

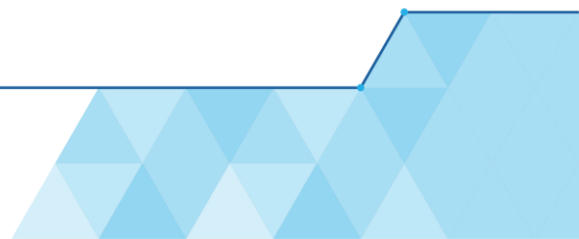


Ministry
of Justice

Safeguarding Review Panel – Youth Custodial Estate

Terms of Reference

February 2026



Purpose

No child should ever be at risk of harm, not least whilst within the care of the state, such as those children detained in a youth custodial establishment. These organisations exist to help children develop and address the issues which contributed to them being in custody.

We must ensure that all children receive the highest standards of support and feel safe, as well as being able to report concerns and have confidence that they will be acted upon.

The Children and Young People Secure Estate (CYPSE) has a statutory responsibility to safeguard children¹— whether the child is serving a sentence or held on remand. The CYPSE should ensure that each site which accommodates children provides a safe, respectful, and developmentally supportive environment that promotes positive outcomes and enables children to thrive.

This panel was set up following the publication of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman report into the appalling abuse suffered at Medomsley Detention Centre from 1961 - 1987. The report detailed the abuse of boys and young men by the very people who were employed to look after them. Recent safeguarding failures have also been flagged at several different establishments in today's estate.

The panel will focus on reviewing current safeguarding arrangements to ensure that the CYPSE is in the strongest position to help prevent abuse of children by staff. In the course of the review, if there are concerns for any children, this will be brought immediately to the attention of the YCS.

The review will look at three central questions:

1. How accessible and how trusted are the arrangements for children in custody, their families and all those that work with those children, to raise child protection concerns, and how effective is the advocacy provided by relevant agencies?
2. How effective are the responses from relevant agencies in addressing allegations against staff?
3. How effective are the arrangements for the recruitment of YCS staff, their induction, ongoing support and training as it relates to child protection and broader safeguarding?

The review will consider examples of good practice to reflect the strengths within the CYPSE, with a view to scaling up the most effective examples.

Remit

The youth custodial estate comprises of four distinct types of establishments. Each establishment type plays a unique role in meeting the diverse needs of children and have their own legislative frameworks, operational models, internal processes, and levels of

¹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) sets out various organisation's statutory responsibilities, including in secure settings, much of which is underpinned by the Childrens Act 2004.

available resources. All of these establishments will be within the remit of this panel's work:

- **Young Offender Institutions (YOIs):** Typically larger and more prison-like in structure, older children often are often placed in YOIs, where there are more rigid regimes and smaller staff ratios.²
- **Secure Training Centres (STCs):** The remaining STC aims to offer a more trauma informed environment, balancing custody with structured learning and behavioural support, with a higher staff to child ratio than in YOIs. The STC is operated by G4S.
- **Secure Children's Homes (SCHs):** These are smaller, welfare-led settings that provide intensive care and support, often for younger or more vulnerable children, with a strong emphasis on safeguarding and emotional wellbeing. They are operated by Local Authorities and have higher staff to child ratios than YOIs and STCs.
- **Secure School:** The first of these is the Oasis Restore Secure School (ORSS) run by Oasis Trust. It is a new model that integrates education, care, and rehabilitation in a therapeutic setting, aiming to reframe custody through a child-first, trauma-informed approach.

The panel's remit includes children who are 18 years and under but held in these settings. It does not cover young adults 18-21 in adult prisons with YOIs attached. It covers children in England and Wales.

Statutory oversight for safeguarding sits with Local Authorities (LAs) and DfE's [Working Together to Safeguarding Children](#) underpins how the system should respond when concerns are raised. This guidance includes specifics for the youth custodial context; however, it has been identified there are inconsistencies in how safeguarding operates in practice among different custodial sites.

Forward Look

From January to June, the panel will take a three-stage approach. It will begin with fieldwork, followed by analysis and interviews, and conclude with final recommendations reported by June 2026. The panel will meet monthly, with progress reports provided to the Minister for Youth Justice every 6 - 8 weeks.

Within this 6-month period of work, the panel will be structured into 5 workstreams:

1. **An exploration of the feasibility for new arrangements for raising child protection concerns and improving advocacy responses – led by Jahnine Davis, Independent Children's Rights and Safeguarding Advisor, with the support of Ministry of Justice**
2. **An analysis of the data held on allegations against staff across the Youth Custody Service – led by the Youth Custody Service**

² The MoJ directly employ staff in three of the YOIs sites – Feltham, Werrington and Wetherby.

3. **A case review into allegations against staff where abuse is indicated** – *led by Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families*
4. **A review of staff recruitment, training and support practices across the Youth Custody Service** – *led by the Youth Custody Service*
5. **Linked to (4), an exploration of the practice culture across the youth custody estate from the perspective of prison staff, young people and their families** - *led by Nana Bonsu, Director of Relational Practice, Camden Council*

Membership

The panel will be chaired by the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families in England, Isabelle Trowler. Whilst the full list may be subject to change as the panel progresses with its work, there will be representatives from across the system:

Government Departments

- Children's Social Care, Department for Education
- National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, Department for Education
- Youth Custody Service, Ministry of Justice
- Youth Justice Policy, Ministry of Justice
- Youth Justice Policy, Welsh Government

Inspectorates

- Care Inspectorate Wales
- HM Inspections Prisons
- Ofsted

Local Authorities

- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Calderdale Council
- Leeds City Council
- London Borough of Camden Council
- London Borough of Hounslow Council
- Milton Keynes City Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Stockport Council

Secure Children's Homes (SCHs)

- Adel Beck SCH
- Aycliffe SCH
- Barton Moss SCH
- Clayfields SCH
- Hillside SCH
- Vinney Green SCH

Young Offender Institutions (YOIs)

- Feltham, HM YOI
- Parc YOI, G4S
- Werrington, HM YOI
- Wetherby, HM YOI

Secure Training Centre (STC)

- Oakhill STC, G4S

Oasis Restore Secure School (ORSS)

- Oasis Restore

Police

- NPCC (National Police Chiefs' Council)

Other Key Stakeholders

- Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Association of YOT Managers
- National LADO Network (Local Authority Designated Officer Network)