of girls from racialised communities were placed in STCs rather than SCHs compared to white girls<sup>21</sup>. This suggests they may have been assessed as less vulnerable, potentially because of unconscious bias in professional assessments, linked to the 'adultification' of black girls<sup>22</sup>.

## **4.2 Needs of girls in secure settings**

### Overview

In 2020, a review of the needs and care pathways of girls in custody was commissioned by the YCS and NHSE along with a comprehensive literature review (Khan 2021) and research

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<sup>19</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2019) *Outnumbered, Locked Up and Overlooked? The use of penal custody for girls in England and Wales*. The Griffins Society. Available at: <https://thegriffinssociety.org/outnumbered-locked-up-and-overlooked>

<sup>20</sup> Lammy, D. (2017) *Lammy Review: Final Report – An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. Ministry of Justice. Available at: [The Lammy Review](https://www.lammyreview.org.uk/)

<sup>21</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>22</sup> Epstein, R., Blake, J., Gonzalez, T. (2017) *Girlhood Interrupted: The erasure of black girls' childhood*. Available at: [Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood](https://www.girlhoodinterrupted.org/)

paper (Khan, Harris and Sinclair 2021)<sup>23</sup>. The review published a report in 2021 called 'Out of Sight – Girls in the CYPSE'<sup>24</sup>. This set out, in detail, the needs of girls in custody and how best to meet them. I have drawn heavily on this review in this section, alongside some other relevant pieces of research including Goodfellow's 2024 research 'An exploration of the factors influencing the incarceration of girls in custody in England and Wales.'<sup>25</sup>

Both reports confirmed that girls' pathways into the CYPSE are closely linked to exposure to multiple traumatic events – particularly physical and sexual abuse and exploitation, and on-going victimisation. Girls in the CYPSE often experience higher rates of mental health difficulties, neurodevelopmental challenges, and physical health issues, and frequently face multiple conditions simultaneously.

Girls placed in the CYPSE are a highly vulnerable group. Many girls come into the CYPSE carrying with them extreme levels of trauma, often because of gender-based violence. This trauma can be further exacerbated by the custodial environment itself.

### Care-experienced girls

Many of the girls in the CYPSE have experience of being in care. Girls who are looked after by the state are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, with a range of studies documenting this<sup>26 27</sup>. The internal YCS data I had access to during this review on the YCS Critical Care Pathway suggested that the majority of girls on this pathway had looked after status. In their recent study on 'Understanding and supporting care experienced girls in the YJS', Staines, Fitzpatrick and Hunter present findings on the over-representation of care-experienced girls in the justice system and how being in care directly impacts on their offending<sup>28</sup>. Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2022 data shows that 52% of care experienced children in England had a criminal conviction by the time they were 24, compared with 13% of those not in care<sup>29</sup>. Prison Reform Trust 2016 research showed that up to half of all children in custody had been in care at some point<sup>30</sup>.

Some of the professionals I spoke with described 2 distinct groups of girls in the CYPSE. The first group was the group described above – highly vulnerable; multiple traumas; high

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<sup>23</sup> Khan, L. (2021) *Understanding the Needs and What Works for Girls in the Children and Young People's Secure Estate: Literature review*. Available at: [CentreforMentalHealth\\_OutOfSight\\_LiteratureReview.pdf](#)

<sup>24</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>25</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2024) *An Exploration of Factors Influencing the Recent Levels of Incarceration of Girls in England and Wales: A Thesis*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Factors\\_Influencing\\_the\\_Recent\\_Levels\\_of\\_Incarceration\\_of\\_Girls\\_in\\_England\\_and\\_Wales](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853_An_Exploration_of_Factors_Influencing_the_Recent_Levels_of_Incarceration_of_Girls_in_England_and_Wales)

<sup>26</sup> Fitzpatrick, C., Hunter, K., Shaw, J., Staines, J. (2022) *Disrupting the Routes between Care and Custody for Girls and Women: Policy briefing*. Available at: [Final-Care-Custody-Policy-Briefing-May-2022.pdf](#)

<sup>27</sup> Malvaso, C., Delfabbro, P., Day, A. (2017) *Child Maltreatment and Criminal Convictions in Youth: The role of gender, ethnicity and placement experiences in an Australian population*. Available at: [Child maltreatment and criminal convictions in youth: The role of gender, ethnicity and placement experiences in an Australian population | Request PDF](#)

<sup>28</sup> Fitzpatrick, C., Hunter, K., Staines, J. (2023) *We Need to Tackle their Wellbeing First: Understanding and supporting care experienced girls in the YJS*. Available at: ['We Need to Tackle Their Well Being First': Understanding and Supporting Care-Experienced Girls in the Youth Justice System - Jo Staines, Claire Fitzpatrick, Julie Shaw, Katie Hunter, 2024](#)

<sup>29</sup> ONS. (2022) *The Education Background of Looked-after Children who Interact with the Criminal Justice System: December 2022*. Available at: [The education background of looked-after children who interact with the criminal justice system - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>30</sup> Prison Reform Trust. (2016) *"Too Many Children in Care Ending Up Behind Bars."* Prison Reform Trust. Available at [Too many children in care ending up behind bars | Prison Reform Trust](#)

levels of complexity; high levels of self-harm as a result; requiring intensive support and therapeutic care; well known to the YJS and social care. Many have previously been subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLs). These girls often went missing; were arrested for breach of bail and would then resort to violent behaviour in the police station resulting in them being charged with criminal damage and /or assault on emergency worker. In court, there was often no alternative accommodation available, resulting in magistrates remanding them in custody. At least 50% of the current cohort of girls in custody is from the group described above. These girls should be nowhere near custody. They should be in supported accommodation in the community, or in a small number of cases, in Tier 4 hospital beds.

The second group were girls who are charged with very serious offences, such as Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) or murder. These girls are not always well-known to youth justice services prior to their entry into the YJS. They will be in custody for long periods of time. Some do not necessarily present with high levels of pre-existent trauma.

### Needs and vulnerabilities

In the 'Out of Sight' report, data on the needs of children admitted to justice placements 2018-20 showed that<sup>31</sup>:

- 22.1% have physical health concerns
- 54.6% have self-harm concerns
- 17.2% have mental health concerns
- 28.8% have special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities
- 42.9% are at risk of sexual exploitation
- 78.5% may offend or behave in a way that could harm others
- many have neurodivergent conditions.

Research shows similar patterns for girls entering secure welfare placements. Goodfellow's 2024 research<sup>32</sup> and the Agenda Alliance 2023 'Call to Action' report highlight high levels of victimisation: 63% of young women serving community sentences had experienced rape or domestic abuse in an intimate partner relationship; 75 – 90% of girls in YJS may have experienced abuse from family member; and 42% of young women in custody say they need help with trauma<sup>33</sup>.

The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF) 2024 annual report on the children, violence and vulnerability national survey found that 14% of girls had experienced violence in the last 12 months (similar levels to boys), with girls five times more likely than boys to be victims of sexual assault.<sup>34</sup> Wider research also shows that girls involved in gangs are subject to some of the most serious forms of violence and exploitation, with the YEF report concluding that girls were at increasing risk of violence from gangs and sexual exploitation.

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<sup>31</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>32</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2024) *An Exploration of Factors Influencing the Recent Levels of Incarceration of Girls in England and Wales: A Thesis*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Factors\\_Influencing\\_the\\_Recent\\_Levels\\_of\\_Incarceration\\_of\\_Girls\\_in\\_England\\_and\\_Wales](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853_An_Exploration_of_Factors_Influencing_the_Recent_Levels_of_Incarceration_of_Girls_in_England_and_Wales)

<sup>33</sup> Agenda Alliance. (2023) *A Call to Action*. Available at: [Agenda Alliance - A Call To Action Briefing-Nov 2023.pdf](#)

<sup>34</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. (2024) *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024*. Available at: [Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024 | Youth Endowment Fund](#)

This data demonstrates the extreme vulnerability and complex needs of these girls, explored further in this next section.

## Health

Receiving physical and mental health services to at least the standard of their peers is a legal requirement for all children under the [Health and Social Care Act 2012](#), and this is the case for all children in the CYPSE.

Healthcare in the CYPSE is commissioned by NHSE and supported by the Intercollegiate, Healthcare Standards and the NHSE Core Outcome Specification. Access to these services and support for the Framework for Integrated Care can vary in the different sectors of the CYPSE. Healthcare at Oakhill STC is commissioned by G4S health, although the responsibility to commission health services will transfer to NHSE on 1 April 2025 with a new NHSE provider commencing on 1 May 2025.

The HMIP thematic report into girls in custody 2022 found that, for the most part, girls health care needs were met in all settings<sup>35</sup>. However, it highlighted that ‘not all secure settings had a clearly defined girls’ management strategy’, and progress in implementing recommendations from the Centre for Mental Health report was inconsistent. More recent inspections have raised concerns, particularly in YOIs and STCs. The joint inspection of Oakhill STC (Oct 2024) found Oakhill to be ‘inadequate’ overall with ‘poor healthcare’<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, the March ’24 HMIP report into Wetherby found that the care provided to both girls and boys with complex needs was ‘not good enough’<sup>37</sup>.

### Physical Health

As a part of this review, I met with the Women’s Health Ambassador Dame Lesley Regan. She was clear that the provision of quality health care in custody is critical in helping girls address often long-standing health concerns as well as receiving, sometimes for the first time, health education. Dame Lesley talked about the NHS programme to support health hubs in the women’s prison estate and the need to bring this learning into girls’ provision. Both Dame Lesley and NHS England health and justice leads spoke about the opportunity in bringing health care directly to girls in the CYPSE and how important and positive this could be.

Care and education in relation to menstrual health are also important, forming a core part of gender-responsive services to support girls in areas such as health and hygiene, access to menstrual products, the links between the menstrual cycle and behaviour, and fostering open discussions about these topics. McKeown and Mulvana in their 2024 briefing, emphasise the importance of managing menstruation sensitively<sup>38</sup>. ‘For girls in [the] CYPSE, menstruation not only results in physical symptoms, but it can also trigger shame and overwhelming emotions (because of some girls’ histories of sexual abuse). There should be

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<sup>35</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) *A Thematic Review of the Outcomes of Girls in Youth Custody*. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Care Quality Commission, HMIP and Ofsted. (2024) *Oakhill Secure Training Centre Assurance Inspection*. Available at: [50244078](https://www.cqc.gov.uk/inspections/50244078)

<sup>37</sup> HMIP. (2023) *Report on an Unannounced Inspection of HMYOI Wetherby*. Available at: [HMYOI Wetherby – HM Inspectorate of Prisons](#)

<sup>38</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

an increased and more sensitive focus on girl specific health issues such as gynaecology, with pathways developed.’ Furthermore, a recent research study by Lee et al (2024) identified the impact of menstrual cycles on the emotional wellbeing, health and behaviour of girls in secure settings, highlighting the need for staff awareness and specialised training in this area<sup>39</sup>.

