Ministry of Justice

A modern youth justice system

Foundations fit for the future

CP1492



Government of the United Kingdom

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A modern youth justice system

Foundations fit for the future

Presented to Parliament by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice by Command of His Majesty

February 2026

CP 1492

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Foreword

This Government came into office with a Plan for Change, and this policy statement is the first stage towards fundamental reforms to the youth justice system.

Among the missions with which we charged ourselves to improve the lives of the British public were "Safer Streets" – that essential duty of government to keep its citizens from serious harm – and "Break Down Barriers to Opportunity" – ensuring that whoever you are, and wherever you come from, hard work should mean you are able to get on in life.

The youth justice system plays a central role in delivering on those missions every day. Dedicated professionals and volunteers who make up that system are diverting children from crime, providing interventions that address their underlying needs, and affording them a route to happy, healthy and law-abiding lives. They are preventing new victims from coming to harm, and they are improving opportunities for children.

Thanks to their concerted efforts, the youth justice system in England and Wales has been able to tell one of the great societal success stories in modern Britain. Since the system was established in its current formation by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, we have seen dramatic improvements at each stage of the criminal justice process:

- the number of proven offences by children has fallen by 88% since 2006/07;
- the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system has fallen by 93% since 2006/07; and
- the number of children in custody has fallen by over 85% since 2006/07.

However, this commendable success has brought its own challenges. The dramatic changes in volume have changed the composition of the caseload within the system.

It is a truism that as we successfully divert more and more children from crime and the formal youth justice system, those that remain are often the 'hardest to reach' – whose needs have been consistently unmet – and the ones who are committing more serious crimes. The cohort of children in the system now have more complex needs, more complex backgrounds, and more complex obstacles facing them on the road to rehabilitation than they did previously. Joint analysis by the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education has shown that 80% of children who had been cautioned or sentenced in England had special educational needs and 32% were designated a 'child in need', compared with 45% and 6% of the all-pupil cohort respectively.

The harder it is to reach these children – to address their needs, to dissuade them from crime – the harder it becomes to protect the public from coming to harm. Perhaps, then, it

is fair to say, where this Government has inherited a 'crisis of capacity' in the adult justice system, it may have inherited a 'crisis of complexity' in youth justice.

It is the right time to consider whether the governance and funding arrangements for this system, as it was set up nearly thirty years ago, are optimised to meet these new challenges of today – and those it is likely to face in future.

Significant change is needed if we are to meet those challenges, and I have listened carefully to what the youth justice sector has said about what it needs in order to do so.

This Government is ambitious about addressing these issues at a system-level – through cross-government action on programmes such as Young Futures Hubs and Panels, as well as tackling upstream causes of youth vulnerability and crime in England through our National Youth Strategy and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2025.

I am determined that the Ministry of Justice plays its part in that system to support local youth justice services, to offer more certainty and consistency on funding, and to foster regional innovation. I believe, too, that the Ministry of Justice should be playing a leading role in the change that we need to see if we are to break down barriers to opportunity for the most vulnerable children in our country, to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls, and to make our streets safer.

That is why I am today announcing a series of modernising reforms to how the youth justice system is funded and governed, enabling it to better intervene early and ensure custody is a last resort.

This, however, is only a first step. We will soon set out our plans for the system as a whole and, taken together, we believe these proposals will amount to the most fundamental reform of the youth justice system in a generation, laying foundations for a modern approach to the challenges our children face in the years to come.

SIGNATURE

David Lammy MP

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

Foundations fit for the future

The fundamentals of youth justice in the community remain sound, backed by the evidence and their own record – local, multi-disciplinary teams working in partnership across public services, and with financial and strategic support from central government, to identify children at risk, address their underlying needs and divert them from crime.

It is clear, then, that this approach should be preserved. Youth justice services have played a vital, and understated, role in our public services – and they continue to evolve. We strongly encourage the greater focus local teams are now placing on the victims of youth offending. The Government welcomed the addition of the victims standard to HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection framework in 2025, which assesses whether victims receive the high-quality, compassionate and individualised service they deserve.

