



Young People's Views on Safeguarding in the Secure Estate

A User Voice Report for the Youth Justice Board and the Office of the Children's Commissioner



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Acknowledgements from User Voice

First and foremost, we would like to express gratitude to all the young people who contributed their ideas and gave their time to participate in completing questionnaires and/or discussion groups on such sensitive subjects. We have made a commitment to protect their anonymity.

We would like to thank the facilitators who led the data collection and facilitation, and Mark Bertram for analysing the insights of the young people. Finally, we are grateful to all the staff who supported and contributed to this project.

About User Voice

User Voice exists to reduce offending. Our work is led and delivered by ex-offenders who foster dialogue between users of and providers of criminal justice and related services. We enable previously unheard voices to make a difference, and enable policymakers and practitioners to listen directly to service users. While User Voice aims to be a powerful advocate on behalf of offenders and others on the margins of society, it does this through robust but constructive engagement with those who have the power to design services and make decisions. These methods of engagement include:

- *User Voice councils*: that can be developed for use within prisons or in the community for probation, youth offending teams and related services
- *Bespoke consultancy*: User Voice works with clients to design projects aimed at accessing, hearing and acting upon the insights of those who are hardest to reach, including prisoners, ex-offenders and those at risk of crime. These projects include staff and user consultations, workshops and research
- *Advocacy*: through speeches and opinion we present the models, practices and business case behind User Voice in order to inspire and influence key audiences.

User Voice works with a range of age groups, but much of its activity to date has been with those under the age of 25. This is not surprising given the demographics of the prison population and those who commit crime.

Ex-offenders who have had considerable experience of the youth justice system carry out our research: our facilitators have turned their lives around and are all fully trained to run consultation groups. Their pasts give them a special understanding and rapport with children and young people, which encourages participants to talk openly, often for the first time, about their feelings and experiences.

Commitments from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

Young people have an ability to speak extremely openly and honestly. They are unafraid to challenge the status quo and offer the insights that we require to commission services that best meet their needs. If we fail to seek the views of children and young people in custody, then we fail in our duty as commissioner of their secure estate.

For a number of years, we have commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons to survey young people in young offender institutions (YOIs) and to ask questions about their experiences. This information has proved extremely useful in helping us to assess the impact of the investment we have made in YOIs.

Following the publication of *A Review of Safeguarding in the Secure Estate* (YJB and National Children's Bureau, 2008),¹ we embarked on a number of reviews of operational practice across the secure estate, namely full searches, separation, complaints and helplines. To inform our work, we were keen to commission a consultation exercise with young people about these specific areas, to ensure that the recommendations we made and the practice changes we asked of our providers would better meet the needs of young people. We were extremely pleased to be able to work in partnership with the Office of the Children's Commissioner and User Voice to produce this thought-provoking report. The young people involved in the consultation showed a willingness to suggest improvements to the various practice areas and it is to the credit of User Voice that this was the case. The fact that it is an organisation led by and employing ex-offenders, some of whom have recent experience of the secure estate for children and young people, gave User Voice a unique credibility when undertaking the consultation exercise.

Young people in YOIs told us that they saw the complaints system as overly complex and one that was not focused on their needs. We respond to this finding with our first commitment, below.

YJB commitment 1

We have obtained agreement from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) that they will redesign complaints forms, information booklets and posters next year. We will ensure that young people in custody play an important part in this process.

It is of great concern that many young people, particularly those in YOIs, do not believe that complaints are dealt with fairly, and we need to address this urgently.

¹ YJB and National Children's Bureau (2008) *A Review of Safeguarding in the Secure Estate*. London: YJB and National Children's Bureau.

YJB commitment 2

We will be working with NOMS to deliver training and guidance to:

- improve the quality of staff responses to complaints
- improve young people's access to independent, outside agencies to which they can complain
- build on existing good practice to ensure that complaints are regularly scrutinised from a safeguarding perspective by an external agent, such as the local authority designated officer.

Young people told of their lack of confidence in the complaints system and suggested their own ways to make improvements, which we will be taking forward.

YJB commitment 3

To improve young people's confidence in the complaints system, we are working with providers to ensure that all responses to complaints are delivered face-to-face and that young people always have the chance to give feedback.

Young people generally recognised that full searches are necessary to maintain the security and safety of establishments; indeed, a safe establishment is a prerequisite to engaging young people effectively while in custody. However, this must be carefully balanced against considerations of decency and vulnerability.

YJB commitment 4

We have affirmed our commitment to the principle that full searches should only ever be undertaken on a risk-led, rather than a routine basis.

Practice in secure children's homes now reflects this approach and both our secure training centre (STC) providers and NOMS have also now agreed to this principle. We will take forward work to ensure that practice on the ground is consistently based on this risk-led approach, and we expect to see a significant reduction in the frequency of full searches.

YJB commitment 5

We are working with the STCs to ensure that gowns are always provided when full searches are deemed to be necessary – something that young people suggested by way of improving current practice.

Following a review of separation practices across the secure estate, and reflecting the strong feelings expressed by young people interviewed by User Voice, we have provided much needed clarity on the principle of its use. We have made it clear to providers that separation should only be used if it is the best way to meet the needs of young people and/or to manage specific risks.

YJB commitment 6

We will work to ensure that the use of separation as a punishment or merely for the purpose of control is phased out in YOIs.

Reflecting the concerns raised by young people in YOIs, the YJB is working with NOMS to develop and introduce more targeted interventions for young people who are placed on designated units. We are also working with NOMS to understand how short, proactive periods of separation can be used more effectively to de-escalate situations and avoid incidents that might ultimately result in restraint.

YJB commitment 7

The message that separation should only ever be used for the shortest possible period will continue to be reinforced with our providers.

The YJB will continue to work closely with NOMS and the Samaritans to look at how access to helpline services can be further improved. Although this area of practice generated the least interest among young people, we are committed to ensuring that these services are easily accessible and available to all young people.

YJB commitment 8

Reflecting young people's concerns regarding confidentiality and privacy when accessing helpline services, the YJB is committed to ensuring that young people can access these services from their own rooms.

I know that our providers of secure accommodation will welcome the publication of this report. We will continue to encourage and facilitate direct engagement with children and young people to ensure that they are involved in shaping the services delivered to them by the youth justice system. This will ensure that these services are of the highest possible quality, offering the greatest chance of preventing offending, reducing reoffending and protecting the public.



John Drew

Chief Executive, Youth Justice Board

Message from the Office of the Children's Commissioner

We were delighted to have the opportunity to jointly fund this participative research project with the Youth Justice Board (YJB). We are also extremely grateful to the 89 young people who took part and to the charity User Voice, who we commissioned to consult with them.

At the Office of the Children's Commissioner, it is our duty to promote the views of children and young people so that decisions are made in their best interests, particularly those who are most vulnerable and least likely to have their voices heard.

Throughout this unique consultation, we were able to gather the powerful insights and experiences of some young people's lives in the secure estate. As a direct result of their open and honest accounts, we are extremely pleased that the YJB has listened to and acted on the young people's concerns by making the eight firm commitments you will find in this report that will improve the safeguarding practice of their service providers.

Policies and practices aimed at children and young people should be developed with a view to the fact that they are first and foremost children, and with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in mind. The UK Government signed this important treaty 20 years ago. In doing so, the Government signed up to the Convention's promises to children and young people. This includes giving them a right to have a say in all matters concerning their lives, and enabling them to be treated humanely, fairly and with dignity, no matter what their background or circumstances.

We heard the revelations of the young people in this report about their experiences of full searches, separation, complaints procedures and helplines in the secure estate. This made us deeply concerned about the way some practices had been developed and were undertaken, and their negative emotional impacts on the young people.

Most of these young people clearly understood why certain practices were necessary to maintain their safety and that of others. However, despite their recognition of these factors and their willingness to co-operate, the majority whose words you will go on to read report feeling anxious and angry during full searches.

The use of separation could also stir up strong emotions. Some girls, for example, expressed helplessness and, at worst, suicidal thoughts. The young people's comments demonstrate a serious lack of consideration, by those running their settings, to the past traumas and abuses in their lives. What we know about how troubled the lives of young offenders often are before they are convicted and placed in custody, should lead to the operation of systems that take account of such issues in all circumstances.

The complaints procedures were generally regarded as 'pointless', although the young people interviewed in the secure children's home have more faith in the

system. And despite efforts to increase the use of helplines, the take-up remains low, and they tend to not be trusted.

We know from our work with them that meaningful consultation with children and young people across the youth justice system can result in changes to attitudes and behaviours. If we are serious about reducing rates of offending and reoffending in this country, effective intervention methods must be used to support them to be constructive members of society.