## Mental Health and Trauma

The Framework for Integrated Care – a trauma-informed, multi- agency approach which is being implemented across the range of secure settings, discussed later in this report – is vital to supporting integrated provision to provide the right support to system change, staff and children.

Research shows that girls in custody experience wide-ranging mental health challenges, often internalising trauma which can manifest itself through self-harm and substance misuse, whereas boys are more likely to externalise trauma through violence<sup>40 41</sup>. Girls in secure settings (both justice and welfare), frequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe behavioural difficulties due to trauma<sup>42</sup>. Their exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is four times higher than that of their peers in the community<sup>43</sup>.

Challenging behaviour in girls often stems from trauma, manifesting in emotional volatility, ‘fight or flight’ responses, violence toward authority figures, and high self-harm rates. Academic evidence is clear that complex trauma because of abuse and victimisation, is the primary factor impacting on girls’ mental health in secure settings. The professionals I spoke to in this review agreed that the level and complexity of mental health-related needs for these girls are far higher than they are for boys. They spoke about boys’ behaviour being more predictable i.e. when boys respond to stress, it is generally by physically acting out through violence which would then tend to blow over. With girls, they felt behaviours were more complex and less easy to predict. Issues could suddenly blow up – particularly between girls and other girls.

Some research also suggests a higher prevalence of social and communication difficulties, including autism, among girls in secure settings. Girls tend to mask these behaviours more effectively than boys, making detection in the community difficult<sup>44</sup>. Experts highlight this as a growing concern, potentially linked to neural damage from early trauma.

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<sup>39</sup> Lee, R., McKeown, A., Graham, J., Hajaji, Y., Kennedy, P. (2024) *Understanding Gender-responsive Needs in Girls in the Children and Young People Secure Estate: Menstrual cycle considerations*. Available at:

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhrj-11-2023-0067/full/html>

<sup>40</sup> De La Rue, L. (2019) *Intersectional Trauma-Responsive Care: A framework for humanizing care for justice involved girls and women of color*. Available at: [View article](#)

<sup>41</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people’s secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>42</sup> Khan, L. (2021) *Understanding the Needs and What Works for Girls in the Children and Young People’s Secure Estate: Literature review*. Available at: [CentreforMentalHealth\\_OutOfSight\\_LiteratureReview.pdf](#)

<sup>43</sup> Baglivio, M., Jackowski, K., Greenwald, M., Howell, J. (2014) *Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders: A statewide analysis of prevalence and prediction of subsequent recidivism using risk and protective factors*. Available at: [Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders - Baglivio - 2014 - Criminology & Public Policy - Wiley Online Library](#)

<sup>44</sup> Kennedy, P.J., Sinfield, P., Tweedlie, L., Nixon, C., Martin, A., Edwards. (2018) *Brief Report: Using the social communication questionnaire to identify young people residing in secure children’s homes with symptom complexes compatible with autistic spectrum disorder*. Available at: [Brief Report: Using the Social Communication Questionnaire to Identify Young People Residing in Secure Children’s Homes with Symptom Complexes Compatible with Autistic Spectrum Disorder | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#)

## Tier 4 (Inpatient care)

The secure settings I visited during the review reported significant challenges in transferring girls to secure inpatient units – far more so than boys. They highlighted a severe lack of available places for girls, unclear acceptance criteria, and lengthy delays in accessing a bed even when a place was eventually secured. Some professionals spoke about several girls in the CYPSE having what they described as border-line personality type disorders, which can be associated with repetitive self-harming or repeated violence. However, this was not sufficient criteria to get them transferred to a Tier 4 bed, so they had to remain in custody.

Some psychologists spoke about difficulties with diagnoses and questioned whether some of the girls *should* be in Tier 4 beds, or whether it was more about ensuring effective provision in the settings themselves. While it seems clear that more Tier 4 beds should be made available, it is equally important that secure settings are able to access the necessary levels of psychiatric and psychological care within the unit, so that girls can receive the professional help they need on site.

The Mental Health Bill 2025 currently going through parliament could present a real opportunity to deliver significant improvements to mental health provision both in the community, in hospital and in secure settings.

## Self-harm

Almost all the professionals I spoke to throughout the review identified self-harm by girls in secure settings as being one of the biggest areas of concern. Self-harm rates amongst girls are alarmingly high, with all settings reporting that most self-harm incidents were committed by girls. HMIP's 2022 thematic report showed that girls are 12 times more likely to self-harm than boys<sup>45</sup>. Data published by the YCS in the 12 months to September 2024, shows that, despite girls making up 1.6% of the total average population, girls were responsible for 55% of all self-harm incidents (1,194 incidents out of a total 2,176).<sup>46</sup>

Self-harm is closely linked to experiences of trauma. Studies show that girls in secure settings are at higher risk of self-harm and suicidal thinking compared to boys, with girls accounting for significantly higher levels of self-harm than boys<sup>47</sup>.

Self-harm can be a means of emotional release and managing emotional distress, and while it does not always lead to suicidal ideation, there is a notable correlation – particularly in girls. Upon entering the CYPSE, girls are particularly vulnerable to self-harming behaviours, often in response to the environment and feeling unsafe, which can trigger earlier trauma. Staff reported that, with the right help and support, most girls settle over time and their self-harm decreases, although at the point of leaving to go back into the community or transitioning to an adult prison, it would often spike again. However, staff also report a small but worrying group of girls where it persists. When this occurs, girls need 24-hour watch and high staff to child ratios. It is highly distressing for the girl and for the staff involved. It can

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<sup>45</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) A Thematic Review of the Outcomes of Girls in Youth Custody. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> HM Government. (2024). *Safety in the Children and Young People Secure Estate: Update to June 2024*. Gov.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-the-children-and-young-people-secure-estate-update-to-june-2024>

<sup>47</sup> Wasserman, G., McReynolds, L., Schwalbe, C., Keating, J., (2010) *Psychiatric Disorder, Comorbidity, and Suicidal Behavior in Juvenile Justice Youth*. Available at: [\(PDF\) Psychiatric Disorder, Comorbidity, and Suicidal Behavior in Juvenile Justice Youth](#)



also be very disturbing to children around them and can trigger other girls into similar behaviours.

Managing self-harm is a major issue for staff in secure settings. Staff need expert training and support and need to be able to draw on support from health care specialist services working to a trauma informed approach to assist.

#### Restraints linked to self-harm

Restraints against girls in secure settings are closely linked to incidents of self-harm, with staff intervening to stop girls self-harming, with this then leading to restraints. According to a HMI Prisons report, data published by the YCS for YOIs, STCs and SCHs, covering the period April 2020 – March 2021, showed that girls are almost 6 times more likely to be physically restrained than boys, at a rate of 287 restraints per 100 girls per month compared with 48 restraints per 100 boys<sup>48</sup>.

The most recent YJB annual statistics '23/24 show that of the 1309 incidents of use of force used in the CYPSE to prevent self-harm where the sex was known, around 28% of those involved girls – whereas girls make up less than 2% of the population.

The cycle of self-harm followed by restraint followed by self-harm was raised in several secure settings. Staff spoke of being unclear on whether and how to intervene, and that restraint can cause further re-traumatisation to already very vulnerable girls. This was confirmed by the Independent Restraint Review Panel (IRRP) who in their visits to both Oakhill STC and Wetherby YOI, reported that issues concerning self-harm and restraint continued to be challenging for staff and girls.

Following their visit to Wetherby in Nov '24, the Independent Restraint Review Panel (IRRP) confirmed in their report to the YCS that they found high volumes of restraints linked to girls. Equally, following their visit to Oakhill Nov 24, they identified both the challenges facing staff when responding to self-harm by girls and the pressing need for guidance to be issued around when and how to intervene:

*“After our last visit we suggested the need for work on the challenges staff face when responding to self-harm involving girls – when to intervene or not. This was addressed to [the] YCS...but it is not yet clear how this recommendation has been addressed.’ IRRP go on to recommend that [the] YCS consider what advice and support is given to staff facing self-harm by girls including when the use of force is appropriate or not.”*

In their response, the YCS acknowledged that this was an issue across the CYPSE and that there are too many interventions where the risk did not match the need to use restraint and indeed where it may increase the risk of potential harm to the girl.

Existing research, such as prof Dame Sue Bailey's 2016 study *Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint*, has provided recommendations for improving restraint management in the CYPSE<sup>49</sup>. The Women's Justice Working Group has also contributed valuable insights relevant to working with girls. Additionally, the 2023 Healthcare Standards for the CYPSE

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<sup>48</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2022). *Outcomes for girls in custody*. Available at: [https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, S. (2016) *Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint*. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a802021ed915d74e33f8980/minimising-managing-physical-restraint.pdf>

emphasize that all staff should be trained in a consistent approach to restraint. Focus should now be given to bringing evidence and best practice together from across health, justice and welfare settings to ensure that all staff in secure establishments are trained and equipped to respond to incidents of self-harm in an effective, safe, consistent and proportionate way. There should also be appropriate monitoring and review in place centrally across the CYPSE to ensure learning can be shared **[recommendation 6]** <sup>50</sup>.

### Personal development, education and training

Secure settings have a legal requirement to provide education to all children in their care offering girls in custody a real opportunity to engage in learning, often for the first time. Many girls in the CYPSE will have struggled in main-stream education, often linked to special educational needs. However, because large secure settings (YOIs and STCs) are primarily built around the needs of boys (around 98% of population), the education needs of girls can get neglected. Girls require diverse learning opportunities, just as boys do. Sometimes these may be the same as boys; sometimes different. Secure settings need to be able to tailor their provision to girls, just as mainstream schools need to, and to recognise that girls may need different provision to boys. In their 2024 research, McKewan and Mulvara talk about girls being more tentative about joining activities, and as a result, they may need different approaches to encourage them to get involved<sup>51</sup>.

Views on mixed-gendered education vary. While professionals and girls see benefits of mixed education and activities, some girls – especially those with experiences of gender-based violence – prefer separate learning environments. Secure settings must be flexible, allowing girls a say in their education and development.

SCHs are generally better equipped to meet girls' educational needs, with recent Ofsted reports rating their provision as good. The new Oasis Restore Secure School is expected to meet similar standards. In contrast, Wetherby YOI and Oakhill STC have received poor inspection ratings for education, highlighting the need for improvement.