However, there is still more that both central government and local services can do in partnership to make their mutual relationship work more efficiently and more effectively for the children and communities they serve.

With this statement, this Government will lay the foundations for a new partnership between central government and those local youth justice services. First, central government can, and will, offer **more dependable funding arrangements** for youth justice services, allowing them to plan ahead, invest in longer-term programmes and more effectively target their resources.

In return, we expect strong performance and outcomes – for children, victims and communities, and taxpayers – an ambition shared with many in the sector. This Government is unapologetic about that, and will demand more. In this statement, we will start setting out a **new approach to oversight and accountability** in the youth justice system.

But we will not just offer money, set targets and walk away. Central government can offer, too, more practical support and freedom to innovate to local services – stepping in or stepping back, as required, to give youth justice services the space and confidence to put new ideas into practice, and harness the technological revolution that is happening around us.

Finally, this Government is committed to ensuring **custody is a true last resort** for children and, when a child must be detained, they are detained for a clear purpose and with a proper plan for their release. Again, this must be achieved in partnership – we will support local youth justice services to find alternatives to custodial remand while, at the same time, improving standards in custody for those children who need to be there.

The Ministry of Justice will shortly write to each youth justice service setting out what the changes announced in this statement mean for them.

Dependable funding

This Government will:

- allocate £281m for the youth justice grant over three years;
- allocate a further £46m for the Turnaround grant programme over three years;
- offer multi-year certainty to youth justice services in three-year grant awards;
- conduct a consultation later this year with the youth justice sector about its long-term funding and oversight arrangements, and with a particular focus on streamlining the terms and conditions attached to funding in this Spending Review period.

There is no escaping from the fact that the fiscal environment remains challenging for public services, but we can be smarter in distributing public money by providing the certainty frontline services need to plan, invest and innovate for the future.

Youth justice services core grant

The youth justice services core grant provides, on average, around a third of the funding for local authority youth justice services. This funding is vital for maintaining the capacity and capability of youth justice services to provide effective interventions that reduce reoffending and protect communities, and to deliver youth justice priorities.

Equally, this Government is clear that elected ministers should be held to account for the distribution of public funds, and ensuring that they are delivering the public priorities for which they are intended. From the financial year of 2026//27, the payment of this core grant will no longer be the responsibility of the Youth Justice Board – an arms-length body – and instead will be **directly distributed by the Ministry of Justice**.

Alongside this, acknowledging need for youth justice services to plan for the future, the Ministry of Justice will guarantee a **multi-year settlement** for the core grant from 2026/27 to 2028/29. The total core grant issued by the Ministry will be **£93.6m per annum for three years.**

This year, we will offer youth justice services three-year grant awards – ensuring they are better able to retain crucial members of staff, develop more comprehensive integrated plans with their statutory partners, and more efficiently commission services and interventions, including from those vital voluntary and community sector organisations who can often offer a nimbleness and a depth of relationship that statutory organisations cannot.

To ensure that this money is being used first and foremost for frontline delivery, we will consult with the sector on a **refresh of grant terms and conditions,** including the requirement for local authorities to produce youth justice annual plans (YJAPs) and submit serious incident notifications (SINs), with an aim to refine the processes involved with accessing the core grant and reduce the administrative burden placed on youth justice services by central government.

We will also make sure these terms and conditions reflect the public's priorities on crime. One key area on which we will be asking youth justice services to focus is **knife possession**. Children carrying knives has become normalised and we know that many professionals working in the youth justice system share our concern and want to address this in a consistent and effective way. The Labour manifesto committed to ensuring knife possession is always met with a swift, robust and evidence-based response. Today, the Ministry of Justice, alongside the Home Office, has published new guidance for youth justice service and police staff to this effect on GOV.UK. Paying due regard to this guidance will become a condition of core grant funding for youth justice services from 2026/27, and will form part of HM Inspectorates of Probation and Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services' upcoming joint thematic inspection of knife crime. We will write to youth justice services with further detail about these new requirements.