We now urge the YJB to incorporate the UNCRC into all its practices and to set a timeline to roll out the commitments outlined above, and featured as YJB responses in the report. The forthcoming changes resulting from this joint consultation should lead to improvements in the safeguarding of children in the secure estate, to bring them more into line with the requirements of the Convention.



Dr Maggie Atkinson

Children's Commissioner for England



Sue Berelowitz

Deputy Children's Commissioner for England

Executive summary

User Voice was commissioned by the YJB and the Office of the Children's Commissioner to explore the views, experiences and suggestions of young people within the secure estate on safeguarding issues. The YJB wanted to take the findings of the consultation into account when examining practice and determining future direction.

User Voice was chosen to conduct this consultation because we have unique and effective methods of engaging with young offenders. We are run for and by ex-offenders and this consultation was carried out by those who have themselves had considerable experience of the youth justice system. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data across six locations that included young offender institutions (YOIs), youth offending teams (YOTs), a secure training centre (STC) and a secure children's home. User Voice was asked to focus on four specific areas.

1. **Complaints:** Do young people find that there is an accessible and effective system in place to deal with their complaints?
2. **Full searches:** How have young people found full searches to be implemented across the secure estate and how have these searches made them feel?
3. **Helplines:** Do young people find helplines accessible, confidential and effective, and do they use these helplines?
4. **Separation:** How and when is separation used across the secure estate and how do young people understand and respond to it?

In total 89 young people chose to participate. They completed survey questionnaires and engaged in workshops. Facilitators kept diary journals that were used to report further insights into the process and validate the data. In all areas we asked young people to suggest improvements to the existing system and broader changes to their establishment.

Summary of findings

As we shall see, common themes arose in relation to all these four areas. However, distinct and different issues were also raised across the four different areas and in relation to specific establishments. There was a significant difference in some areas according to gender.

Complaints

The vast majority of participants knew how to use the complaints system but they rarely did so. They had little or no faith that it would be effective for them. The system was felt to be selective, with complaints that were inconvenient to staff often being ignored. Procedures were considered slow and impersonal. Some feared reprisals if they complained.

In general, participants did not feel that the secure estate attached importance to their complaints. The exceptions to this were the STC, where some participants expressed satisfaction, and the secure children's home, where there was general satisfaction. In the secure children's home all establishment complaints are dealt with rapidly (within five days) by senior staff in a personal, face-to-face manner.

Full searches

Full searches were largely viewed as a necessary part of the regime to ensure safety. Discussions raised strong and different emotions, with a distinct gender divide. Girls were generally likely to feel intimidated, frequently reporting feelings of anxiety, powerlessness and embarrassment. Not surprisingly, those who had been abused or raped prior to entering custody expressed particular distress. (It should be noted that, as of 2007, full searches no longer take place in female YOIs on a routine basis, so some of the responses will be based on experiences prior to that date.) While some boys had become unconcerned by full searches, a shared sense of anger and of breached dignity surfaced, particularly in the YOT focus groups with young people who were now outside the secure estate. The presence of two or more adult males during the search was viewed by some as especially intimidating.

Many young people complained about the frequency of searches, and it was widely pointed out that drugs hidden internally are not detectable by this method. Repeated suggestions included introducing the use of screens for undressing and dressing gowns. A number of young people recommended electronic equipment like wands or scanners be used.

Helplines

Of all the areas covered by the consultation, helplines generated the least interest. At the same time, the few who had used them expressed a very high level of satisfaction. There was widespread understanding of their availability and how to use them, but in most of the establishments helplines were viewed negatively due to the perception that they are not effective, and were mistrusted.

Fears were expressed about confidentiality and/or the "facelessness" of the person at the other end of the line. The exceptions were the helplines at the STC, where all the young people reported a high degree of satisfaction, particularly with Barnardo's: participants liked the one-to-one emotional support offered and suggested this approach be applied elsewhere. In general, girls were more likely to use the helplines than boys.

Separation

The issue of separation generated strong responses from young people, although most understood why it was necessary. Again, there was a clear gender variation. Boys reported experiencing anger, while girls expressed feelings of helplessness and, at worst, thoughts of suicide. The experience was strongly disliked by most. Some saw the procedure as punishment rather than a management technique.

It was clear that separation takes many different forms across the secure estate, but where there was a separation facility or "block", it was regarded as physically and psychologically unpleasant. Participants expressed fear at the

breakdown in human relations in a separation facility, perceiving themselves to be in the hands of unfeeling staff and cut off from normally supportive relationships.

Data overview

In this report we summarise the responses of participants by establishment and gender. Below we aim to highlight the key messages arising from both the quantitative and qualitative data. In particular we are keen here to draw attention to the recommendations and ideas that were raised by the young people themselves. Some of these were broad suggestions, such as creating procedures which involve face-to-face discussion where possible, during which staff listen and discuss issues.

However, there were also specific suggestions, ranging from simple matters such as installing a complaints box and providing opportunities for young people to give feedback, to more profound changes such as wanting a more “human” response, being able to speak to senior staff more regularly and improving levels of trust and confidentiality.

Table 1: Complaints overview

| Establishment | Satisfied/dissatisfied | Improvements |
|---|--|--|
| STC (female) | Mixed responses | Box for complaints Improve confidentiality Human response/listen/discuss |
| STC (male) | Mixed responses | Human response/discuss Write back Speak to more senior staff Speed up process |
| YOI (male) | Dissatisfied | Governor involvement Speed up process Verbal explanations/clarity |
| YOI (female) | Mixed responses | Implement effective system Speed up process |
| YOTs (male/female) | Dissatisfied | No suggestions |
| Secure children’s home (male/female) | Majority satisfied, one participant dissatisfied | No improvements necessary |

Table 2: Full searches overview

| Establishment | Satisfied/dissatisfied | Improvements |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| STC (female) | Accepted for safety reasons Majority negative emotional experience | Dressing gown/part-dressed One member of staff |
| STC (male) | Majority not concerned | Dressing gown Use wand Use curtain Female staff |
| YOI (male) | Negative emotional responses Some not concerned (safety) Concerned by frequency | Body scanner/metal detector Less frequent Different gender staff Offer explanation |
| YOI (female) | Majority negative emotional responses Re-traumatisation Seen as pointless | Scanning equipment |
| YOTs (male/female) | Negative emotional responses Majority did not like Accepted as part of regime | Less revealing One member of staff |
| Secure children's home (male/female) | Managed well Some felt anxious Frequency highlighted | Detectors Partial clothing |

Table 3: Helplines overview

| Establishment | Satisfied/dissatisfied | Improvements |
|----------------------|---|---|
| STC (female) | Satisfied | No suggestions |
| STC (male) | Satisfied | No suggestions |
| YOI (male) | Majority do not use One person found them useful Majority heard of them | More confidential Greater range Face-to-face help |
| YOI (female) | None reported using them | Face-to-face help |

| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| | All knew of them | |
| YOTs (male/female) | Majority heard of them Majority don't use them Not trusted | No suggestions |
| Secure children's home (male/female) | All knew of them Majority don't use them | No suggestions |

Table 4: Separation overview

| Establishment | Satisfied/dissatisfied | Improvements |
|--|---|---|
| STC (female) | Dissatisfied Negative emotional impact | No suggestions |
| STC (male) | Mixed responses Anger Understand why it is necessary Not concerned | Less force |
| YOI (male) | Dissatisfied | Less force Talk through |
| YOI (female) | Dissatisfied | Another person present Separated to cell |
| YOTs (male/female) | Dissatisfied | Better communication |
| Secure children's home (male/female) | Dissatisfied | Avoid corridor Calm down in same spot |

Many participants felt that this was the first time their voice had been heard. The consultation underlined the importance of communication, and not just paper-based systems but human communication, involving talking and listening.

User Voice believes that in all four areas of the study, the earlier existence of a mechanism or platform for young people to express freely their views, concerns and experiences could have prevented problems from arising and escalating. Our overriding recommendation is that a vehicle should be set up to give young people a chance to express their views and feelings, and the secure estate a chance to hear them. Such an approach should be designed to enable specific consultation as well as ongoing feedback. We believe this would improve the

effectiveness of the secure estate, foster co-operation and help young people to take more personal responsibility.

Methods

Consultation design

The consultation explored young people's experiences of complaints, full searches, helplines and separation within the secure estate. We collected four types of data: responses to survey questionnaires, data from semi-structured focus groups, audio recordings and diary reflections from facilitators. We aimed to provide coverage of different elements of the secure estate, taking into consideration the type of establishment, demographics and geography. In total, three YOIs (one of which was for females), one STC, one secure children's home and three YOTs participated in the consultation.

Three key questions underpinned our design strategy.

