



Wayne Reid  
BASW England Professional Officer  
British Association of Social Workers  
Wayne.Reid@basw.co.uk

MoJ Ref: ADR109825

18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Dear Wayne,

### USE OF PAVA IN THE YOUTH ESTATE

Thank you for your letter to my predecessor the Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, regarding your concerns about the potential deployment of PAVA spray within the youth estate. Firstly, I wish to express my apologies in the delayed response to your letter, which my team only received on 8 December 2023.

I have read your letter with care. I appreciate your concerns and focus on this complex matter. We are actively considering the deployment of PAVA spray within the youth estate. Whilst no decision has been made to date, I want to emphasise that this option will not be taken lightly. The Lord Chancellor and I are currently reviewing all the evidence available to us and the stakeholder views.

Whilst the evaluation of PAVA use, in the adult estate has not yet been published, my officials have had sight of this and have shared the findings of the report in their advice to the Lord Chancellor and myself.

As was the case with my predecessor, I will continue to engage with stakeholders around this decision and welcome your views and thoughts. As and when any decision is taken there will of course be further engagement and communication.

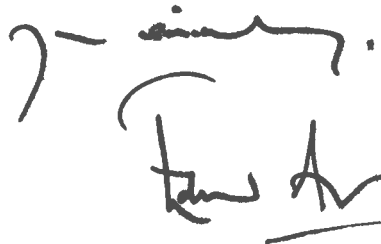
Improving safety in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) is a complex issue with no single solution. Despite existing work around violence reduction and improving behaviour management, we continue to see risks from serious incidents such as multi-perpetrator assaults. The potential introduction of PAVA is one action that we are considering, due to the unique opportunity it presents for staff to intervene in serious multi-perpetrator incidents whilst maintaining a safe distance.

I agree that further work is required to support children and young people who have been victims of assaults whilst in custody. The Youth Custody Service (YCS) is exploring how there can be further support from safeguarding boards and youth offending teams, following serious incidents; Rapid Review is one of those methods to be considered. Additionally, the YCS is taking several other actions to support children and young people involved in incidents, including the local Safeguarding teams, notifying a child's home local authority of any safeguarding concerns, or making a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) if these concerns involve staff.

I understand your desire to further reduce the numbers of children and young people in custody. The youth custody population fell from 2,900 in 2007/08 to c.800 pre-Covid, due largely to a fall in first time

entrants to the youth justice system. The population as of October 2023 stands just under 600. The reduction in the number of children and young people in custody does bring challenge in managing a more concentrated population of children with complex needs and a high percentage of violent offending (two thirds). The Government is piloting a new form of robust community sentences, to strengthen community alternatives to short custodial sentences, but with the support of GPS tagging, help to safely manage their risks to the public.

Regardless of any decision on PAVA, we will continue to drive improvements in the delivery and performance of our YOIs to keep children and staff safe. Thank you for your engagement on this matter. I look forward to continuing to work toward our shared goals of providing a safer, more rehabilitative environment for children and young people in custody and in the community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', written over a faint, illegible background.

**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**