Turnaround grants

The 'Turnaround' youth justice early intervention programme was established by the Ministry of Justice in 2022, to provide additional funding to support children on the cusp of the youth justice system, with the explicit aim of preventing future offending.

Over the past four financial years, the Ministry of Justice has invested £71m in the programme, funding interventions for up to 20,500 vulnerable children by the end of this financial year.

Alongside this policy statement, we have today published an independent evaluation of the programme on GOV.UK. The results are striking. Only 7% of children who completed a Turnaround intervention had received a judicial decision or caution by December 2024; parents and practitioners reported improvements in children's behaviour, education, wellbeing, and outlook, with benefits also extending to families; and the programme also helped foster stronger collaboration and more confident practice among youth justice services and their partners.

It is clear that, with programmes like Turnaround, we can do more to divert children from crime entirely – improving lives, preventing crime and offering tangible return on investment. We need to follow, and further develop, this evidence base.

That is why **we are committing a further £15.4m per annum to Turnaround, guaranteed as a three-year settlement** until 2028/29.

This will enable youth justice services and their partners to maintain the broad and deep positive impact Turnaround, alongside other diversionary schemes, has had on the lives of children, their families and communities by preventing crime and protecting the public.

Longer-term funding

The current method of distributing the youth justice core grant uses demographic data from 2009 and reflects historical decisions made in 2011/12, when several standalone 'ringfenced' grants were merged to avoid sudden drops in funding. What was initially a transitional arrangement has now been in place for over 13 years.

In 2022, the Ministry of Justice asked the Youth Justice Board to commission a review of the grant funding formula, which made a series of recommendations.

The Government accepts that this current method for allocating local youth justice funding needs updating, not least because it fails to recognise the 'upstream' preventative and diversionary work increasingly done by youth justice services. However, we have concluded that the wider arrangements for funding youth justice services are similarly and more fundamentally flawed. Funding for local youth justice services is provided by several organisations – to different degrees, at different frequencies and on different calculations or bases.

It cannot be right that there is such a 'postcode lottery' for financing these vital services. Our local youth justice service managers and management boards should be spending their time developing long-term plans to prevent and address childhood offending, not on juggling budgets and spreadsheets.

We also heard loud and clear from the youth justice system that there needed to be greater engagement, consultation and notice for any such changes to the funding formula and arrangements.

As such, the Ministry of Justice will consult with the youth justice sector and its other funding partners to develop proposals for longer-term reform that provides a more coherent and consistent approach to youth justice funding, and ensure that statutory partners continue to meet their duties and expected contributions. We will work closely across government to ensure that other public service reforms – such as the future abolition and redistribution of the responsibilities of Police and Crime Commissioners – enable continuity of these services and local partnerships as a priority.

We will begin to set out our proposals for this work in the spring, and we anticipate a further, more detailed consultation later in 2026.

Central government supporting the frontline

This Government will:

- reform the role of the Youth Justice Board to focus on supporting the frontline;
- transfer activities relating to the development, funding and monitoring of government policy and the wider youth justice system from the Youth Justice Board to the Ministry of Justice; and
- establish an expert panel to advise government on how digital technology and data analytics can be better used to support youth justice services.

This Government recognises that it is local youth justice services that have the expertise and the relationships to most effectively identify and provide tailored support to children who have offended, or at risk of doing so. However, we also recognise the limitations of a local approach – it can be harder to secure the infrastructure you need, or see how practice is changing for the better elsewhere.

The future of the Youth Justice Board

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out the principles for governance and oversight of the youth justice system, which included the formation of the Youth Justice Board – an independent, non-departmental public body charged with functions to ensure the system met its principal statutory aim to "prevent offending by children and young persons" and thereby protect the public.

As set out above, the Youth Justice Board has seen this aim met to resounding success – with 88% falls in proven offences by children over the past twenty years – but, in so doing, now oversees a system facing different challenges to those in 1998.