### Girls with protected characteristics

Data shows that girls and boys from racialised communities (described in YJB data analysis as 'ethnic minority communities') are over-represented at every stage of the criminal justice system including in the secure estate. The 2017 Lammy Review highlighted this issue, noting a rise in Black, Asian and minority ethnic children within the youth justice system despite overall reductions in numbers <sup>52</sup>. While there have been some reductions in the proportion of black children in some areas including children in custody, black children continue to be over-represented across the YJS<sup>53</sup>. Black children continue to be over-represented in youth cautions and sentences, accounting for 11% of all such cases

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<sup>50</sup> NHS England. (2023) *Overarching Healthcare Specification: For children and young people in secure settings (CYPSS)*. Available at: [Health and justice and armed forces service specifications for children and young people in secure settings: Overarching healthcare specification](#)

<sup>51</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>52</sup> Lammy, D. (2017) *Lammy Review: Final Report – An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. Ministry of Justice. Available at: [The Lammy Review](#)

<sup>53</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2023) *Youth Justice Statistics 2022-23*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b391a60c75e30012d800fa/Youth\\_Justice\\_Statistics\\_2022-23.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b391a60c75e30012d800fa/Youth_Justice_Statistics_2022-23.pdf)

compared to their 6% of the overall population. The proportion of black children in the CYPSE is approximately 23% (2023/24) and around 30% of girls in the CYPSE in '23/24 were from racialised communities<sup>54</sup>.

Literature and research show that girls in the YJS with protected characteristics – including those from racialised communities, LGBTQ+ and trans communities, those with disabilities, and those with intersecting identities, experience discrimination and disadvantage before they enter the youth justice system and when they are in it.

The Centre for Mental Health report<sup>55</sup> states that the proportion of girls from racialised communities in the CYPSE who have been identified by professionals as having a need or vulnerability, was consistently lower than for white girls, with further research<sup>56</sup> suggesting that this could be because professionals perceive black girls to be developmentally 'older' and less vulnerable and in need than white girls. New admissions data from the YCS within the report, is consistent with this, with the needs and vulnerabilities of white girls reported at significantly higher levels than girls from racialised communities.

The 2023 Agenda Alliance report found that young women with intersecting and marginalised identities were disproportionately impacted and criminalised, and that Black, Asian, and minoritised young women experienced inequalities on account of their ethnicity as well as gender and age<sup>57</sup>. In her 2024 research, Goodfellow also found that 'girls face systemic discrimination before, during and after their contact with the justice system...Discrimination across a range of systems and services including education and welfare settings, shape girls' pathways into the YJS including a lack of safeguarding when they are victims'<sup>58</sup>.

Research suggests that children from LGTBQ+ communities are also over-represented in secure settings and that they experience higher levels of victimisation<sup>59</sup>. Trans or gender questioning children are also widely recognised to be highly vulnerable and victimised.

It is essential that girls with protected characteristics have access to the services they need. Staff in secure settings should be trained and equipped to understand and respond to the needs of girls with intersecting and marginalised identities. Gender-responsive programmes should also address the realities of girls' lives, including the impacts of race, class, and gender inequality.

### Wider welfare and vulnerabilities

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<sup>54</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2024) *Youth Justice Statistics 2023-2024*. Available at: [Youth Justice Board Annual Report and Accounts, 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>55</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>56</sup> Epstein, R., Blake, J., Gonzalez, T. (2017) *Girlhood Interrupted: The erasure of black girls' childhood*. Available at: [Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood](#)

<sup>57</sup> Agenda Alliance. (2023) *A Call to Action*. Available at: [Agenda\\_Alliance\\_-\\_A\\_Call\\_To\\_Action\\_Briefing-Nov\\_2023.pdf](#)

<sup>58</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2024) *An Exploration of Factors Influencing the Recent Levels of Incarceration of Girls in England and Wales: A Thesis*. Available at:

<sup>59</sup> Irvine-Baker, A., Jones, N., Canfield, A. (2019) *Taking the 'Girl' Out of Gender-Responsive Programming in the Juvenile Justice System*. Available at: [Taking the "Girl" Out of Gender-Responsive Programming in the Juvenile Justice System](#)

Connections between girls' involvement in the care system and their likelihood of offending have been shown in many recent studies<sup>60</sup>. International research also shows strong associations between placement of girls in residential care and their subsequent involvement in the YJS.

Research has shown that girls in secure settings held under welfare and justice legislation have overlapping characteristics and share many adverse childhood experiences<sup>61 62</sup>. A recent review commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), examined mixed placements in SCHs for children in justice and welfare systems and found that 'they are fundamentally the same children...with some children having repeat admissions on different pathways'<sup>63</sup>. They proposed greater integration including with secure mental health services which they felt would better meet the needs of these children. Girls subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLs) also present with many of the same needs and characteristics. There has recently been a sharp rise in the number of children deprived of their liberty, with Cafcass data showing an increase of 462% in the 3 years up to 20/21. A recent review by Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (Sept 2023) into children subject to DoLs found that around 50% of those children are girls (around 650 a year)<sup>64</sup>. These girls often experience high levels of self-harm, complex trauma, and vulnerability to criminal and sexual exploitation. Many have previous involvement with youth justice services and are now deprived of their liberty through family courts—often because no other options are available, and their severe vulnerabilities make this measure seem necessary to ensure their safety. The same is true for many girls who enter secure accommodation through the justice system.

The lack of specialist provision in the community is a significant underlying challenge when considering the needs of girls in the CYPSE. While the focus of this review is on secure placements for justice girls, until the wider issues around health and welfare provision in the community is addressed, then this can only ever be a sticking plaster.

Community placements, including those with intensive support, are significantly cheaper and more cost-effective than secure estate costs. For example, intensive multi-dimensional treatment fostering (MTFC) has been tested with welfare girls with positive outcomes, with placements costing one third to one half less than placement in residential group care<sup>65</sup>.

A number of professionals I spoke to during the review described what they saw as perverse incentives in the overall children's welfare system, meaning that some girls with high levels of vulnerabilities and needs end up in the youth justice secure estate, with costs incurred by

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<sup>60</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>61</sup> Andow, C., Byrne, B. (2018) *Family Characteristics and Experiences of Children Entering Secure Settings*. Available at: <https://thenayj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NAYJ-Child-friendly-youth-justice-May-18.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Hales, H., Warner, L., Smith, J., Bartlett, A. (2016) *Census of Young People in Secure Settings: Characteristics, needs and pathways of care*. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/secure-settings-for-young-people-a-national-scoping-exercise-paper-2-census-report.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Hart, D., La Vall, I. (2021) *Secure Children's Homes: Placing welfare and justice children together*. Available at: [Secure children's homes: placing welfare and justice children together](#)

<sup>64</sup> Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. (2023) *What Have we Learnt in the First Six Months of the National DoL Court?* Available at: [What have we learnt in the first six months of the national DoL court? - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

<sup>65</sup> Chamberlain, P., Leve, L., Degarmo, D. (2007) *Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System: 2-year follow-up of a randomized clinical trial*. Available at: [Multidimensional treatment foster care for girls in the juvenile justice system: 2-year follow-up of a randomized clinical trial - PubMed](#)

one bit of the system (YCS), rather than being offered secure welfare provision where the budget would be met by a different part of the system. Expanding community provision for welfare *and* justice girls is an important part of reducing the numbers of girls in custody and ultimately improving outcomes. The YCS and DfE should work together to deliver this **[recommendation 11]**.

#### **4.3 Current placement options and how suitable they are (including placements, process and transitions)**

##### Types of provision

HMPPS Youth Custody Service is responsible for accommodating all children aged under 18 in custody in England and Wales. Under the current system, girls can be placed in 4 different types of setting when they are remanded or sentenced:

- YOI (at HMYOI Wetherby on Keppel or Napier units there are up to 12 beds available for girls)
- STC (at Oakhill there up to 8 places available for girls)
- Secure School (at Oasis Restore Secure School which opened in 2024 and when fully operational will have 49 places with up to 6 of them available to girls)
- Secure Children's Homes (there are currently 8 SCHs that provide justice beds with a total of 103 beds available total, of which 79 beds can be used for girls or boys).

Legislation also permits the Secretary of State to place children in alternative accommodation as approved places of detention. However, this is rarely if ever used.

Prior to the closure of Rainsbrook STC in June 2021, the only placement options for girls were STCs and SCHs (the secure school opened in 2024). However, following the closure of Rainsbrook in 2021, a unit in Wetherby YOI was opened to take girls. The YCS said that this was an interim measure while wider options were considered. However, some 3 and a half years later, the YOI still remains a placement option for girls.

##### How much placements cost

The costings for the different placements vary considerably. The YCS publish indicative cost per place and average bed night costs in a statutory instrument on an annual basis. The 24/25 figures set out the following cost per establishment:

- YOI placements cost £145,713 per year or £329 per night (664 beds total of which up to 12 could be used for girls)
- STC placements cost £335,935 per year or £921 per night (80 beds total of which up to 8 could be used for girls)
- SCHs placements cost £321,395 per year or £887 per night (103 beds total, of which 24 beds are available for boys only, and the remaining 79 are available to boys and girls)
- Secure School placements cost £281,633 per year or £772 per night (up to 49 beds or which up to 6 could be used for girls)

This does not include costs of healthcare, which is provided by NHS E.

##### Where girls are currently placed

At the time of this review, girls could be placed in the 4 different types of provision listed above. During my review, I accessed internal data which confirmed that:

- in 23/24 the majority of girls (over one-third) were placed in SCHs, with over a third in the STC and the remainder in HMYOI Wetherby
- in the first 6 months of 24/25 the majority of girls (around two-thirds) were placed in SCHs, with the remainder placed in HMYOI Wetherby, Oakhill STC and the Secure School (from summer when it opened)
- No girls were placed at HMYOI Wetherby during the time of the review

### Types of Secure Settings

#### 1. Secure Children's Homes (SCHs)

SCHs are specialist placements to care for children between the ages of 10-17 in a secure environment. They tend to be small units housing around 20-30 children. The YCS currently hold contractual arrangements with 8 of the homes to take justice children, with 7 of the homes able to take girls (1 is boys only). There are currently 103 justice beds in total commissioned by the YCS in SCHs (24 boys only; 79 boys and girls). No girls only beds are commissioned. SCHs are the second most expensive placement within the CYPSE, with the average cost per place per year being £321K per place per year. Most people I spoke to during this review said that SCHs were best placed to meet the needs of girls.

Government transparency data published in May 2024 (providing a snapshot on 31 March '24) on children accommodated in SCHs show there were 59 justice children and young people in total at the time, which was up 5 % from the previous year. Between 2010 and 2021 there was a long-term trend of fewer children placed in SCHs by the YCS. But since 2021, this has started to change with around 60 children now placed each year.

All but one SCH are run by Local Authority children's services departments. SCH policy is overseen by DfE in England and Department for Education and Social Services in Wales. Recent Ofsted inspection reports reviewed during this review, show for the most part positive judgements for SCH's taking justice children. (see Appendix A).