1. To what extent and how had young people experienced these aspects of custody?
2. What was the impact of this and what was the experience like for them?
3. How did they think improvement could realistically be made in the future?

User-led consultations in custody settings are very rare and there is no single model of user involvement to replicate, so we were treading new ground: we had to be flexible and we drew on our experience of previous consultations. The study was designed to provide valuable insight to inform future service planning and sharpen the focus for further study.

User Voice specialises in qualitative consultation, which we believe is critical to uncovering and reflecting a full range of responses. Here we aimed to harvest rich descriptions of young people's first-hand experiences in the four focus areas by helping them to overcome their fears about sharing by providing clear reasons for engaging and ensuring their safety during the consultation.

Trust-building, making connections through sharing appropriately and creating rapport are central to our model. Participants are prepared to cross the huge barriers which can exist in consultation because they can see that the process is being carried out by people who have similar experiences and who have a deep, personal understanding of their lives.

The team

Four User Voice team members were selected because of their first-hand experience of the care system and the secure estate for children and young people, and their professional consultation skills. Our team composition was unique. We were personally equipped to connect emotionally with young people in custody whatever their gender, age and ethnic background, and to deliver a robust and reliable consultation process. As well as all being ex-offenders, and so experts through experience, our integrated professional skills and experience included:

- youth facilitation
- project management
- academic research
- extensive community work and development work with young and vulnerable groups
- professional health and social care experience, and service management.

Ethics and principles

The sensitive nature of this consultation demanded that a sound set of ethical principles be followed. These were developed and discussed at the planning phase and underpinned our work throughout, together with our pre-existing safeguarding policies. The principles were specifically designed to optimise the consultation process and safeguard the participants, as follows.

- *Participant choice*: our facilitators only engage with young people who have chosen to participate. Participants are individually supported to help them to decide what they disclose and how. They are able to disengage from the consultation at any time, without giving reasons.
- *Respect for the individual*: young people have a right to be heard and respected, and everything they say is considered a valid and valuable form of evidence.
- *Equality and diversity*: we work with both young men and young women and endeavour to ensure that those from diverse or marginalised communities are represented and heard.
- *Commitment to change*: we undertake consultation so that the views and experiences of participants can inform reviews of current practice as well as future service planning, implementation and evaluation.
- *Transparency and accountability*: we believe that being open, clear and accountable to all stakeholders (staff, young people and commissioners) creates the ground for trust-building and solution-focused approaches.
- *Confidentiality*: participants will not be personally identified in the report and they undertake participation on this understanding.
- *A user-led approach*: the strength of our approach is that appropriate disclosure by our facilitators creates a genuine connection with the young people. This emotional resonance can build trust and a rapport which increases the likelihood of participants disclosing and sharing. However, we recognise that sharing their experiences of some areas of the custodial regime may be distressing. A key priority is to ensure that participants feel safe and supported throughout this process.

Process

Contact was made with the lead member of staff at each site before the beginning of the consultation period. Two establishments felt unable to proceed without National Research Committee approval and were replaced.

Each establishment was sent an information pack. This explained the purpose of the consultation and what we planned to cover. Attention was drawn to the fact that participation was not compulsory. The pack explained how the information gathered would be used. Throughout, information sheets and consent forms were used (see Appendices 2 and 3).

The participants were found both by staff selection and self-selection. Staff were asked to consider age, gender, ethnicity and sentence type, as well as different demographic and offence characteristics, and to select young people from across the spectrum. This was intended to ensure that we captured views from a diverse range of young people, as well as to ensure that those selected were not simply the most compliant. The element of self-selection ensured that external pressures to take part in the consultation were minimised.

The process that we followed for facilitating the survey questionnaires and workshops is set out in detail in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire

Great care was taken in developing the survey questions to make these accessible while optimising the depth and breadth of potential responses.

We addressed a range of factors that could influence the levels of participation and the nature of the responses given, including:

- the young people's ability to read/write and understand English
- the detail and length of the questionnaire
- group pressures: ensuring that responses were participants' own perceptions and were not influenced by the group
- young people's potential anxieties about their responses being identified.

Questions were open and clear, and facilitators clarified the purpose of the consultation to participants.

Facilitators shared their own experiences of living within the secure estate and answered questions about the role and aim of User Voice. Young people were then invited to fill in the questionnaire. Facilitators were aware of the importance of providing practical or emotional support and approaching the needs of the young people with flexibility. We were also aware of the potential for the responses given to be biased because facilitators were present; facilitators were clear that their role was to support and maximise individual expression and ensure that participants were not led or biased by anyone.

Workshops

In two establishments we were unable to undertake workshops (which took the form of a group interview), either because there were staff shortages (at an STC), or because the establishment contained several wings and it was not possible to assemble a single group (YOI 2). However, in most establishments, following completion of the questionnaire, the young people were asked if they would be interested in engaging further. Facilitators explained that this would involve more in-depth work through group sharing exercises, which would be recorded by the group. In three locations (YO1 2, YOI 3 and the combined YOT site) the workshops were undertaken without staff present, although they were nearby and on hand if necessary.

The first section of these workshops was designed to gather thoughts and experiences under the main consultation themes. The second section aimed to build on this and to focus on participants' recommendations for improvement. Although each section was structured, there were opportunities to improvise and be creative. Participants were encouraged to express their views during discussions and it was important to ensure that they felt involved, validated and valued.

Quotes and diary reflections

The qualitative data, consisting of verbatim quotes from young people across the secure estate (in the form of questionnaire responses, workshop findings and audio-recorded responses), enabled us to achieve a high degree of faithfulness in representing their experiences. Interpretations are deliberately kept minimal in this report.

Facilitators wrote diary journals following the events at each location. This way we were able to capture important observations about the levels of participation, group dynamics and any other issues that were relevant and which might make a useful contribution to evidence gathering. The key facilitator was present at all locations and was therefore able to offer a thoughtful overview of the process.

Limitations

The size of the sample of young people we talked to (89) was not high enough to be statistically significant and therefore will not necessarily be representative of young people across the secure estate. The focus was on qualitative work rather than getting a large sample size suitable for quantitative analysis.

As a result of the difficulties we faced in securing participation from establishments, two of the replacement establishments contained participants aged 18 to 20. It was not always possible to identify accurately which establishments these participants were referring to in their responses or exactly how long ago their experiences took place, but all had experience of the secure estate for children and young people.

Quantitative data

The following responses were given by participants in the study and are not considered to be representative of all young people within secure establishments.