This Government also has a clear commitment to the principles of democratic accountability and central government efficiency, as demonstrated by the Cabinet Office's recent Public Bodies Review, which required each government department to assess its associated public bodies against its standard criteria for good governance.

That is why, in December 2024, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a review of the Youth Justice Board and its operations from Steve Crocker, which we will publish alongside this statement on GOV.UK. We are very grateful for Steve's report and have

carefully considered his recommendations on how to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the Youth Justice Board's operations.

However, in keeping with the Cabinet Office principles, and in light of the much-changed context of the youth justice system since 1998, the government has concluded that we need to go further still – amounting to a substantial reform of the role of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

As youth justice services' caseloads become more complex, and we see worrying trends begin to emerge or worsen – such as knife crime, racial disproportionality, violence against women and girls, and online harms – we believe the time is right to re-examine what central government can do to better support the frontline, and be more accountable for doing so.

A reformed Youth Justice Board will drive measurable, **evidence-led continuous improvement** across youth justice services by identifying best practice, supporting innovation, and accelerating the spread of effective approaches to improve outcomes for children, victims and communities.

As we change the funding arrangements to enable more innovation, investment planning, and collaboration, this renewed focus of the Youth Justice Board will be more important than ever – working closely with youth justice service management boards to develop and sustain even better evidence-based practice will make a direct and meaningful difference for some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

It is right that responsibility for developing, funding and monitoring government policy should be under democratic oversight. This change in remit for the Youth Justice Board, therefore, will involve **it transferring some of its other functions into the Ministry of Justice**.

In addition to the transfer of the responsibility for payment of the youth justice core grant, the Youth Justice Board will no longer be responsible for the following functions and activities, which will be transferred into, or merged with existing functions in, the Ministry of Justice:

- the development of youth justice standards;
- the monitoring of youth justice service performance; and
- strategic oversight and policy advice for the youth justice system a whole.

The Ministry of Justice will work closely with the Youth Justice Board over the coming months to plan this transition and will continue to engage with local services to understand how the Ministry's reformed central oversight arrangements, alongside other statutory partners, can support local delivery most effectively. We will be in touch with frontline services in due course.

To lead this transition, the Government has appointed Phil Bowen as the new interim chair, bringing years of experience working on future-facing challenges to criminal justice at the Centre of Justice Innovation. We will shortly be advertising for a new permanent Youth Justice Board chair.

Harnessing technology

If the nature of childhood offending, and the needs of the children involved or at-risk, have changed faster than the system structures have to address them, that disparity is even more stark when it comes to the use of technology and data in youth justice. Where the advance of digital technology and data science is almost outstripping our imagination, offering countless new solutions to old problems, the youth justice system is stuck in time with digital infrastructure and approaches that can actively hinder the good work of practitioners.

We have heard concerns from youth justice services about the outdated technology they are forced to rely on. The hours spent copying and pasting, and cross-checking records, which could be spent working with children, and protecting the public. We can be more efficient and more productive, and the children, victims and communities in our care rightly expect us to be – as does the taxpayer.

This Government wants to see the system embrace the most up-to-date technology to allow youth justice services to manage their caseloads more effectively, but we can also harness the power of data more proactively.

We know there are factors that can indicate when a child may be more vulnerable to more, or more serious, offending, and we understand the triggers that should prompt timely support. We know we can do more to identify those children earlier, and to provide them with the support they need, when they need it. We also know the importance of not stigmatising, or unnecessarily criminalising, those children, and the potential for biases in data.

As such, we have begun exploring three key changes to data and technology across the youth justice system.

First, we will work with youth justice services and others to explore what a more modern and more effective youth justice case management system, that can interface efficiently with other such systems in the children's sector, might look like. One that allows professionals to spend more of their time on front-facing work with children, not in the back-office entering the same information on multiple systems.

Secondly, we will review how we could build on existing innovative practice to roll out artificial intelligence transcription tools to staff in community and/or custody services across the youth justice system, to help youth justice professionals to spend more quality time with children rather than writing up notes of their meetings. These tools are already on track to save probation officers and other staff up to 240,000 days of administrative time.