Under the [Care Standards Act 2000](#) and the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#), SCH registered managers have a responsibility to ensure that decisions relating to new admissions must take into account the risks and needs of both the child being placed and the other children in the home. This means that SCHs can decline to accept to take a child if they assess that they cannot meet their needs or that the placement will have a negative impact on others. The same is the case with the new Secure School. During my review, many people raised this as a significant issue. While there is recognition of the importance of SCHs having the final decision on admissions, the ability of SCHs to decline placements – contrasted with the inability of YOIs and STCs to do so – can lead to a perverse outcome, whereby girls with the most complex needs and challenging behaviours end up in the settings least equipped to meet their needs. The 2022 HMIP thematic report into girls said, 'The individual SCH decisions may be understandable, but in a system that cannot refuse to accommodate girls in custody by courts, the cumulative impact of all seven SCH managers refusing to offer a placement to the same girl is stark<sup>66</sup>. It leaves the YCS with no option but to place girls with highest levels of need in establishment with few resources to meet those needs.'

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<sup>66</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) A Thematic Review of the Outcomes of Girls in Youth Custody. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

### *Reasons for SCHs declining a placement*

To better understand reasons given by SCHs for declining a placement of a girl, I reviewed internal data held by the YCS.

The most frequently stated reasons for declining to take a girl included:

- previous levels of aggression and violence by the girl – either in that home or other homes, and the impact this would have on other children and staff (this was by far the most common reason)
- significant mental health concerns and levels of self-harm and the impact this could have on other girls or children in the home
- linked to this, some homes said they didn't have access to the specialist mental health, psychology or integrated care provision to meet the girls' needs
- homes reporting that they already had several highly vulnerable and complex justice girls, and they didn't feel they currently had the resources to manage another.

Other reasons included:

- Much younger cohort in the home at that time
- Another child in the home from same area
- Would have difficulties mixing with peers
- Unsettle the current cohort
- Only one stated that they had 'No justice capacity'
- Only a very small number gave no reason for refusal.

### *Where children go if their placement is refused by an SCH*

The majority of SCH refusals I reviewed for the Dec 21 to Dec 24 period resulted in the girl being placed in another SCH, followed by Wetherby YOI. Looking at most recent data for 23/24, a majority of refusals by an SCH went on to another SCH, followed by Oakhill STC. The majority going to another SCH increased, which could suggest the direction of travel is that more SCHs are taking girls.

I believe we need to get to a point where all girls can be accepted by an SCH or by the new Secure School. This doesn't have to be the first SCH approached. As the data shows, if one SCH is not able to take a girl for a range of reasons, another should be able to. This is the benefit of having a range of provision available. However, from reviewing the reasons for refusal, this suggests that we need a system whereby SCHs, on occasion, can draw on additional resource such as mental health provision, in order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable girls.

### *Level of provision in an SCH*

While there are significant challenges in accessing SCH welfare placements, including long waiting lists and a lack of capacity as highlighted in national reviews<sup>67</sup>; justice placements are different in that they are directly commissioned and prepaid by the YCS. From reviewing YCS operational capacity for SCHs in 2023/24, this shows that, with an average of c.100

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<sup>67</sup> Warner, L., Hales, H., Smith, J., Bartless, A. (2018) *Secure Settings for Young People: A national scoping exercise*. Available at: [secure-settings-for-young-people-a-national-scoping-exercise-paper-1-scoping-analysis.pdf](#)

commissioned beds available, monthly occupancy for justice beds was around 80%. In the first six months of 2024/25, this hit a peak of 90%.

Given the small number of girls in the CYPSE and the recent addition of the Oasis Restore Secure School, the system *currently* appears to have the capacity to accommodate CYPSE girls' placements. However, it is vital that there is adequate and sustained investment across SCHs to ensure capacity. This requires on-going investment from government to support existing and develop future facilities. The new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which is currently going through parliament should support this.

There is no indication that this Government (or previous governments) are looking to amend the [Care Standards Act](#) or [Children's Homes Regulations](#). It is however critical that the YCS can find placements for every girl. This is a bottom line. We therefore need to find a way to work better within the existing legislative framework to ensure placements can be found for all girls that best meet their needs. I cover what this might look like later in this report.

## 2. Secure School

There is 1 Secure School (Oasis Restore) based in Kent, England. The Oasis Restore Secure School opened in August 2024 after 10 years of planning, costing around £40 million. It offers up to 49 places to children in the CYPSE aged 12-to-18-years. Its purpose is to 'enable young people to live their best lives, through education, wellbeing and hope.' The Secure School has been much anticipated across the sector for well over a decade. The 2016 Charlie Taylor review into youth justice proposed the replacement of the current youth custodial estate, with a network of Secure Schools and regional establishments, taking both boys and girls<sup>68</sup>. Taylor proposed that these should be governed and inspected as schools. He believed that the co-educational environment would best meet the needs of girls and boys, and stated that governance, commissioning and inspection arrangements would need to play close attention to needs of girls so that they remained in focus. The Youth Custody Improvement Board that was set up following the Taylor review, specified that consideration should be given to how effective provision could be made for girls within the secure schools.

[The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#) established Secure Schools in legislation as 'secure academies' under both the [Academies Act 2010](#) and the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#). This means that in line with Children's Homes Regulations, the Secure School can decline to take a child if it assesses that it cannot meet their needs or, in taking them, the needs of others in the school. I was surprised to learn this, as were others I spoke to during this review. From reading the Taylor review recommendations and the subsequent work to develop the school, I don't think that this was what was originally planned. While I understand the importance of the school operating within the [Care Standards Act \(2000\)](#), it surely doesn't make good sense to set up a new establishment commissioned through a contract with the YCS, that can then decline to take the children who the YCS need to place. I believe the Secure School has the potential to be a real force for good in the CYPSE, but this issue needs attention if we are to address the issues of girls' placement in custody.

The previous Government had determined a longer-term vision of developing a network of Secure Schools. However, given the current economic climate and the fact the Oasis Secure School is still in its early stages, it is difficult to know at this stage whether we will see more

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<sup>68</sup> Taylor, C. (2016) *Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales*. Available at: [Review of the Youth Justice System](#)



Secure Schools. While for the most part the professionals I spoke to during this review were very optimistic about the Secure School and its potential for all children including girls, some questioned whether its set-up had properly considered the needs of girls and whether this had been a missed opportunity. Some also raised concerns as to whether the regulatory framework it was set up within was stifling innovation. My conclusions – from visiting the Secure School; to speaking with the multi-disciplinary staff team; to considering the range of specialist resources they access across education, health and care, is that they should be well placed to meet the needs of girls including vulnerable girls. Indeed, the original vision of the Secure School model was to do just that. Oasis Restore, working with the YCS and NHSE, now need to ensure that this vision is realised.

#### How we can best work with SCH and the new secure school so they can all take girls

The current review of SCH contracts by the YCS, while in its final stages, should give us an opportunity to begin to signal a desire to do things differently, in partnership with SCHs, so they can be supported - working together with the new Secure School, to accommodate all justice girls. I set out how we might take this forward later in the report. In addition, DfE have been working with SCHs through the Target Operating Model (TOM) project to identify what more is needed to support them to take children with high, complex needs.

We can also draw some important learning from Scotland. They have recently changed their legislation so that no children can be placed in YOIs. This means that children can only be placed in one of 4 Secure Centres, which are similar to SCHs. They are independently run by charitable organisations. As in England, the Secure Centres can decline to take a child if they don't feel able to meet their needs. To ensure that they can find placements for all remanded or sentenced children, the Scottish Government have developed a protocol with the 4 Secure Centres so that the centres are working together, with the Youth Justice and Children's Hearing Unit, to match children to placements in a coordinated way. They share information and work as a system rather than as individual units. To date, they have always been able to place every child, despite not having legislation in place to 'direct' placements. The overall numbers of children (boys and girls) in the Scotland secure system are very low, although similar to the number of girls only in secure in England and Wales. This suggests a similar model could be applied for girls in the CYPSE.

### 3. Young Offender Institutions

Girls have only recently been placed in YOIs. Following the closure of Rainsbrook STC in June 2021, the then ministers agreed to place girls in Wetherby YOI on 'an interim basis (for 18-24 months) while conducting an internal review. Initially housed in Keppel Unit, and then the Napier Enhanced Support Unit, Wetherby adapted quickly under challenging circumstances. It is to their credit that they did this with great commitment across their management and staff team. Staff showed strong commitment to the girls' welfare but were clear – along with most stakeholders I consulted – that YOIs were never designed for girls, particularly vulnerable ones.

All YOIs are configured for boys, with rules, regimes and cultures focused on containment and risk management, making them unsuitable for girls. As one professional put it: 'No amount of paint, or carpets, or furniture can change that'.

In September 2021, the Howard League raised concerns with the then Justice Secretary about the lawfulness of placing girls at Wetherby YOI. The MoJ confirmed this was a temporary measure while alternatives were explored, a position re-stated to the Justice Select Committee in late 2021, and again in 2022. In May 2022 the minister indicated a review would follow the opening of the new Secure School. Despite this, in March 2024, the YCS confirmed in a letter to stakeholders that Wetherby remained a placement option for

girls on its forthcoming CYP strategy. The Howard League wrote again to the Justice Minister in April 2024 questioning the ongoing use of and investment in Wetherby for girls. From the information made available to me during the review, I understand that the YCS had been considering Wetherby's continued use until recently. However, with the opening of the Secure School and this review's commissioning, significant efforts have been made not to place girls there. At the time of this review, no girls had been in Wetherby YOI for several months.

Research highlights multiple concerns about holding girls in YOIs. McKeown and Mulvana (2024) talk about the scale of institutions designed for boys, staff recruitment issues and a lack of training for working with girls<sup>69</sup>. In her 2025 research on girls in YOIs, Harrison also sets out the challenges that girls have experienced in Wetherby<sup>70</sup>. Alongside the buildings themselves, it would seem that the legislation, policies and procedures that underpin YOI regimes which are about managing risk and controlling behaviour, are incompatible with delivering the therapeutic environments which are conducive to good outcomes for girls. During my visit to Wetherby, it was clear that dedicated frontline staff were doing their very best in often challenging circumstances. However, the setting was not set up or equipped to deal with highly vulnerable girls and most of the staff I spoke to were clear that they should not be placed there.

The 2022 HMIP thematic report echoed this: 'Despite the best efforts of committed staff at Wetherby, no one could give a positive reason (other than a lack of alternative) why girls should be placed there...Putting vulnerable girls in male prisons is the worst possible place'<sup>71</sup>.

Similarly, the 2019 by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (Jay et al) who concluded that 'Children in YOIs and STCs are not safe from harm, either physical or sexual'<sup>72</sup> and highlighted the protective environment of SCHs.

The Howard League criticised the perception that 'deserving girls' are placed in SCHs while 'undeserving girls' go to YOIs'. Some Wetherby staff shared that girls felt unwanted, reinforcing this troubling divide. This cannot be right.

#### 4. Secure Training Centres

STCs were introduced in 1998 as secure education and training centres run by private operators for children 12-17 years. They were heralded as a new way to support children in custody into better education, training and resettlement outcomes. Recent years have seen several high-profile closures of STCs. The 2019 serious case review of Medway STC by Medway Local Children Safeguarding Board highlighted systemic failures in keeping children safe, which led to its closure. Rainsbrook STC was also closed in 2021 following a report by Ofsted outlining findings around increased levels of violence and self-harm.