Figure 1: Overall responses to questionnaire

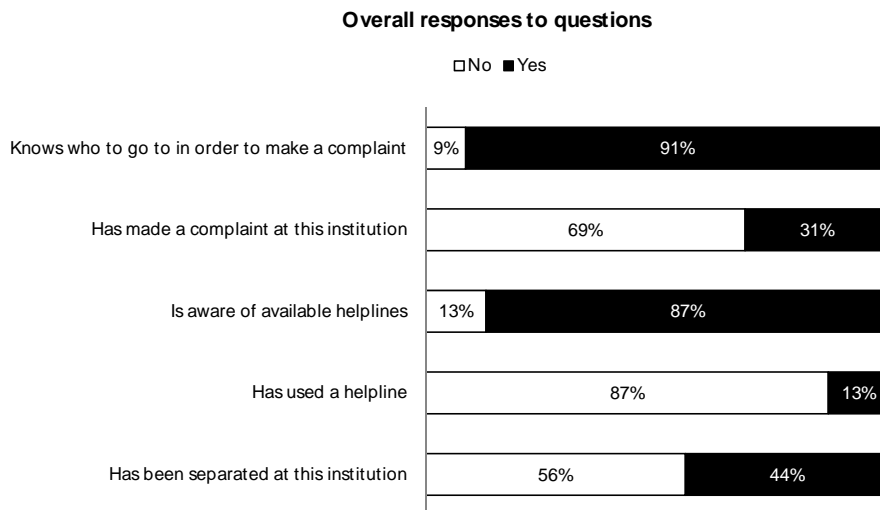


Figure 2: Complaints

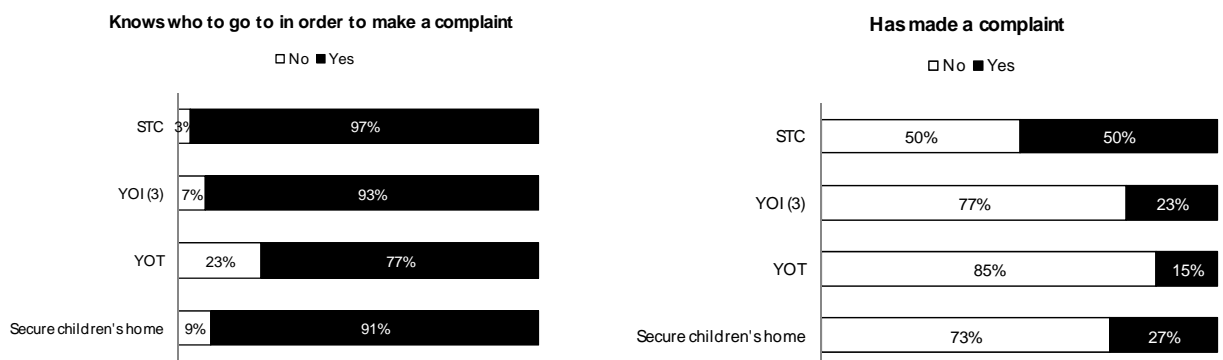
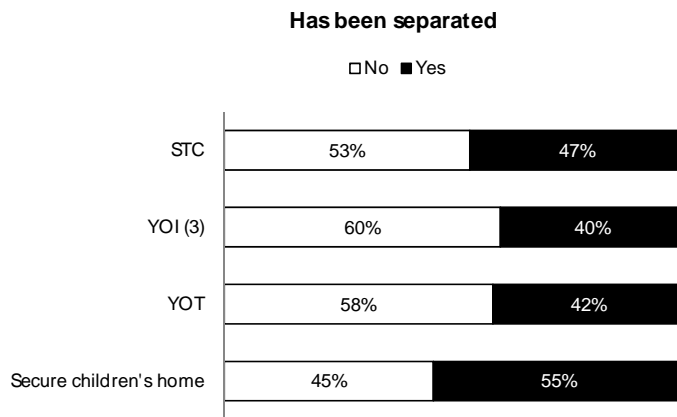


Figure 3: Helplines



Figure 4: Separation



Findings from secure training centres

Secure training centre 1 (females)

Eight of the ten females aged 14–17 residing in the STC completed questionnaires. Four participated in a workshop.

Complaints

The questionnaire asked participants whether they had made a complaint, what their experiences were when they used the complaints system, and whether they were satisfied with the outcome. The group were asked for their ideas on how the complaints system could be improved.

All the participants said that they knew how to make a complaint, but they were divided between those who were satisfied with the outcome and those who were not.

Young people's views

My experience was okay.

It was because I was getting bullied and the staff did help me and solved it for me. I am happy how it is.

I have used the complaints system quite a lot and it has never satisfied me because the people at the centre never look at the forms, they usually end up getting shredded up.

You can't tell the staff, lack of confidentiality, they tell other inmates and I ended up getting threatened.

Staff don't take it serious, they think it's a joke and when people put complaint forms in they just shred them and put them in the bin.

The system could be improved for me by the complaint forms actually being read and to discuss what they could do to solve the problem.

It could be improved by having a box to put the complaints in.

Listen to the kids and be more supportive to the kids at the centre.

Full searches

The participants were asked how often they receive a full search and where this happens. They were also asked to explore their feelings about being given a full search, especially remembering the first time. All the females confirmed that they had been fully searched, without describing the frequency or location. Some felt it was a necessary safety procedure. A few expressed indifference but most reported that the experience had a negative emotional impact on them.

Young people's views

It was not that nice but it has to be done for safety reasons.

I'm happy with it because I have no choice and it is going to be done anyway.

When I first got searched I was worried but I now know the staff doing the search are not actually looking at me they're just checking if I have anything I'm not supposed to have.

It doesn't bother me because I've got nothing to hide.

When I had my first full search I was 14, it was horrible as I have been sexually abused and I didn't feel comfortable showing my body as this brought back memories. They told me if I didn't take my clothes off they would do it when they got permission.

It makes me feel upset, embarrassed and really violating because I have been raped and it's awful being strip searched.

Abused, intimidated, unsafe and lose dignity.

I think they should do the searches like they do at secure children's homes, by letting you get changed on your own, hand your clothes out and change into dressing gowns and get searched covered.

I think there should only be one member of care staff that have to search you because I think two people is disgusting and pervy.

I think it would be better if they didn't have to do it at all.

Helplines

Participants were asked whether they had used a helpline and, if so, whether it had met their expectations. All the girls were aware of the availability of helplines and four described using Barnardo's, Star or the Samaritans to help them to address a range of problems.

Young people's views

I used Barnardo's and they were very helpful and actually listened to me and took everything into consideration.

I now ring a few helplines to talk about my problems because before I was sent down I was raped.

The helplines are very helpful especially in my case because I like to talk about my problems and I suffer with flashbacks and Star are sorting out counselling sessions for me.

I spoke to Barnardo's about getting bullied and they raised it for me and helped me.

I'm happy with how it is because you can phone them and talk private with them.

Separation

Participants were asked whether they had been separated, how they felt when this happened and how they thought the process could be improved. In the workshops the area was explored further by asking whether they thought separation was necessary and why this might or might not be so. They were also asked what could have been done differently.

Participants had mixed views about whether separation was used as an appropriate management response or as a punishment. Some of the girls emphasised the emotional effects, with a recurrent theme being that separation generated feelings of alienation and desire for contact with family.

Young people's views

Segregation is only used when necessary.

Punished for too long.

Double punishment.

Want your family.

Lonely.

Suicidal.

General improvements

Participants were asked to explore their ideas about how the unit could generally be improved. Their responses focused on increasing activity levels, changes to visiting arrangements, washing facilities, the canteen and increasing phone time.

Young people's views

The centre could be improved by the trainees being able to have more stuff to do because there isn't much for the girls to do.

I think you should be allowed more visits than two hours once time a week.

I think we should be able to hug our families when they come and visit us because it is bad enough being away from them for a year and a half. It's awful.

Have more time outside and be able to hug your parents, it hurts so much not being able to hug my mum, fiancé or little brother.

The showers should be set so they don't go off.

We should be allowed more phone time and more activities.

We should be allowed more things from tuck and to shave twice a week instead of once.

Secure training centre 2 (males)

There were 22 participants aged 14–17 out of the 30 young males in the STC. Unfortunately, no workshop was possible.

Complaints

All the participants knew how to make a complaint apart from one. Twelve had direct experience of making complaints. There was a wide gap between those who were satisfied and those who were not. Two participants stated that they would never complain because they felt the complaints system was for “grasses” [informers]. The range of suggested improvements focused on speeding up the process and receiving clear feedback on what was actually being done.

Young people's views

I used a complaint form and it was sorted.

I think it's already okay.

My CD went missing and I complained and they got back to me and bought me a new one.

The outcome was good.

Not satisfied because nowt happens.

I wasn't pleased because nothing was resolved.

Sometimes you get something out of it, sometimes it gets ignored.

*A lot of s***.*

It would be better if we could speak to someone that can deal with it straight away.

It would be better if they didn't ignore them and at least tell you why they can't sort it out.

Get them to write back to you.

Improve by speaking to someone higher up.

Full searches

All participants had been searched and a large proportion (14 young people) stated that they were not concerned by the procedure, as they understood it to be necessary. A minority of the participants didn't like it. The key suggestion for improvement was for the use of a dressing gown to be standard practice. None of the participants mentioned the frequency or location of searches.

Young people's views

I'm not bothered; it's their job.

Not bothered, the first time I had drugs on me.

First time was okay, did not give a toss.

Alright, the first time I just thought, what are you doing? But you just have to do it.

I didn't like it. Wasn't that bothered, but it's pointless.

Bad, but I don't know why.

Embarrassed because they're seeing me naked, uncomfortable.

I didn't like it, made me feel like an idiot.

It feels gay.

They could give you a pat down and use the wand, they put you in a dressing gown and you have a screen covering you anyway.

They could use a curtain and let you strip behind that.

Could give you a dressing gown.

It would be better if they let you keep your boxers and T-shirt on.

Getting a female would be better.

Better if it wasn't every time you get a visit because you don't get searched every time in a YOI when you get a visit.

An improvement would be not doing it or just patting you down.

Helplines

Very few of the participants reported using a helpline and four were unaware of their existence. There was very little interest generated in this area. The minority who had used them expressed satisfaction.

Young people's views

I used Barnardo's, they acted quickly and sorted out the problem.

I was happy with it.

I had used one, Barnardo's, apart from another one as a prank to a sexual health one.

They should get an office with workers from a charity.

They could make it more private.

Separation

Most of the boys focused on the issue of restraint, which is outside the remit of this report, rather than the use of separation itself. Two thought that the separation procedure was appropriate and they weren't concerned by it.

Young people's views

Not bothered it [separation] was not for long.

It didn't bother me.

General improvements

The participants were asked for their ideas on what would improve the centre generally. Most of the responses focused on smoking, more activities, food and more effective help for those who need it.