Thirdly, we will explore how machine learning and advanced analytics can be applied responsibly in the youth justice system to support early, appropriate intervention and strengthen our ability to prevent harm. We want to equip caseworkers and other professionals with well-evidenced insights that help them understand where support may be most effective for children. The technology in this area is evolving quickly, and appropriate safeguards will be essential to ensure its use is free from biases. This Government is committed to ensuring that any use of data or analytics meets the highest ethical, technical and operational standards.

As such, we are establishing an expert Advisory Panel on preventative analytics for youth justice. With the expertise of individuals such as Professor Mark Mon-Williams, the Advisory Council will help inform our future thinking and next steps in this vital area.

We will set out more details on these proposals in the spring.

Custody as a last resort

This Government will:

- allocate £60m for local authority remand payments over three years;
- introduce a new funding formula for remand payments, to incentivise the use of community alternatives;
- invest a further £5m in regional projects to develop alternatives to custodial remand, with a particular focus on fostering; and
- set out plans for improving standards in youth custody later this year

This Government is determined that a child should be sent to custody only ever as a true last resort. Unless children are detained with a clear purpose and a proper plan for their release, custody risks becoming a means of further criminalisation, not rehabilitation, and therefore counterproductive for public protection.

The use of remand

Ten years ago, 23% of children in custody were there on remand. In 2024/25 remanded children made up 44% of the average custodial population, and only 38% of those children went on to receive a custodial sentence after trial. Black and Mixed Heritage children are overrepresented in the custodial remand population. That some children are being remanded to custody, for short periods of time and with less serious charges, who could have been supported in the community, is a shameful failing – one that this government will fix.

Remand to custody should only happen when all possible options to keep the child safely in the community have been considered and ruled out. Any length of time spent in custody can be severely damaging to the child. There are children in custody today who the system acknowledges need not be there, which is simply not acceptable. Every unnecessary remand to custody delivers consistently poor outcomes for the child remanded and costs the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds per year for the placement. This is a tragedy for the child, the taxpayer and society.

Since the introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), local authorities have financial responsibility for children being remanded and the Youth Custody Service has provided annual payments to support covering those costs. While local authorities may wish to provide community alternatives to custodial remand, they consistently tell us of the struggle to find the upfront investment required. That is why

we will change the youth remand funding arrangements to support investment into high-quality community remand placements and robust bail services.

Since 2023, the Ministry of Justice has been funding the Greater Manchester Youth Remand Funding pilot. This has tested and evaluated pooling the region's remand funding to support stronger community remand and bail options, with promising results – seeing both a reduction in custodial remands and an increase in the use of bail and community remand. The London Accommodation Pathfinder, funded by the Youth Justice Board, further demonstrates that providing dedicated community accommodation can support improved outcomes for children who would otherwise face remand to custody.

From 2025, the Ministry of Justice extended our funding to projects in West Yorkshire, Kent, Lambeth, and Birmingham to further test different approaches to diverting children away from custody, including specialist fostering and family-centred support. Now, we will go further to support the expansion of this effective practice.

We will introduce a three-year remand funding settlement of £20m per annum to provide greater financial stability and certainty for local authorities, enabling more effective planning and longer-term investment in alternatives to custody. **We will also revise the funding formula so that areas reducing their custodial remands are rewarded rather than punished.**

Further, to build on the success of the Greater Manchester pilot we will reserve a small proportion of the annual funding to support local authorities who agree to work regionally to improve practice and bolster their community remand and bail options. This project management funding will ease the financial burden on local authorities of establishing a new way of regional working, whilst helping them to unlock long-term efficiencies through regional resource-sharing for this small, highly vulnerable cohort.

We will invest a further £5m in areas working as a regional partnership as direct upfront investment in community alternatives to custody, whether that is specialist fostering, accommodation, or highly supported diversion into family care.