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<sup>69</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>70</sup> Harrison, M. (2025) *The Experiences of Girls Residing in YOIs*. Available at: [Experience of Girls in YOIs - Research Report.pdf](#)

<sup>71</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) *A Thematic Review of the Outcomes of Girls in Youth Custody*. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> Jay, P., Evans, M., Frank, I., Sharpling, D. (2023) *Independent Report: The report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*. Available at: [IICSA: report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse - GOV.UK](#)

In Nov 2022, the YCS began placing girls in Oakhill STC – the only remaining STC in England and Wales - in a dedicated girls' section. This was in response to the closure of Rainsbrook and the need for additional capacity outside of SCHs and the fact that girls were now being placed in Wetherby YOI. Oakhill was given additional resources to develop a girls' unit, in a separate section on the site. However, Oakhill has also experienced some serious issues and concerns over time, with the most recent Ofsted inspection in Oct 2024 finding the STC to be 'inadequate'.

Some professionals spoke of Oakhill having come along way over the past few years in providing care for girls and that the environment is now much more supportive. When I visited Oakhill, I found a motivated staff team that were doing their best, in very challenging circumstances, to meet the needs of girls. But many Oakhill staff, and many of the wider stakeholders I spoke to, felt that the STC was not the right environment for girls and particularly for very vulnerable girls. Some felt that the rules, regimes and policy frameworks that STCs operate in, and the level of resourcing that they have, means that they are not set up or equipped to meet girls' needs. Concerns were raised with me about the level of specialist health care provision and the lack of clinically trained staff. These concerns were echoed in the recent 2024 Ofsted report that found healthcare provision to be inadequate in Oakhill<sup>73</sup>.

NHSE will become the statutory commissioner for health provision in Oakhill from April this year, which is a positive development, and will include the introduction of the Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS). However, despite the best efforts and commitment of staff at Oakhill, I do not believe that STCs are best placed to meet the needs of girls, particularly vulnerable girls. The current contract for Oakhill is due to end in 2029. The YCS should seek to end the placement of girls in STCs by the end of that period **[recommendation 2]**.

### Wales

The numbers of girls placed in secure settings from Wales are very small. Where possible these girls are placed in Hillside SCH which is in S. Wales. Wherever possible, girls from Wales should be placed in Wales **[recommendation 7]**. There may be occasions, depending on where the girl lives, that SCHs in England are closer to where the girl lives.

### Placement Process

In considering secure placements for girls, it is important to understand the placement process itself. I spend some time in this section considering the process, how it helps meet the needs of girls and whether there are changes that can be made to better support this.

The placements of girls in custody are the responsibility of the YCS. It was transferred to MoJ from the YJB in Sept 2017 following the Taylor review, with the reform also establishing the YCS within HMPPS. The YCS is responsible for the day to day running of youth secure services including the placements process, and is responsible for making placement decisions based on a range of factors including age, gender, the local YOTs placement recommendation, proximity to home, availability of places etc. YCS guidance states 'Placements are made with the aim of promoting a child's safety and ensuring decisions are

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<sup>73</sup> Care Quality Commission, HMIP and Ofsted. (2024) *Oakhill Secure Training Centre Assurance Inspection*. Available at: [50244078](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/50244078)

made with the child's best interest as the primary consideration'<sup>74</sup>. It is also clear that decisions are influenced by other factors including the availability of places and the decisions of placement providers – particularly SCHs and SSs who under the [Care Standards Act](#) and [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations](#) can decide not to take a child.

Linked to the placements service is the Critical Case Pathway (CCP) panel that reviews and has oversight of the most complex cases in the CYPSE. Many, although not all, of the girls are on the CCP. The CCP provides an opportunity to review concerns from a secure setting, including if any additional resource is required, and provides specialist advice and support to both the placements team and the placements themselves. It is jointly chaired by Dr Neil Gredecki, lead psychologist, and Caroline Twitchett (NHSE) and is an invaluable resource at the centre.

From discussions with members of the placements team and with the CCP chairs, it was clear they are highly skilled, committed and passionate about making a difference for children in the CYPSE. It was also clear from speaking with professionals throughout the review that the placements system itself is not working as effectively as it could. HMIP in its 2022 thematic on girls in custody called the system 'dysfunctional'<sup>75</sup>. This was linked to a range of factors including the very limited amount of time that the placements team must find a place for a child following a decision by the court, and the consequences of this on finding placements, particularly for the most vulnerable children. Some secure settings report having very short periods of time (between half an hour to an hour) to decide on a placement, which can make decision-making very difficult – particularly for girls with high level of needs or histories of violent or chaotic behaviour.

The placements process must also be challenging and stressful for the placements team themselves, as they do their best to find a placement at short notice with courts often asking for rapid decisions. It is worth noting that the system to find secure welfare beds for children is very different and involves a lengthier assessment period to place children in SCHs.

When courts make decisions on remands or sentences, they have no idea where that child will be placed. It can feel like a lottery. This cannot be right for any child and particularly those who are very vulnerable. There also seems to be insufficient scrutiny by the courts regarding the placement of children. While I recognise the pressures on courts to make decisions quickly, it must be possible to explore adjustments to the placement process to enable more time to make placement decisions. Many of the girls appearing in court are well known to local Youth Justice Services. Through more advance planning and co-ordination across Youth Justice Services, the YCS placements team and the CYPSE, we should be able to move to a place where, by the time most girls are in court, a placement has been identified.

### Transitions into the adult women's estate

While most girls in the CYPSE are released back into the community, a small number go on to serve their sentences in the women's estate. It is so important that girls' transitions between the CYPSE and the women's estate are managed sensitively and effectively. From

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<sup>74</sup> Youth Custody Service. (n.d.) *Placing Young People in Custody: Guide for youth justice practitioners*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/placing-young-people-in-custody>

<sup>75</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). (2022) *A Thematic Review of the Outcomes of Girls in Youth Custody*. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Outcomes-for-girls-in-custody-web-2022.pdf>

discussions with professionals and girls themselves, this is not always achieved – often because of a lack of resource or co-ordination to achieve it. That said, I have been very impressed by the trauma-informed, gender-responsive work of the HMPPS Women’s Justice and Estate Team, particularly through initiatives like the [Hope and Early Days programmes](#), which focus on supporting young women upon arrival in prison and helping them settle through the use of therapeutic interventions. There is a great deal of learning that could be shared across the YCS and the women’s estate team, particularly around trauma informed, gender responsive approaches. This should be taken forward in partnership with new Women’s Justice Board.

### Inspection Findings

I have set out in more detail the findings of recent inspection reports (HMIP and Ofsted) in Appendix A.

#### **4.4 To what extent the current placement options meet the needs of the cohort**

To conclude this section, given the findings outlined above, I conclude:

- That YOIs are not able to meet the needs of girls and girls should not be placed there.
- That STCs are not well placed to meet the needs of girls, and particularly vulnerable girls, and that as the STC contract comes to an end, girls should no longer be placed there.
- That SCHs can meet the needs of girls, including vulnerable girls, and deliver positive outcomes.
- That the Secure School, while in its early days, is well placed to meet the needs of girls, including vulnerable girls, and deliver positive outcomes.

#### **4.5 What girls say they want**

An important component of this review is listening to the voices of girls themselves and understanding what they want and need. Girls have been ‘done to’ on too many occasions. Research, such as the 2024 McKeown and Mulvana MCAG report, is clear about the importance of girls’ voices being heard and for girls to have agency in their development and futures, including the co-production and co-design of services<sup>76</sup>. Their voices are key in developing solutions.

I have been fortunate to be able to draw from a number of excellent research reports that have included direct consultation and engagement with girls including the 2021 ‘Out of Sight’ report produced by the Centre for Mental Health and Leaders Unlocked<sup>77</sup>; the 2024 McKeown and Mulvana research<sup>78</sup>; the 2023 Young Women’s Justice Project report<sup>79</sup>; the 2024 Children’s Commissioners report on children with complex needs deprived of their

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<sup>76</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>77</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people’s secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>78</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>79</sup> Agenda Alliance; Alliance for Youth Justice. (2022) ‘We’ve Not Given Up’: Young Women Surviving the Criminal Justice System. *Young Women’s Justice Project Report*. Available at: <https://www.ayj.org.uk/young-womens-justice-project>

liberty<sup>80</sup>, and the very recently published 2025 Harrison research on the experiences of Girls in YOIs<sup>81</sup>. I have also spoken with Kinetic Youth, an advocacy organisation working with children in custody. I have used these and other reports to inform this section.

I have also had the opportunity to talk to a small number of girls myself during my visits to Oakhill STC, Adel Beck SCH and the Secure School (there were no girls in Wetherby when I visited). I have also been fortunate to speak to two young women who had earlier experience of the CYPSE – one who is now in a women’s prison and one who is now in the community. I am so grateful to all these girls and young women for their openness and thoughtfulness in sharing their views and reflections. They were inspiring in so many ways and reminded me why this work is so important.

### Learnings from research

Through research, including consultation and engagement, girls raised several important points raised including:

- relationships with staff are key to good outcomes for them
- trauma is a big part of why they are in custody
- young women need greater support that responds to their experiences of violence and abuse, mental-ill health, substance misuse, poverty, racism, discrimination and social exclusion
- young women have felt judged by services and labelled as ‘difficult to engage with’
- many young women feel alienated from provision that does not offer specialist and gender specific support
- the importance of good mental health support and provision
- the importance of feeling safe - some describe feeling safe and secure in establishments, whereas others feel the opposite and that all their support systems have been taken away when they arrive.
- challenging dynamics with other girls - and how dynamic and difficult this can be, with issues escalating quickly
- the importance of female only staff, particularly for things such as room checks, and that no girls should be left alone with only one male staff member, given the abuse and trauma many girls have experienced with men
- the damaging impact of restraint, including
  - its impact on levels of trust and safety
  - what some saw as its incompatibility with trauma informed approaches
  - some felt that it made their anger and distress worse rather than better
  - some spoke of the trauma of watching other girls be physically restrained
  - some spoke about lack of early intervention to de-escalate incidents and that there should be a lot more focus on prevention
- the importance of good, supportive relationships with staff, including a named case worker and access to positive routines and activities
- hating the uncertainty about future placements
- the importance of having a safe, caring and homely physical environment.

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<sup>80</sup> Children’s Commissioner. (2024) *Children with Complex Needs who are Deprived of Liberty: Interviews with children to understand their experiences of being deprived of their liberty*. Available at: [CC A4 HEADER](#)

<sup>81</sup> Harrison, M. (2025) *The Experiences of Girls Residing in YOIs*. Available at: [Experience of Girls in YOIs - Research Report.pdf](#)

Girls in YOIs specifically reported:

- feeling unimportant and voiceless in an all-boys environment
- feeling disconnected from staff and peers, with a lack of mixing with others
- hearing boys shouting at them – abuse and name calling during ‘shout outs’
- perceiving that staff didn’t like working with girls
- their needs not being met – particularly around physical, menstrual and mental health
- feelings of isolation due to their ethnicity
- stereotypical expectations of girls.