Young people's views

If sixteen or over you should be allowed to smoke.

More activities on the weekend.

More food instead of sarnies everyday.

Just probably more help for people who have problems and need help.

For everyone to do their job properly because you have to ask about twelve times before something happens.

Needs cleaning [centre].

Facilitators' diary reflections

The male facilitator and female assistant kept diary journals and made notes of their experiences of the consultations. Their observations and reflections are intended to shed more light on the context of the responses and process. They provide more insight into what happened, why and what other issues they encountered during the consultations. Below are extracts.

Upon arrival the officer in charge told us that he'd take us from wing to wing. This wasn't really appropriate given the timescale. I had hoped to get everyone together for the questionnaires and then see if there was interest in the more in-depth groups in the afternoon. This wouldn't be possible as it would be too chaotic, there's rivalry between the different wings and they are kept apart as much as possible to avoid fights.

Segregation consists of a young person sitting on the education block with a member of staff until they've calmed down, or until everyone else has been locked up for the night. This was confirmed by both young people and staff.

Again very few of the participants had experienced separation, indicating it was rarely used. The procedure here was that if inmates had a fight it was

split up and they were returned to their rooms until they calmed down or until the next day.

I was told there was a lot of bullying. I asked about the bullying and they told me they all did it to each other and the victims changed regularly and it could be for a range of things: looks, clothes, who was in the clique at that time.

It seems that way with the females; they seem to have more of an idea of how they really feel about things. While there were image issues up there, they were still willing to discuss sensitive stuff, and give a little thought to solutions.

The lads are indifferent or they can't see beyond feelings such as anger. When you probe for more depth they can't find an answer. I was unsure if this was mainly down to image, but the more I look and observe it, the more I'm convinced that they don't understand feelings and emotions.

The young people seemed to have a good relationship with the staff here, it is more like a children's home than a prison. There's a lot of banter and mock "squaring up", on the girls' unit a young person even jumped on a staff member's back and was piggy backed around the place.

Summary of secure training centre findings

In the STCs there was a wide gap between those who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied with the complaints system. This could indicate that the complaints system procedures are applied inconsistently, and indeed both males and females felt the system was "hit and miss": sometimes complaints were resolved and sometimes they were ignored and no response was received at all.

There was an even more striking divergence of opinion about full searches, which might indicate that there is variation in how procedures are carried out. There was a marked difference between the way males and females reacted to the full search. The majority (but not all) of the boys claimed to be indifferent to it, while many of the girls described the negative emotional impact of the searches, particularly for those who had experienced the trauma of rape or abuse.

The only area of agreement was the effectiveness of helplines. All those who had used them had found them helpful. Noticeably, more girls than boys used them. This could indicate a greater willingness among girls to discuss issues (a theory borne out by the facilitators' observations that many boys in the groups seemed to struggle to be emotionally articulate, while the girls were able to identify and describe their emotions), or a greater social acceptance among girls of discussion of emotional issues.

The same divide between the genders in terms of their emotional reactions was evident when participants discussed separation experiences: girls reported feelings of alienation and, in one case, thoughts of suicide. Boys claimed to be indifferent to separation.

Findings from young offender institutions

Three geographically separate locations were visited. Some participants conveyed that they also had experience of other establishments in the secure estate.

Young offender institution 1 (females)

In YOI 1, 14 females with an average age of 18–19 completed the questionnaire and took part in discussion groups. They all had experience of different STCs, secure children's homes or YOIs. Two had experience of all three types of environment.

Complaints

All the participants in the group indicated that they knew how to make a complaint. Two participants had done so. Satisfaction levels indicated on the questionnaire were divided.

Young people's views

I was satisfied with the outcome the staff gave me, it was really fair.

I think the complaints system is very fair really.

It can be improved by actually dealing with the complaint.

By not fobbing you off.

By getting back to you quicker.

Discussions in the group about the complaints system opened up a wider range of deep concerns and the following responses were recorded.

Young people's views

Trouble-making: *You get in more trouble for making a complaint.*

Timescale and effectiveness: *It takes forever for them to come back and when they do nothing much is done about it.*

Fear: *Not approachable as you're too frightened of losing any privileges.*

Attitudes: *Staff get a bad attitude towards us afterwards.*

Staff motivation: *They don't do anything because they are too lazy.*

Variance: *Staff treat some people different, preferential treatment.*

Nature of complaint: *Sometimes they are dealt with properly it all depends*

what it is.

Futility: Some people have never even made a complaint because they can't see the point.

Full searches

Seven of the females responding to the questionnaires had experienced full searches and they all believed this was for appropriate reasons. However, some described a negative emotional impact. It should be noted that, as of 2007, full searches no longer take place in female YOIs on a routine basis, so some of these comments will be based on old practices.

Young people's views

Only do it when they think you've got drugs, which has happened to me.

Frustrating.

Scared.

Dirty.

Reminded of past abuse.

Shouldn't be allowed to do it.

Many participants stressed that searches happen only when necessary, and one participant stated that: "you get used to it". A couple of the participants were able to offer suggestions for improvement, such as the use of electronic or other screening equipment in replacement of full searches.

Many participants expressed the view that searches were pointless because things could be hidden internally. The frequency of searches was highlighted by some participants. Discussions also led to some disclosure of very personal feelings of dehumanisation, anger, powerlessness and fear. For those who had been raped or abused, the full search process was associated with these past experiences.

Young people's views

It's pointless 'cause if you've got drugs everybody keeps them up them anyway, so it's pointless, it's not like they can search you there. So I don't even know why they have strip searches.

Sometimes it's a bit boring as well, for instance if someone's getting searched constantly, time after time, it just gets boring and you're used to it.

They look at you like you're a dog, making you strip is bang out of order, it proper makes me angry, it really does.

Scared not to as you have no choice.

Vulnerable and intimidated as there can be three people watching.

Embarrassed because you are completely naked.

I think it's quite like rape me, getting forced to take all your clothes off.

It reminds me of the sexual abuse I have suffered, makes me feel like I am being abused again.

Helplines

This area was responded to very briefly in both the questionnaires and group discussions. Everyone had heard of helplines, but, for a range of reasons, no one reported using any. Several participants suggested that helplines are an inadequate replacement for counselling.

Young people's views

Takes forever to speak to someone.

Not as helpful as speaking face to face.

I don't use them because I don't like talking about my problems.

We need counsellors.

Having somebody more experienced to listen.

Separation

All the females in this group conveyed through questionnaire responses and discussion that they did not like separation because of its emotional impact. Different participants felt this impact in different ways, but with a recurrent theme of alienation, helplessness and the possibility of depression. No suggestions for improvement were made and no one mentioned the timescales involved.

Young people's views

Lonely and they wind you up which makes matters worse.

Leaves you feeling isolated, helpless and confused.

You feel isolated, depressed, because of the way they treat you, they treat you different.

You feel useless and emotional.

I've been down the seg and it's not nice.

If you're in a room with someone else at least you can talk to them.

Facilitators' reflections

Separation leaves people feeling isolated. They may have suicidal thoughts, stuck with feeling, on their own, lonely. Some people shut down.

Few of those who took part in the consultation had experienced separation, the ones who had said it made them feel isolated and lonely, it made them think, but in a negative way. It wasn't thoughts about what they had done to have ended up in segregation, but self-pity about their life as a whole, which would make them depressed. Attempted suicide was commonplace amongst this group though one did tell me that she didn't feel that she really wanted to kill herself.

The dynamics of the group worked really, they were as honest as could be expected, no holding out.

The girls often presented with complex problems that they weren't equipped to deal with, the staff said it would be nice if they could speak to them all individually, but it was not possible, and the resources had to go to those who needed it most.

They were really thankful that we seemed interested in their situation and voiced a view that it would be good if the prison service supplied people to come in and just listen to their frustrations about their predicament.

Summary of findings from YO1 1

Most of the females had little faith in the complaints system or helplines, and, as a consequence, rarely used them. All agreed that full searches happened when necessary, but that this procedure and separation could both have a powerful psychological impact on their well-being. They were also able to offer a few ideas for improvement. However, the strongest theme to emerge was that they valued the opportunity to talk about these issues and would appreciate the chance to explore these and other issues further.

Young offender institution 2 (males)

This was a large establishment. Small groups were consulted in several wings to maximise representation. Twenty young males participated in the survey questionnaire and discussions, but because of staffing issues workshops were not possible.

Complaints

All of the participants knew how to make a complaint and three had done so. No one reported being satisfied with the system.

Young people's views

When you need it, it doesn't happen.

Took time to come back, and still only got half dealt with, then I forget because it takes so long.

They need to listen, not say they'll come and talk about something and then not bother.