We have a shared commitment with the Department of Education to expand the availability of remand foster placements in England, as a robust alternative to remand in custody. Expanding regional remand funding arrangements, alongside the expansion of Regional Care Cooperatives and Regional Fostering Hubs will be mutually beneficial across the justice and social care systems. Providing children with the safety and care that they need whilst on trial and beyond, to live more positive lives.

This Government wants to see central and local agencies, including police, health and education services, doing all they can to ensure custody is a true last resort. Local authorities not willing to work in a regional partnership will miss this singular opportunity to

access additional remand funding and will see a reduction in their funding in future if they do not reduce their remands to custody.

More broadly, we are determined to explore all other options for reducing the population in custody – such as future changes to remand legislation that raise the eligibility threshold – to ensure that only children charged with serious offences, who truly pose a risk to the public, can be remanded into custody. Together, we can increase the number of children who are kept close to community services as they await trial and increase the likelihood that those children who do go to custody are going with intent, with clear plans for their rehabilitation.

Improving outcomes in custody

Even as we introduce these reforms to reduce the use of custody for children where suitable alternatives could be found, there will be a need to maintain this option, as a last resort, for the most serious cases when a child or their community would not otherwise be safe. Where custody is to be used this way, it is imperative that we do what we can to ensure our youth secure estate is able both to keep that child safe while in their care, and to keep their home communities safe, by putting effective plans in place to ready them for release.

Those children who remain in custody, and for whom it will remain an option, have been failed repeatedly – by the state and by wider society – before they ever entered the justice system. Many have special education needs, significant mental health issues, and histories of chronic non-attendance at school. Two-thirds of the children in custody are there for violent offences. They are both vulnerable and challenging to manage.

Challenging though they may be, the conditions for children in custody are dismaying. Most children (around two-thirds) in the custody of the state are held in young offender institutions, and these are the cause of most concern. These are not environments set up to deliver the complex therapeutic interventions that we know are required to have any success at reaching these children. They are too old and too big, they are austere and unsafe, and they were often not designed to hold children at all. They are staffed by many hard-working staff who, though they are dedicated public servants putting themselves at risk every day, often face challenges because the environment and training do not always prepare them for the unique needs of children in custody.

The results are sadly predictable. High levels of violence and self-harm are a tragic norm, as are poor rehabilitative outcomes. Young Offender Institutions can find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of instability. In these larger sites, whole regimes and wings must shut down in response to violent incidents, trapping children in their rooms; those children are then denied access to the interventions they need, the education they

deserve, or even a breath of fresh air – bottled-up, needs unmet, and frustrations unaddressed – when the regime begins again they are more likely to be violent, and the cycle continues.

Wholesale change, particularly with regard to a problem this ingrained and multi-faceted, cannot happen overnight. While we have to accept that fundamental change will be a long-term endeavour, what we cannot accept is a custodial system that fails children, fails victims and fails the public.

We need a plan that is realistic, affordable, and focused on achievable outcomes – a plan that recognises the complexity of these children's lives and commits to safeguarding, education, and rehabilitation. To this end, the minister for youth justice has established and chairs a new youth custody performance oversight board to drive improvement in these areas.

Central to this will be a focus on increasing the time children spend out of their room, and in classrooms or engaging with their peers instead. We must be ambitious about how we move away from children spending too long alone in their rooms – at an age where they should instead be learning, both from teachers and each other, and when physical activity is paramount to bodily and mental health.

In December 2025, the Justice Select Committee recommended setting a statutory minimum for time spent out of room. This Government agrees in spirit with the Committee's findings and welcomes its recommendation. We will look at the best, and safest, means by which to implement this provision in due course, as one step toward breaking this cycle of isolation, improving children's wellbeing, and encouraging more positive social reaction.

Time out of room is essential, a basic necessity if anything at all is to reach these children, but it means little if the quality of services they access outside their room are poor. Too often, mainstream education has failed these children, and we should not expect that those same models will always work in custody. Teaching can be a hard job at the best of times, and in these most challenging of environments with the most complex students, the hardworking teachers in youth custody deserve our sincere thanks – but on a more fundamental level, they deserve the resources and flexibility they need to do their job.