### Comments and feedback from girls

Girls say they like:

- small, homely environments
- personal choice in what activities they can do
- cooking their own food
- staff who are kind and approachable
- consistency and clear boundaries
- when staff listen to their voice and views (‘If we raise something, it needs to be taken seriously’)

Girls say they do not like:

- a lack of fairness or consistency in how staff treat children
- if there are no clear sanctions when people do things wrong
- being left alone with individual male staff or officers unless they know them or are confident they can trust them
- when they do not have enough support or provision for special education needs including ADHD, autism and needs relating to neurodiversity
- when they do not have enough understanding of gender specific needs i.e. menstrual pain or the impact of menstrual cycle on mood etc.
- when restraints are used on girls – which can re-traumatise them.

Girls also described changes they want to see. They said they need:

- gender responsive, trauma informed training for all staff
- staff who want to work with girls
- more support around special educational needs
- more activity choices for girls
- better approach to support girls that self-harm including de-escalation
- more primary health care and support
- independent, advocacy support for every girl in custody, that continues when they leave or go to another establishment
- girls talking groups in each establishment

The girl I spoke to who had been in Wetherby YOI said that:

- she felt it was the wrong environment for girls
- she had received persistent sexist and racist abuse from other boys while she was there

- she had been regularly restrained by male prison officers
- prison officers did not understand girls' needs
- she was not given adequate sanitary provision
- she felt she could not access the mental health provision she needed.

The girls I spoke to who had been in STCs felt that:

- with so many boys and so few girls, it was the wrong environment for girls
- the education and activities were designed around boys
- the site was violent ('I went from a household of violence to a place of more violence')
- they didn't feel safe being surrounded by so many boys and male staff.

The girls I spoke to with experiences of SCHs had mixed responses. Some had had very positive experiences with caring staff and good support, whereas some had not. Generally, they reported feeling safer and better looked after, and that the activities for girls were good.

#### Girls' views on girl-only or mixed accommodation

There were a range of views from girls on this – both from my conversations and from research. Some girls were clear that given the experiences of many girls in relation to sexual and physical abuse from men, that girl-only environments were best and provided the most trauma informed care. Others felt that girl-only environments were worse for girls, saying that issues between girls could quickly escalate to become challenging and confrontational, including the risks of 'copycat' behaviours in relation to self-harm. Some girls felt that it was only a problem where girls were placed in large establishments with boys, where girls were in a very small minority. Most agreed that small, homely mixed environments could be fine as long as there was flexibility to allow girls to have time away from boys if they wanted to, and as long as staff were skilled and trained in a trauma informed way.

### **5. A model secure setting for girls**

This section looks at what factors need to be in place in a secure placement to enable girls to thrive and achieve positive outcomes. In summary, a model setting is:

- gender-responsive, with an operating model tailored to meet needs of girls
- trauma-informed
- child first – acknowledging that these girls are children first and foremost
- made up of small, homely units
- resourced to meet differing levels of need including girls with complex needs
- staffed by a multi-disciplinary, integrated team – trained, equipped and supported to work with girls, who want to and choose to work with girls
- able to provide high-quality mental health services including psychological and psychiatric support
- able to respond to incidents of self-harm in line with best practice, with a focus on de-escalation, and staff who are trained and supported in this
- made up of mixed gender homes, with the ability for girls to be placed in separate sections for periods of time as appropriate to meet their needs
- non-discriminatory, culturally and gender sensitive
- strong and effective in its community links to support effective resettlement
- strong and effective in its links to the women's estate to support effective transitions.

#### **What a model setting looks like in practice**



## Gender-responsive

Research shows that girls facing multiple levels of trauma require responses that are trauma informed and gender responsive. Gender-responsive approaches recognise that many girls have been subject to gender-based violence; that they have multiple needs because of their trauma; that they require multi-agency, holistic responses that are different and distinct to those required by boys, and that these responses need to consider the abuse, victimisation and systemic inequalities experienced by girls. This is set out in a range of research reports including the 2021 Centre for Mental Health report<sup>82</sup>; the 2024 NHS Managed Clinical Advisory Group (MCAG) briefing on the CYPSE<sup>83</sup> and the 2024 Pippa Goodfellow research<sup>84</sup>.

This is even more so in relation to girls who experience multiple experiences of discrimination and disadvantage based on their ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity. Supportive, nurturing and empowering interventions and relationships with workers are central to gender responsive ways of working, as are giving girls a voice and enabling them to shape their own futures<sup>85 86 87</sup>.

Gender-responsive means:

- recognising that girls are different – they have different needs to boys and need different kinds of support.
- working in a trauma-informed way
- focusing on a range of complex needs
- listening to and empowering girls
- focusing on building relationships and trust
- recognising and addressing issues arising from gender-based violence, gender roles and norms
- therapeutic, holistic, multi-disciplinary approaches
- recognising and responding to girls' intersectionality.

## Trauma-informed

Research is also clear that, to address complex needs and trauma, secure settings need to adopt a trauma-informed approach, with all staff trained in trauma-informed practice, utilising multi-disciplinary teams within a therapeutic model.

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<sup>82</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>83</sup> NHS. (2024) *Managed Clinical Advisory Group Briefing on Girls in the CYPSE*. Unpublished Briefing.

<sup>84</sup> Goodfellow, P. (2024) *An Exploration of Factors Influencing the Recent Levels of Incarceration of Girls in England and Wales: A Thesis*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Factors\\_Influencing\\_the\\_Recent\\_Levels\\_of\\_Incarceration\\_of\\_Girls\\_in\\_England\\_and\\_Wales](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378830853_An_Exploration_of_Factors_Influencing_the_Recent_Levels_of_Incarceration_of_Girls_in_England_and_Wales)

<sup>85</sup> Watson, L., Edelman, P. (2012) *Improving the Juvenile Justice System for Girls*. Available at: THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR GIRLS

<sup>86</sup> Garcia, C., Lane, J. (2012) *Dealing with the Fall-Out: Identifying and addressing the role that relationship strain plays in the lives of girls in the juvenile justice system*. Available at: [Dealing with the fall-Out: Identifying and addressing the role that relationship strain plays in the lives of girls in the juvenile justice system - ScienceDirect](#)

<sup>87</sup> Bloom, B., Owen, B., Covington, S. (2005) *Gender-Responsive Strategies Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*. Available at: [\(PDF\) Gender-Responsive Strategies Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders](#)

In their report 2024 report, McKeown and Mulvana present 6 guiding principles for trauma informed care (TIC)<sup>88</sup>:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, historical and gender issues.

They go on to talk about how trauma-informed care can best be implemented in secure settings, including:

- the importance of governance and leadership
- effective training and development of the workforce
- cross-sector collaboration
- adequate funding and resource
- the importance of the physical environment
- engagement and involvement of girls themselves
- monitoring and evaluation so good practice can be identified and shared.

Other research points to the importance of wrap-around, holistic and strengths-based support in response to girls' trauma and needs<sup>89 90 91</sup>. Trauma recovery work takes time. It requires high levels of specialist staff resource and engagement with the child. It cannot be achieved through very short-term placements. Where girls are placed for short periods, such as remands, their care will be more about stabilisation and support.

#### Physical environment including size of setting

The professionals and girls I spoke to during the review talked about the importance of the physical environment. This included the need for safe, personal space; a small, homely feel; an environment that feels caring and nurturing. McKeown et al 2022<sup>92</sup> and Khan et al 2021<sup>93</sup>. also talk about girls needing smaller, homely-feeling therapeutic settings with higher staff ratios. The physical layout of prison establishments, with large, imposing sites, long corridors and small cells can serve to exacerbate the trauma experienced by girls, and lead to increased levels of self-harm and violence.

Physical environment is a key part of a trauma-informed, gender-responsive approach to working with girls. Girls speak about the importance of calming, safe spaces, including sound and lighting – for example, strip lighting and noisy corridors can result in sensory

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<sup>88</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>89</sup> Bateman, T., Hazel, N. (2014) *The Resettlement of Girls and Young Women: Evidence from Research*. Available at: (PDF) [Resettlement of girls and young women: research report](#)

<sup>90</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

<sup>91</sup> Agenda Alliance; Alliance for Youth Justice. (2022) 'We've Not Given Up': Young Women Surviving the Criminal Justice System. *Young Women's Justice Project Report*. Available at: <https://www.ayj.org.uk/young-womens-justice-project>

<sup>92</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

<sup>93</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

overload whereas additions such as calm lighting and sensory rooms can help to reduce trauma.

The SCH and Secure School managers spoke about how they had designed their environments to be safe and caring, with security built into the design. For example, fobs replaced the need for staff to carry around bulky sets of keys. Managers at Lincolnshire SCH, who are currently developing a new, larger site called Millenium House which is set to open in spring 2027, spent considerable time reviewing evidence and research to help shape the ideal physical environment for the new home. Furniture, fittings and equipment are all based around providing a therapeutic, homely environment. They are designing more space for children, including sensory rooms, with separate wings to provide flexibility to house smaller groups of children separately if required. The new home includes some high dependency beds and the ability to create a mother and baby unit (a specialised facility for mothers who give birth while in custody).

### Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS)

The Framework for Integrated Care, known as SECURE STAIRS, is vital to meeting the needs of girls. In the CYPSE there are currently two versions of this: SECURE STAIRS is used in the existing estate and RESTORE is used in the new secure school.

This approach is supported by strong, consistent leadership and utilises a psychologically informed formulation ("my story"), which is developmentally attuned to each child's needs. Through holistic, multi-agency collaboration, the framework focuses on building therapeutic relationships between children and staff, grounding interventions in the child's personal narrative—understanding where they come from and guiding them toward where they want to go.

Secure Stairs is currently being embedded across secure settings in the CYPSE and is a core part of meeting the needs of girls.

### Supportive, caring, skilled workforce

A motivated multi-disciplinary staff team, with consistent, high-quality training and support is critical to meeting the needs of girls in secure settings. This came out loud and clear from conversations with girls and with staff themselves. The relationships between staff and girls underpins everything and is fundamental to delivering good outcomes. Incorporating guidance on reflective practice within the framework of integrated care ensures that staff can continuously improve their approaches and better address the complex needs of the girls.

I met so many dedicated and motivated professionals during my visits to secure settings. All were committed to doing their very best for girls, often in challenging circumstances.

The 2024 MCAG report talks about 'system anxiety' around working with the most vulnerable girls, with some staff unsure how to support girls, particularly in relation to self-harm<sup>94</sup>. The report says there needs to be more and better training and support for staff working with girls.