Nothing happened at the end of it.

Make the system quicker.

When you actually know things are being followed up.

*Need people to check everyday, people you can actually talk to, someone who gives a f***.*

Full searches

All the young males indicated that they had been fully searched. The majority said that they experienced feelings of violation and anger during the search procedure and that they did not like it. A few said that they were used to it and were not concerned, but others reported feelings of paranoia and embarrassment, particularly being in front of men. While the frequency of full searches was an issue for many, the majority stated that full searches happen only if there are suspicious circumstances. All the participants reported being searched going to and returning from court, and occasionally after visits in the reception. Some said that searches happen in their cells.

Young people's views

Highly violated, it feels unnecessary.

Felt like knocking them out, it was my first time.

I was angry I didn't want to strip in front of two men.

It was not that nice but it has to be done for safety reasons. It was not nice because I didn't know them. It was a new strange place and I had been in court all day.

*You know what I hate about strip searches, see last time I was in court and there was two standing there having a conversation while man was stripping down, they was just chatting about going on holiday and s***.*

I am used to it because I have been searched a lot of times.

Don't feel anything.

In my cell.

Paranoid, the way they were all crowding round.

When I go reception and sometimes visits.

Stressed, you go to court in a sweatbox, you're held in the cells at court and you come back in a sweatbox and you still get strip searched.

The only time you face a full search is if you are suspicious and it will happen in visit or reception.

They could use full body scanners so that you don't have to be naked.

An improvement would be if they just pat you down and use a metal detector.

Don't search me every time I come back from court.

Helplines

One person hadn't heard of them, three had used a service called Voice, and one reported using the Samaritans. Of those that had used helplines, one said it had been useful and the others thought they could be improved. Staff confirmed that helplines are rarely used.

Young people's views

Voice to help me write a letter to the judge.

They should talk more instead of just listening.

Being more confidential.

Separation

Participants in this group discussed reasons why they had been separated. One participant thought the condition of the separation facility was "nasty", while another thought it was "not too bad". Two participants mentioned the duration of separation as being an issue.

Young people's views

On the wing for fighting it made me mad and angry and I have been segregated because one of the screws said that I bit him.

Never ate for a couple of days, just to calm down because obviously I was mad and that.

Block is nasty, smelly bang up 23 hours a day and they treat you like an animal.

I didn't get restrained but I got put down the block.

When I went down the block it wasn't too bad.

For 72 hours and a nicken on top of the g.o.a.d [good order and discipline].

They have to come and see you after 72 hours to check men alright.

General improvements

Young people's views

Better food because the food isn't fully cooked.

More association, let us eat our meals in each others' cells. More food, the portions are tiny.

Well first of all we should be allowed to have a toaster, freeview, pool table and a wing Play Station 2 and also to have more activities.

A few more showers.

They could make it more easy.

They should let more people in to visit and let people out of their cell for longer.

Facilitators' diary reflections

It had been planned that I would consult with a large group and then see who would like to participate in the workshops. Because of staffing this wouldn't be possible. Some young people were on education and because there would be a shortage of staff that evening there wouldn't be any association, as a result the young people were getting it either in the morning or afternoon.

As with the others, separation was rarely experienced. One person had experienced it at a YOI. He said that he had hit an officer while being restrained and had been held in segregation for three days. He felt unable to eat for a couple of days, stating it was because he was too mad. He also said he had to be checked by a governor after 72 hours, to check he was alright, and he was removed from the prison soon after. Others had experienced being put back in their cells.

While there I saw other inmates on association chatting to people who were in their cells through their doors, and the officers didn't do anything to prevent this, which would indicate that if someone remained in their cell as a result of their own behaviour, separation was physical rather than completely cut off from their fellow inmates.

YOI 2 has serious gang issues, many of the young people are affiliated on the outside and also form their own gangs when in custody, the client group is predominantly BME inner city.

After telling them about myself they visibly relaxed and began opening up. They started filling out the questionnaires and discussing the issues. One was more reluctant, seeing it as helping the prison. I explained that it was giving him the chance to have his say, but he didn't see it like that.

There's no faith in the complaints process. Above all they don't think anything would change anyway, so, while they participated, they did see it as a pointless exercise.

Summary of findings from young offender institution 2

All the participants were dissatisfied with the complaints system. Either a response took too long, or there was no response at all. They suggested that complaints should be followed up more quickly and more rigorously.

Most of the group reported that full searches had a negative emotional impact on them and that the use of alternatives, such as scanning machines or detectors, would be an improvement. Only four of the 20 participants reported

using a helpline, and concerns about confidentiality were expressed. There was a suggestion that a service could be provided on site.

Although separation was rare and participants understood why they were sometimes separated, the condition of the separation facility was raised. Two participants mentioned the time duration involved.

Young offender institution 3 (males)

This was a small establishment and the consultation took place in an education block. The residents were males aged 18–21 and all of those participating in this group consultation (seven young people) had extensive experience of the secure estate for children and young people.

Complaints

All seven of the participants knew how to make a complaint and four had done so in a range of establishments. The results were varying, with two reporting that complaining had been a positive experience. One linked his satisfaction to the speed of the response his complaint had received. However, the system was viewed negatively by most, with a general sense that not enough is done to address complaints.

Young people's views

Not good, if something wrong happens yeah, they say put the complaint in but whatever has happened has already gone wrong, and then nothing happens.

I put in a complaint and didn't hear anything back for about three weeks, when I got it back there was not a reasonable answer to my complaint.

*Pointless having complaints in jail I think because nothing ever gets done, the way they look at it yeah is they're normal people and we're just criminals, they don't give a f*** do they really?*

Half the people don't complain because they know nothing will get done, it's like me if I had something to complain about I just won't bother about it. I just get my head down and get on with it, and I think that's the same with quite a lot of people as well.

*A lot of people have issues. People say put a complaint in, but they'll think it's pointless because they feel like they'll get singled out for no reason if they put a complaint in and they won't get a job or anything, s*** like that.*

Awful, they don't seem to care unless it's something simple.

I put in a complaint about not getting paid my extra money because I was enhanced and I hadn't got it for a few months, so I put in a complaint to see if anything could be done about it and where it said "what would you like to see done about it" I put, obviously that I'd like the money and within a couple of days the money was in my account.

At [named YOI] they'd sit down with you once a month, the governor and that, and things would actually get done.

They deal with it there, you get complaints back within a couple of days, other places it's weeks.

Maybe if the Governor was to come back to you with the complaint you put in and explain what is actually happening instead of just putting a piece of paper through the door.

Faster replies, something actually getting done about the complaints.

If someone explained what was the reason they gave the answer they did. To not be discriminated against for putting a complaint form in.

More explanation to be given as you can't understand.

Full searches

All participants had direct experience of searches. Three participants thought it was an appropriate procedure to ensure safety. Two didn't like it. One wasn't concerned. One mentioned that items can be concealed internally.

Young people's views

I think it's okay really; it's security it has to be done.

I don't really care coz it's for people's safety and prison rules. The first time was weird.

*It makes you feel violated. I don't know it's just f***ing wrong, having to strip down in front of a couple of blokes, it's just weird innit.*

I'm kind of used to it now, but yeah the first time I was quite embarrassed.

If you wanna hide something it goes up your arse.

They can't be improved, they need to do it. For first timers they should explain "look you're gonna be strip searched and this is why", for the first time it is a bit embarrassing, you know you go somewhere new and they just suddenly say, "pull your trousers down".

Instead of having a load of geezers standing there you should go behind somewhere and just throw your clothes over, yeah.

I think women staff should do it instead of men.

You don't have to stand naked in front of two members of staff.

Not trash your cell.

Helplines

This area generated little interest among this group, although all the young males reported that they knew of the existence of helplines. One participant reported using a helpline once and said that he wasn't satisfied. The suggestion for improvement was that a greater range of helplines should be available. Two people expressed negative views about using a helpline.

Young people's views

I'd be embarrassed if I used the helpline.

*They're only on the phone, they'll just chat a bit of s*** to you and that's it.*

Separation

One participant described his experience of separation. The discussions at this establishment tended to focus more on the use of restraint when being separated. This suggested a close relationship between the two practices. As a result, not many respondents described their experiences of separation itself.

Young people's views

I didn't really care coz I done wrong but staff still acted like wankers by ignoring me.

General improvements

Young people's views

Complaints procedure, more food, better regime.

When you enter prison you should be allowed to get full canteen as you might not get canteen for weeks being shipped from prison to prison.

They need to deal with prisoners' issues faster and more efficiently, giving them proper answers.

More time out of your cell and more help from staff if you need it.

Staff to listen to you when a question is asked rather than walking away without saying anything.