Therefore, we will also be looking closely at how education is delivered in custody, how we work with our providers, and whether we can do more to draw on innovative best practice from multi-academy trusts and across the education sector. We are working with the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel De Souza, to better understand these challenges across the estate, and inform recommendations to this end.

The safety and welfare of children in the state's care remains our paramount concern. At the end of last year, this Government announced that a panel chaired by the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families would conduct a rapid review into safeguarding arrangements for children in custody. This review is not only looking at the Youth Custody Service's practices, but at the obligations of all statutory partners, including local authorities, and considering how those interact to support those in our care. This includes those who receive visits from social workers through virtue of being remanded or a looked-after child. For those who currently do not receive this support, we will consider what more we could do to extend it to them.

We look forward to receiving the recommendations of that review, but will not wait for it to conclude to act. This panel has an urgent mandate to ensure recommendations are implemented as they are identified and we will not hesitate to ensure all organisations are playing their part – for these children, out of sight must not mean out of mind.

Whilst in custody, we want to ensure that we build upon the Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) which seeks to improve the quality of care and outcomes for children and young people in the children and young people secure estate. It aims to do this through culture change promoting consistent, trauma-informed, formulation-driven, evidence-based care, delivered within a whole-systems approach by well-trained and supported staff. It is being delivered, in settings in England, in partnership by NHS England, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Education, and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Youth Custody Service.

For few, if any, children will, or should, spend their life in custody forever. So, just as important as support for children while they are in custody, is the planning for their release, which encompasses equally as many partners. Ensuring children have reliable access to training, education or employment upon release is the cornerstone to reducing reoffending, and we need to better prepare them to return to positive, productive lives. That is why this Government will expand the use of release on temporary licence (ROTL), where it is safe to do so, to break down barriers to these opportunities.

None of these initiatives will be successful without ensuring that the staff who care for, protect and interact with these children everyday have the tools and support they need to do so effectively. This goes beyond just material resources, and encompasses skills, knowledge and exposure to new ideas – all of which help translate energy and enthusiasm into stronger outcomes. That is why the Ministry of Justice's new performance board is exploring, too, how our staff are recruited, the training and qualifications they can access, and how this can be improved by links to other expert professionals in the community. The Government will announce these plans in more detail later this year.

These issues in youth custody are deep-seated, but they are not intractable. Over the longer term, the other measures announced in this statement today – investment in

community resources, and alternatives to custodial remand – should enable us reduce the custodial population yet further. We should not be shy of thinking about how we reconfigure, or even shrink, our youth custody estate as and when these numbers continue to fall – enabling safer and more innovative use of better quality space, and ensuring value for money for taxpayers.

Later this year we will set out how the Government intends to begin wider reforms to youth custody to deliver better outcomes for children, communities and taxpayers. In anticipation of that, we will explore whether the Youth Custody Service headquarters operations is as effective and efficient as it can be in setting and delivering these aims for the wider youth custody estate.

Though these longer-term changes may be some way off, we will not wait to pursue improvements – in time out of room, education quality and, crucially, safety – that we, and the children in our care, need now.

Conclusion

The Government believes these reforms will lay a strong foundation for the frontline youth justice system in the years to come.

Local youth justice services are – and will remain – a critical part of the youth justice system, but there are other essential elements that go beyond their gift. That is why, in spring, the Government will set out a clear, bold and practical vision for a modern youth justice system. The first for many years.

This will set out the Government's ambitions for improving operations and outcomes in the system as a whole; from driving effective and consistent use out of court resolutions, to re-examining the youth sentencing framework, and breaking down barriers to a child's rehabilitation.

In the meantime, today's announcements and package of reforms will provide our frontline services with more certainty, more freedom and more support to innovate, broaden their reach and tailor their services to the emerging challenges facing the sector.

This, in turn, will provide the children under our collective care and supervision with more opportunities to turn their back on crime and lead happier, healthier lives – ultimately protecting the public.

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