A staff team who work in a gender responsive way and who are trained and supported to recognise and respond to the needs of girls is key. It takes a particular motivation and skill set to work with vulnerable girls in a secure setting. Staff talked about how beneficial it was

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<sup>94</sup> McKeown, A., Mulvana. (2024) *Development of gender responsive pathways in CYPSE*. Available at: [Development of Gender Responsive Pathway in CYPSE.pdf](#)

for girls to have female staff working with them, modelling proactive and positive relationships, and that it was also important to have male staff who could act as positive role models, showing that men can be supportive and caring.

### Feeling safe

An important component of a trauma informed approach is feeling safe. Girls who feel safe can better regulate their distress and are more able to form positive relationships. On arriving in a secure setting, girls may feel unsafe and, linked to this, feel re-traumatised, acting this out internally through self-harm or externally through violence towards staff. Girls need to feel able to trust the staff around them to keep them safe.

Some girls report feeling safe for the first time in a secure placement, away from the abuse that they may have experienced in the community.

The use of restraint is particularly challenging in this context. Staff in YOIs and STCs spoke about how difficult it was when faced with a girl self-harming to determine when and how to intervene. They recognised that when they used restraint, this was distressing and re-traumatising to the girl and was also very distressing to the staff involved. Staff at SCHs and the Secure School also spoke about challenges, although they seemed better able to agree approaches in advance with girls. This included some acceptance of lower-level self-harm that would not put the girl's life at risk, which could serve to de-escalate behaviours.

Learning can also be taken from pilots in the women's estate. Multi-disciplinary teams focus on delivering a trauma-informed approach through hub-based models with a particular focus on early-days in custody to help stabilise young women as they arrive, which helps them feel safer and reduces the incidences of self-harm. This work is currently being evaluated by Dr Gilly Sharpe. Learning from this and wider work linked to the women's justice programme should be equally applied to girls' provision.

### Single or mixed-gender settings

Academics, professionals and girls themselves have mixed views on single vs mixed gender settings, and the evidence base is not clear either way. That said, most people I spoke to during this review said that on balance they preferred mixed settings, but that there needed to be flexibility for some girls to be supported in areas away from boys for periods when they needed it.

In the Centre for Mental Health review, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the girls consulted they would prefer a mixed gender environment, with staff also saying that creating binary divisions between boys and girls was unhelpful. <sup>95</sup>divided, most staff including health care staff said mixed unit benefitted girls by providing an environment that mirrored the community.

There is currently one girls-only SCH (Clare Lodge) owned and run by Peterborough City Council that can home up to 16 girls. However, this is a welfare-only SCH and therefore cannot currently take children placed in SCHs for justice reasons.

### Distance from home

Having multiple placement options can allow girls to be placed closer to home. A 2016 HMIP report on children in custody found that children held further from home had fewer visits from

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<sup>95</sup> Khan, L., Harris, A., and Sinclair, C. (2021) *Out of Sight: Girls in the children and young people's secure estate*. Centre for Mental Health. Available at: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/out-of-sight>

family and professionals<sup>96</sup>. Findings from large scale international research on children show the importance of parents, siblings and friends in the lives of children.

That said, with such a small number of girls, many with highly complex needs, it becomes more difficult to find appropriate placements which meet those needs, and which are at the same time close to home.

Most stakeholders during the review agreed that when weighing up finding a placement with the services and support that meets the needs of girls, alongside finding a placement that is close to home but may not have those services in place, that the decision should be to prioritise meeting needs.

## 6. Delivering the model setting for girls: what we need to do and how we make most effective use of placement options

### Proposed model

The evidence in my report points to SCHs and the Secure School being the most appropriate placement options to meet girls' needs, including girls with high levels of vulnerabilities.

To note - I have also considered options outside of the current set – that is, building a new, girls only unit, or attaching a girls' unit to a women's prison. I do not assess that either option is viable or deliverable or best meets the needs of girls. I touch on both options in Appendix C.

My recommendation is that the YCS, working with DfE and NHSE, work with SCHs and the Secure School to create a 'girls consortia' comprising of a small group of SCHs and the Secure School who are supported and resourced to work together in a coordinated way to provide placements for *all* girls in the CYPSE.

It would be for the YCS and the consortia to determine and agree how this would work in practice, but from early discussions with different parties, I believe the model could work as outlined below.

First, SCHs would express an interest in being involved in the girls' consortia. From initial discussions, I think there would be positive interest from around 4-5 of the homes as well as the Secure School. A ministerially chaired roundtable could be convened to bring leaders from the SCHs and SS together, along with DfE and health partners, to discuss the elements needed for a successful consortium and agree next steps in taking it forward.

The consortia model could include:

- agreed approaches to **sharing information** across the consortium
- access to **additional resources** to support the most vulnerable girls, which could be in the form of a centrally held resource pot that consortia homes could draw from when they take a very vulnerable / high needs girl and need additional resources to support them
- access to **shared training and expertise for staff** to enable consortia homes to better meet needs of most vulnerable girls

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<sup>96</sup> HMIP. (2016) *The Impact of Distance from Home on Children in Custody: Thematic report*. London: HMIP. Available at: <https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Keeping-Girls-And-Young-Women-Safe-MMU-and-COYL-report-.pdf>

- commitment by consortia members to work together with the YCS with the intention of finding placements for *all* girls, which could be reflected in some way in contracts or a protocol
- the YCS (placements team), the YJB and Youth Justice Services to work with HMCTS and the consortia to develop and test longer placement finding periods for girls. (I recognise this will be challenging given the demands of courts, but believe it must be possible with earlier, better information sharing)
- a dedicated senior role should be established in MoJ to work with the consortia to take this work forward
- the consortia should be run as a pilot with evaluation, building on learning from the pilot, it could then move over time into standard practice.

To give the consortia time to establish, Oakhill STC should be supported to continue to take small numbers of girls until the end of its contract in 2029. This should include on-going support and resource to offer the best possible support to girls in its care during this period. The NHS are taking over the provision of health services in Oakhill from early this year, including the introduction of Secure Stairs, which should provide positive support and development during this period.

## **7. Conclusion: An opportunity for girls**

Work is currently underway across the Government, led by the DfE, to make significant changes to how children are placed in secure settings. While the focus is primarily on welfare children, this has the potential to significantly impact on children in youth justice settings too. The 2024 DfE report 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'<sup>97</sup> contains proposals to achieve better outcomes for children across secure settings, including focusing on improving the marketplace and the commissioning of different kinds of children's homes. Through the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently going through parliament, the Government will amend primary legislation to provide a new statutory framework for Local Authorities, whereby they can place children in new types of accommodation where they may be deprived of their liberty but where the accommodation is not the same as SCHs. Through this they can test out new models of care and provision, so that children can be supported in different types of secure accommodation that can respond more flexibly to their needs. The Bill is likely to receive Royal Assent this summer (2025).

This is an important development with great relevance to this review. Linked to the Bill, DfE have established a task and finish group, working with local and national partners, to focus in the first instance on children with the most complex needs. Over time, they want this to include work with MoJ so that children in custody can also be included in this work. This recognises that many of the children who are placed in the CYPSE have very similar needs to those who are subject to deprivation of liberty orders and / or are placed in welfare secure beds.

The new Bill includes work across local and national government to support social care and health partners to commission joint care across sectors including the development of regional commissioning co-operatives. DfE propose to work with NHSE to pilot new community-based approach to pathways and provision which provides treatment and care, bringing in professionals from children's social care, health, education and – most important

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<sup>97</sup> Department of Education. (2024) *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive: Breaking down barriers to opportunity*. Available at: [Keeping children safe, helping families thrive](#)

for this review - justice. This will enable the system to deliver specialist care and accommodation for children with complex needs.

***It is only by working together across government department and across health, welfare and justice systems that we will deliver the step change needed for these girls.***

This is a catalyst for wider system change and we should seize it.

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## Glossary: Acronyms and abbreviations

- **AAPG:** All-Party Parliamentary Groups
- **ACEs:** Adverse childhood experiences
- **CCP:** Critical Care Pathway
- **CYPSE:** Children and young people Secure Estate
- **DoL:** Deprivation of liberty order
- **DTO:** Detention and Training Order
- **DfE:** Department for Education
- **GBH:** Grievous Bodily Harm
- **LAP:** London Accommodation Pathfinder
- **HMIP:** Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
- **MoJ:** Ministry of Justice
- **NHS:** National Health Service
- **ONS:** Office for National Statistics
- **PTSD:** Post-traumatic stress disorder
- **SCH:** Secure Children's Home
- **YCS:** Youth Custody Service
- **YEF:** Youth Endowment Fund
- **YJ:** Youth Justice
- **YJB:** Youth Justice Board
- **YJS:** Youth Justice System
- **YOI:** Young Offender Institution
- **STC:** Secure Training Centre

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Review of inspection reports

I have reviewed several inspection reports and summarised the findings below.

#### 1. HMIP Thematic Review of Girls in Custody (Sept '22)

This report identified several concerns and areas for action including:

- Lack of alternative provision in community meant custody was not always used as a last resort; that despite significant senior management oversight in managing risk, many local authorities were failing to provide or commission appropriate provision – both in the community, and secure welfare beds.
- Lack of step-down provision in the community.
- National system was frail
- SCHs being able to refuse placements meant in reality most complex cases ending up in place in institutions least able to support them
- Girls far more likely to harm themselves, experience restraint and be involved in fights than boys. 'Vicious cycle of self-harm and restraint needs to be addressed urgently.'
- Girls who needed tier 4 mental health beds waited too long for transfer to hospital. HMIP gave an example of a girl remanded into custody because a psychiatric bed was not found. She ended up remanded into Wetherby YOI.
- Poor transition planning into adult estate
- Failures to find suitable accommodation prior to release.

Their comments include the following:

*'We observed many dedicated frontline staff doing their best in difficult circumstances. Despite this the custodial estate did not function effectively and too often girls with highest needs were placed in establishments with least resource.'*

*'Outcomes for girls in key areas were poor.'*

*'There is a risk that the new units at Wetherby become the default provision for girls who are not accepted by SCHs'.*

*'Strong relationships between staff and children critical for building trust and starting to address trauma'.*

They concluded that SCHs offered a better environment for all children.

#### 2. HMIP inspection YOI Wetherby including Keppel unit 2022

The report identified several areas of concern and made recommendations for action:

- Girls at Wetherby received less time out of their cell than boys; had higher rates of self-harm and that there were 12 instances of use of force during the inspection period
- Failure to plan nationally had led to girls being placed in Wetherby.
- Levels of self-harm amongst girls was extremely high and this resulted in very high levels of force and assaults on staff.
- There was still no effective model of custody for very vulnerable children and despite the best efforts of staff, the YOI was not able to meet their needs.
- Considerable concerns about use of all male teams to cut clothes of vulnerable girls under restraint and place them in anti-ligature clothing.