Staff to take notice of what's going on on the wing coz certain people need a mental health team to see them.

When you press the emergency button they take their time to get to your cell.

Facilitators' diary reflections

They all have extensive experience of the children's estate with some having stints in a couple of places... Also they have not been pressurised into coming which means they are cooperative.

They'd all had negative experiences in the children's estate on segregation and the complaints system. They viewed strip searches as "just part of prison life".

I believe only one person had experienced separation, this had been limited to being returned to his room until either the following day or until he had

calmed down. This individual was only angry at the time and once he had calmed down the incident was over.

Comments on entering the room were like, "We'll tell you about YOIs" in a more cocky manner, like it was going to be a moan festival. Three sat across the back in particular acted a little disinterested. After I told them about User Voice, the project and myself and [male assistant] told them about himself the dynamics changed.

I enquired about speaking with the Governor about trying to get another group for the afternoon, unfortunately the education block shuts on Friday afternoon and the inmates are on exercise or association as they are locked up Friday evening, my chances of a group in the afternoon were zero.

On reflection I think though that they may have been briefed more on what it was we were discussing because despite their initial composure they'd hit the ground running as soon as they started opening up, in a way completely different to other groups that I have consulted with. It would be of great benefit on future consultations if the young people could be briefed in more depth when we are carrying out such work.

Summary of findings from YOI 3

This group of young males had experience of a range of young offender establishments and nearly all were dissatisfied with the complaints systems they had encountered. They suggested that the system needs to be speeded up and that it would perhaps become effective with the personal involvement of more senior staff. They wanted clearer explanations about their complaint and why or how it was being dealt with.

The feedback on full searches indicated that, while some thought the procedure was required for security, some didn't like it: indifference to the procedure was low here. The gender issue of men searching younger males was raised, and there was a suggestion that females should undertake the procedure.

Only one person reported dissatisfaction on using a helpline. The subject generated minimal interest in the group. Separation also generated little discussion here.

Findings from the youth offending teams

Fifteen young people attended this workshop, two of them girls. All had experience of the secure estate for children and young people. They were attached to three different YOTs in one region of the UK. The facilitator had two assistants.

Complaints

All of the participants said they knew how to make a complaint, but none of this group had done so. Complaining was seen primarily as unproductive, and some thought it could create trouble.

Young people's views

No, they don't work, no point, they're a waste of time.

No point in using them because they don't go anywhere.

They're all done by screws, they open the box, look at them, complaint about me, complaint about me, complaint about me, all in the bin. Even if they get to the place they're supposed to go to, they get dealt with by the same people anyway, they're all mates. At the end of the day they see each other after work, they give each other lifts to work, they all drink together, why put a complaint in when we're just going to get victimised for putting a complaint in?

Full searches

Everyone in the group had been fully searched apart from one young person. The consensus was that they didn't like the experience: they discussed feelings of anger, powerlessness and insecurity. The issue of being exposed to adult male staff was raised. Only one participant said that he was not concerned. The group as a whole indicated that in the secure estate this procedure was seen as a normal part of the regime, although they did not give details of where they were searched, nor of the frequency.

Young people's views

I was only 14 the first time, I had no choice, and it felt weird, like I'd been invaded.

Felt horrible stripping in front of officers because officers were the same sex.

I felt insecure stripping in front of adult males.

Strip searches make me feel like being violent because they're embarrassing.

Humiliated, violated and disgusted.

It can be improved by not making it so revealing.

It would improve if there was only one staff doing it.

Helplines

Apart from one participant, the entire group was aware of helplines. Only one person reported using a helpline – the majority had negative views about helplines and thought that they could not be trusted and were ineffective. Helplines were seen as part of the custodial system and were not thought to be confidential enough. There was also suspicion because the person on the other end of the line was not known. There were no suggestions for improvement.

Young people's views

Not confidential.

Part of the jail.

No trust.

Never answer.

They can't help me.

Help lines, never use them.

Don't get used because you don't know who you're speaking to. You could be phoning another country for all you know.

You can talk to your family they can give you more help.

Separation

Several participants had experienced anger as a result of separation. This had made them feel violent. One participant thought that separation had a negative impact on his mental health. Three participants talked about alienation: feelings of fear and of being cut off. There were no suggestions for improvement.

Young people's views

When you're angry you want to smash up, it makes the situation worse.

It makes you hyper and makes you want to smash up.

It made me more angry. I was segregated for one and a half hours until I calmed down, I felt horrible.

Segregation's no good for your mental health.

Banged up, nothing you can do about it, makes you start thinking. You can't use the phone, can't talk to your family.

It makes you feel alone.

Alone and scared.

If, say, you're scrapping on the floor they'll just grab you, bend you up on the floor and make sure you're separated and then take you back to your cell.

General improvements

Young people's views

People should be helped to feel safe.

Better food, comfy mattresses.

More activities.

Get screws [staff] who treat you with respect.

Facilitators' diary reflections

As soon as the young people arrive they are wanting to know what time they're finishing. They don't really want to be there and it's obvious. The group is quite big, some fifteen people I think, and they're quite rowdy, talking over each other.

Again, respondents had rarely experienced separation.

The other individual who had experienced separation spoke only of feeling lonely and further from his family as he had been unable to have contact with them for the duration. He had said he'd have liked to have spoken to them while there, he usually turned to them when he felt depressed or had problems and not being allowed to do so had been the only thing that had affected him.

I don't know if it was an image thing, but the group, which is for the most part male, doesn't seem to have an awareness of how incidents made them feel... they can't really think about the first time. Some when I asked them looked at me as if wanting me to give them the answers as to how they felt at the time.

It may also have been about image. They are out now and sat amongst their peers so wouldn't want to say anything that would make them appear weak.

Summary of youth offending team findings

The evidence from this group of young people reveals that, regardless of where their experience in the secure estate had been derived from, they had no faith in complaints systems.

Helplines and their effectiveness were perceived similarly. Although only one participant actually had experience of using a helpline, the group agreed that helplines could not be trusted because they were seen as a fundamental part of the establishment.

The subject of full searches produced a universally negative response. In many people they had generated feelings of anger and humiliation. The most cited reason for this was the fact that they were undertaken by adult male officers. Only one participant said that he was not bothered by full searches. It was suggested that just one officer should carry out the procedure.

The group was also in agreement about the impact of separation. The participants said that it resulted in feelings of anger, fear, loneliness and isolation from family support.

Findings from the secure children's home

The average age of the 14 children in the home was 14. Eleven children filled in questionnaires.

Complaints

All the children knew how to make a complaint and three had done so. Complaints are dealt with directly by the manager, usually within five days. If the child is not satisfied, the complaint is taken to senior management outside the secure children's home. Most of the children were satisfied with this system, though one child was dissatisfied and another thought the procedure should be quicker.

Young people's views

They came and spoke to me and sorted it out, I felt satisfied.

I am happy with it the complaints will go to the staff on the unit.

No-one does anything about it, feel powerless.

Full searches

All of the participants had experienced a full search. Five participants said that they are searched regularly, once a month or weekly. A few children thought that the procedure was managed well and some thought it was necessary and weren't bothered by it. Several children described feeling anxious, angry or strange when they were being fully searched.

Young people's views

The full search here is better than what I've been through.

Every week or if lucky every month. I don't really care about it obviously needs doing and I can't do anything about it.

Nerve wracking, scared.

When I was in STC when I was 12 I got a full search for the first time. I was so shocked as I have never been told about this before.

I feel strange and anxious.

Every four weeks, when it first happened it was scary for me because I got adults touching me and around me, it made me feel weird.

It would be an improvement not be able to take your clothes.

Just do metal detector search.

It would be better if it was quicker, two rooms at a time.

Helplines

All the children knew of the helplines available and two children had experience of using one. There was very little interest in this area and there was no feedback on their effectiveness.

Separation

Two children described their experience of separation, which, at this secure children's home, consists of a mandatory period of 20 minutes. In general the procedure generated feelings of anger.

Young people's views

The staff should not put children on the corridor because it makes you feel like an animal.

On the corridor for spitting and fighting with staff I felt anger getting locked in my room.

I've never been segregated, I'm being good so I get early release.

They should let you calm down where you are.

They should not just take the people away quicker.

Safety and to be relaxed would be better.

General improvements

Young people's views

Nothing, everything is cool.

Everything is good and this place is all right. I've never had any issues with anybody here.

Obvious a few problems now and then but they're minor and sorted out straight away, and there is some stuff I think is dead. If security searches some of the concourses for some things but nothing can be done about it.

More easy going, less harsh.

Sort the rules out in this building and lift the smoking ban.

Allowed to smoke if you have parents consent because it's hard just to stop after me smoking, because I smoked for 6 years then I just stopped.