Comments include:

*'Despite the best efforts of staff, who often had to intervene several times at night to remove ligatures, it was clear that the lack of flexibility in the daily regime and long period locked alone in cells at night and at weekends did not help to meet needs of these vulnerable girls'*

*'Wetherby is one of 3 different types of institutions that hold the 7 currently imprisoned girls in E and W. Nationally there is not a coherent plan for caring for these girls and what was originally only a temporary accommodation at Wetherby after the closure of Rainsbrook, has now become the destination of those who STCs and SCHs will not or cannot accommodate. The result has been pressure on staff who, while doing their best, have not had the training or do not possess the expertise to care for these girls, most of whom require specialist provision.'*

*'The care for these girls and other challenging children was not good enough.'*

### **3. March 2024 HMIP report following last inspection of Wetherby**

The report raised on-going concerns and described extremely high levels of self-harm and high levels of use of force including male staff cutting clothes off vulnerable girls. One girl was living on the Keppel unit and had no peer contact in evenings or weekends.

Immediately following this HMIP report, the Children's Commissioner published a response saying she was 'appalled' by the findings and added that 'girls in Wetherby's Keppel unit are some of the most vulnerable children in the country and it is not appropriate for them to be placed in a setting for boys.

### **4. Dec 2024 HMIP Review of progress at Wetherby**

The report said that *'During our review there were no girls at Wetherby. Although they had been at the prison until recently, it was encouraging that they had not been placed in recent months. However, Wetherby was still considered a potential placement of last resort making it challenging for leaders to plan effectively'*.

The Wetherby Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) has consistently raised concerns about the placement of girls in Wetherby. In its Jan 2024 annual report, it again raised concerns and asked minister to confirm plans.

### **5. Ofsted, CIC and HMIP Joint inspection of Oakhill STC (Dec 2024)**

The joint inspection team gave an overall judgement of Inadequate. While comments were in relation to both boys and girls, the concerns focused primarily on care for the most vulnerable children which included girls.

- Concerns were raised regarding shortfalls in the help and protection of children, particularly in the use of single separation for extended periods due to risk, with the impact of separation not appropriately assessed or monitored by health professionals
- The inspection found that children received poor healthcare and that governance systems had failed so there was a lack of sufficient oversight or awareness of the declining quality of healthcare.
- It found that children received inconsistent and at times unsafe primary and mental healthcare and that healthcare planning was weak.
- That the quality of education children receive had declined since the last inspection.

The report made a number of recommendations about improving the quality of healthcare provision, and educational provision.

### **6. Ofsted inspections of SCHs**

Recent inspection reports for SCHs have been for the most part positive. These include:

- Adel Beck SCH – May 2024: Overall judgement good, with good for education, health and help and protection.
- Lincolnshire SCH – Nov 24: Overall outstanding, with good for health and education, and outstanding for help and protection.
- Clayfields SCH – Jan 24: Overall good, with good for health, education and help and protection,
- Aycliffe SCH – July '23: Overall good, with good for health and education, and requires improvement for help and protection.
- Barton Moss – Feb '24: Overall good, with good for health, good for education and good for help and protection.
- Aldine House – July '24: Overall requires improvement.
- Vinney Green – July 24: Overall requires improvement, with good for health and education.
- Hillside – June '21 (Care inspectorate Wales): CIW do not provide overall judgements.



## **Appendix B: Terms of Reference**

### Definitions

For the purposes of these Terms of Reference:

**“Short-to-medium term”** refers to up to the next 5 years.

### Purpose

The Minister for Youth Justice has commissioned Susannah Hancock to consider the short-to-medium term placement options for girls in the Children and Young People Secure Estate (CYPSE); and to make recommendations about the most appropriate placement and care for girls in the youth estate.

### Background

Until 2021, girls in England and Wales who were remanded or sentenced to custody could be placed in either a secure children’s home (‘SCH’) or Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre (‘STC’). In June 2021, following repeated Urgent Notifications issued by inspectors citing concerns for children’s safety, a decision was made to close Rainsbrook STC.

The following month, ministers agreed to begin placing some girls into Wetherby Young Offender Institution (YOI), on one dedicated spur within the standalone Keppel Unit (boys live in the wider unit but not on that specific landing). The Youth Custody Service (YCS) has also since started placing girls in the Enhanced Support Unit (Napier), a unit dedicated to children requiring higher levels of individual support.

In November 2022, the YCS also began placing girls into Oakhill STC in a dedicated girls-only area.

In addition to SCHs, Wetherby YOI and Oakhill STC, the Oasis Secure School was opened in August 2024 and is accepting the placement of girls.

### Scope of Review

#### Evidence Summary

Based on the available evidence, the Lead Reviewer will review and make any assessment of the following:

- What factors enable girls to thrive and achieve positive change in custodial settings?  
*Please include reference to physical buildings, support from staff, provisions and services, and anything else you see necessary.*
- What are the conditions required for the successful management of girls with complex needs in custodial setting in England and Wales?

- What do recent inspection reports or thematic reviews say about the current placement options for girls in custody?
- What support is required to make effective use of the different placement options?

#### Review of current policy practice

Based on the findings from the evidence review, make assessment of:

- the suitability of current placement options for girls (taking into consideration contract lengths, and provisions/services within each site). *Please include reference to physical buildings, support from staff, provisions and services, and anything else you see necessary.*
- to what extent do the current placement options for girls, support the current needs of the cohort (including those with the most complex needs)?

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings made throughout the review of the current policy practice, make recommendations on:

- the most effective placement option(s) for girls within the CYPSE for the short-to-medium term
- how the YCS can ensure the most effective use of the placement options to meet the needs of girls in the CYPSE.
- the resource and support required to enable the sites and staff to be best equipped to meet the needs of girls, including those with the most complex needs.

The review may also provide any wider observations about the placement process of girls that the YCS and Government should consider in considering and developing long-term options and strategies for the placement of girls.

#### Arrangements for the review

The review will be led by Susannah Hancock. The Reviewer will be supported by a dedicated Secretariat. Civil servants supporting the review will be drawn from Ministry of Justice. Funding for the review will be provided by the Youth Custody Service.

The Reviewer will be given access to papers, data and meetings with relevant individuals as appropriate. They will also be granted access to sites, staff and, where relevant and appropriate, children and young people in youth custody.

The review should involve consultation with all relevant stakeholders. We anticipate this will include statutory partners such as the Children’s Commissioner and the Youth Justice Board, youth secure settings, as well as interested external stakeholders.

The review must be completed within three months. The Reviewer will prepare a written report outlining their findings and recommendations by the end of January 2025, with an oral update on recommendations by the Lead Reviewer to MoJ by 20 December 2024.

The Lead Reviewer will confirm the start date for the review with the MoJ upon appointment.

## **Appendix C: Other options considered**

In brief, there were two other options considered through the course of this review.

### **Do we need one single, dedicated girls' unit?**

Having assessed all of the evidence in this review, I don't believe that the evidence base supports this, or that – given the very small numbers, this would provide the flexibility and responsiveness that is needed. I believe we need a small number of gender responsive homes across England and Wales that can offer support to girls including the most vulnerable. We have these in the form of SCHs and, we anticipate, the new Secure School. These homes need to be resourced to deliver for the most vulnerable girls.

### **Do girls need to be placed in dedicated units alongside a women's prison?**

This has been suggested on the basis it was a model used some years back and was seen to be effective. Even if a completely separate unit for girls were built next to a women's prison, while allowing the transfer of gender responsive skills, learning and professionals across sites, this would be potentially unlawful and open to legal challenge given that these girls are first and foremost children; that the workforce needed to work with children is different, and that the risk of diluting the needs of children by setting them alongside higher volumes of adults could be high.

## **Appendix D: Consultation Approach**

Thank you to everyone who has met with me and to all those who shared their insights, evidence, reports, views, reflections and resources so generously. These have been invaluable to the review. I have listed those consulted below.

### Stakeholder meetings

I met with representatives from the following organisations:

- Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Agenda Alliance (including Jessica Southgate, Deputy Chief Executive)
- Association of YOT Managers
- Alliance for Youth Justice (including Jess Mullen, CEO)
- Centre for Justice Innovation (including Phil Bowen, Director)
- Centre for Mental Health (including Lorraine Khan, Associate Director for Children and Young People)
- Children's Commissioner (including Juliette Cammaerts, Director of Policy, planning and Delivery)
- Children's Society (including Pippa Goodfellow, Director of Influence, Impact and Evidence)
- Crest Advisory (including Jon Clements, Executive Director of Development)
- Department for Education
- HMI Prisons
- HMPPS Women's Group
- Howard League (including Andrea Coomber, Chief Executive)
- Independent Restraint Review Panel (including Colin Allars, Chair of Panel)
- Kinetic Youth
- Ministry of Justice
- NHS England
- Ofsted
- Prison Officers Association
- Prison Reform Trust
- Scottish Government
- Secure Accommodation Network (including managers of individual Secure Children's Homes)
- Welsh Government
- Womens Justice Board (including Dame Vera Baird DBE KC, Member of Women's Justice Board and former Victims Commissioner)
- Womens Rights Network
- YOT Managers Cymru
- Youth Custody Service
- Youth Justice Board (including Steph Roberts-Bibby, CEO and Keith Fraser, Chair)

### Engagement with children

I spoke with:

- girls in Oakhill, the Secure School and Adel Beck SCH
- two young women who had previously been in the CYPSE.

### Visits

As part of this review, I visited: Oakhill Secure Training Centre, Oasis Restore Secure School, Adel Bech SCH and Wetherby YOI. To ensure that all SCH's viewpoints were captured, I convened a roundtable. All SCHs and the Secure School were invited to join the SCH roundtable that I chaired as part of this review.

### SCH Roundtable

Attendees from the following homes attended the roundtable:

- Aycliffe
- Hillside
- Lincolnshire
- Clayfields
- Oasis Restore Secure School

### Data commissioned from the YCS

As part of my review, I commissioned significant data from the YCS. This included:

- the number of girls in custody over the past decade (compared to data on number of boys in custody)
- breakdown of age groups (10 to 14 years/ 15 years/ 16 years/ 17 years/ 18+) over the past decade
- breakdown of location (SCH/STC/YOI/Secure School) over the past decade
- breakdown of ethnicity groups (Asian/ Black/ Mixed/ Other/ White/ Not Known) over the past decade
- average number of girls in custody by Youth Justice Service Region over the past decade (compared to boys) (including information about where that girl is originally from)
- average number of girls in custody by legal basis (Remand/ DTO/ Section91/ Other) over the past decade (compared to boys)
- average number of girls in custody by offence group (Breach of Statutory Order/ Domestic Burglary/ Drugs/ Robbery/ Sexual Offences/ Violence Against the Person/ Other) over the past decade (compared to boys)
- occupancy capacity within SCHs over the past 5 years
- data on SCH refusals of placement of a girl (including information about where the girl was eventually placed if the SCH refused)
- indicative costs for each type of accommodation and number of beds within each provision in the secure estate
- data on assaults, self-harm, separations and use of force incidents within the secure estate.