Not so much education and work, we have 32 ½ hours a week.

I think we should have more space to run around more.

If you are a graduate [rewards system for good behaviour] you should be able to have a Nintendo Wii in your room and a freeview in your room because 1 to 5 channels are not very good, and we should get the weights back and better goals in the gym.

Bigger sports facilities, a better fitness, a soft play area, a better music room, a relax centre.

More items on the shop run, late bed extension, more weight in the gym.

Facilitators' diary reflections

I tell them about the project and more about User Voice, I then tell them about myself, then [female assistant] does likewise. When we ask if there's any questions they shake their heads, but they're all interested in taking part after lunch. Someone, the manager I think, asks if it was what they were expecting and they all say no, when asked what they were expecting someone says: suits.

We chat about the project and User Voice. Again the group goes from disinterested to interested and all are willing to take part.

This workshop again went as the initial one had, with most people looking for further answers rather than the one words, this I encouraged by again walking around the room and encouraging them to think about why they felt the way they were saying they felt.

For separation, residents are taken into the corridor for twenty minutes until they calm down, they are in full view of their peers and if they calm down they return to the group. If staff feel the problem, for example a fight, needs longer to calm down, the inmates may have to go to their rooms until the problem is resolved. Because of the high staff ratio fights seemed rare, so separation is mainly when inmates are displaying anti-social behaviour which could harm themselves or others. This is dealt with by staff taking them to the corridor.

Segregation, here this lasts for 20 minutes, if the person has calmed down they are allowed back in the pod. After 3 hours an area child care manager has to be informed. I'm not sure if that's the title but it goes senior level outside the establishment very quickly.

Segregation consists usually of being in the corridor with a member of staff for about twenty minutes until they have calmed down, occasionally they will go to their room until they have calmed down. They are able to do this because of the low number of children and high staff ratio.

After about thirty minutes or so they have completed the questionnaires and we're just talking about the areas on the forms but it's all covered. Then one messes about with another, prodding him with a plastic spoon, it's like someone flicked a switch and the whole group just start messing about, not in a negative way, it was just the concentration was gone, the whole group in an instant, and at a level where you knew you wouldn't refocus them.

My impression of [secure children's home] was that the emphasis is much more on the care of the young people rather than merely warehousing them and carrying out the child care requirements. This would be down to the size of the unit, the level of staffing and the vulnerability of the client group. Many of the young people I have encountered while carrying out this study would have benefited from this type of intervention...

Summary of secure children's home findings

Most of the children agreed that the complaints system was effective. Complaints are directly managed by the most senior member of staff on site. When asked about their experience of full searches, there was a mixture of reactions from the children: some thought that they were necessary and were undertaken well, but others reported experiencing feelings of anger or anxiety. Helplines generated the least interest, and despite all of the children knowing of their availability, only two children had used them. The majority of the children didn't like separation and said that it generated feelings of anger. There was a range of ideas offered for improving the home generally, including improved facilities, more free time and better technology in rooms.

Facilitators' reflections: overview

Complaints

The vast majority of young people knew how to access the complaints procedure, though not all had done so. This was because the consensus seemed to be that it was pointless as nothing would be done. Young people in STCs seemed to be under the impression that the complaints were binned or shredded. The young people in the secure children's home, however, seemed to have more faith in the system with the participants either being fairly happy with responses when they used the complaints procedure or not having felt the need to complain.

In other establishments the reasons given for not using it were that it was pointless. Young people in YOIs receive a written reply to their complaints, faceless and often an unsatisfactory answer, leaving the complainant with a feeling that it was pointless. In STCs young people may well not even get a response, which would explain why they didn't believe the complaint was even seen by a governor. There were also concerns over the confidentiality of complaints.

There should also be an explanation as to why the complaint can't be dealt with when the inmates receive unsatisfactory responses, this way the person will know the reasons why, rather than just being told "no, it's the rules". The recommended route is how it is done in the secure children's home where the residents seemed to have confidence in the process. Although the YOIs hold more young people than STCs this could still be practical, even if it was a high ranking representative of the governor. This seemed to be something that some of the young people suggested, or at least something similar, i.e. governor should respond, give an explanation.

Full searches

The frequency and process of full searches varied at different establishments and were, to a degree, dependent on who carried out the search. They were all searched upon entering the establishment, some were also searched when leaving to go to court. This was the case in YOI. There would also be searches if it was believed an individual may have something on them, like drugs, tobacco or a weapon. Searches took place in either their cell/room or in the reception area.

Young people at the STC spoke about standing behind a screen and passing clothes, while those in a secure children's home strip behind a curtain, put on a dressing gown and then give their clothes to officers to check. They all have the "wand", a handheld metal detector passed over them. YOI residents spoke both about full strip searches or top half, bottom half searches, when the individual takes off their upper clothing first, then puts on a T-shirt and take off their bottom half. It may have been that some YOI residents saw this procedure as a "full strip search" or that it may have been dependent on which staff carried out the process. It would seem

standard practice in the children's area of YOI is the top half, bottom half method.

Females seemed more inclined to emotional feelings during the process, with some comparing it to past abuse, although females seemed to have a greater understanding of their feelings when discussing all issues with many males looking at me as if trying to guess what it was I wanted them to say. Females also described being body conscious, causing embarrassment, one larger girl especially relating it to herself. Some also indicated that strip searches were pointless because any contraband would be "up" them and wouldn't be detected using current methods anyway.

Males would describe feelings of embarrassment or violation, a word which came up repeatedly in YOIs, but during discussion it was apparent that they accepted that it was just part of prison. They were also unable to go into any detail about why or how they felt violated.

It seemed that when it first happened those who didn't expect it were surprised, whereas males with family or friends who had experienced custody and knew it was going to happen just got on with it. After the initial experience of the search they weren't fazed by it, something that fitted in with my own experiences. Also, males from inner city areas had often experienced full searches at the hands of the police, so were used to it before arrival in the secure estate.

Males also spoke about it being a problem with men doing the searches, which at first I mistook as laddish banter, but when probed further was actually about stripping in front of two grown men, which could be explained as feelings of inadequacy, although this wasn't specifically said. Males in particular also voiced that they couldn't see why the searches had to be carried out in front of two or more officers.

All understood why it had to be done, and while some made recommendations, they couldn't envisage any change because they understood the reasons for it. They did question the need for it every time they left and entered the establishment.

Quite a number of people discussed using the wand instead of strip searches, or x-ray equipment similar to that used at airports. Some females suggested a process like they used at secure children's homes, which involved putting on a dressing gown behind a curtain and going over them with the wand.

It should certainly be explained to young people upon entry and before the full search procedure begins that it is going to happen and why, this way it wouldn't be unexpected. When a young person is entering the secure estate they can often be bewildered with little understanding as to what is going on. There should also be an explanation as to why there needs to be more than one officer/staff member present.

Helplines

Very few people who took part in the consultation had experienced using a helpline and of those who had an opinion, or had used one, their reasons or experience varied. Some said it was pointless as there was nothing that the

person at the end of the helpline could do anyway, others thought it was just part of the establishment.

In YOI 1 the preferred and trusted helpline was Voice, though this was used for advice on letter writing to judges and advice on adjudications. Young people contacted Voice, and would be visited by a representative. STC had one to Barnardo's who also have people visiting frequently, at least once a week, to see if the young people have any problems.

Helplines in the sense of the Samaritans were rarely used, some seeing them as unable to help, others raising confidentiality issues.

The Head of Child Safeguarding at YOI 1 confirmed the lack of helpline usage by inmates who may be experiencing emotional problems such as bullying or suicidal thoughts. It was a concern with them especially in regard to bullying, which is the biggest trigger to suicidal thoughts. As a result of a low uptake of helplines, YOI 1 had introduced an on-site helpline in the hope that an immediate response may encourage a greater uptake in usage, however there had remained a low uptake in usage.

The other aspect would be something similar to Listeners in the children's estate, manned by people who have been there but are older and have turned their lives around. An office, employing an ex-offender, fully trained to deal with the issues that may arise, may be a big step forward, both in trust and an ability to relate.

Separation

They understand why they get placed in segregation or separation and how they are behaving determines whether they are taken to segregation or separated.

Separation [at the secure children's home] is also carried out by removing the person into a corridor until they have calmed down, if they need to be separated for longer then they have to inform senior childcare staff based outside of the secure children's home who give their permission. They are able to operate like this because of the high staff to inmate ratio.

It would seem that the use of separation in the children's secure estate, across all models, YOI, STC and secure children's home, is rarely used and when it is used, for the most part is until the individual has calmed down. Very rarely are they any distance from their peer group so it's seldom they are isolated completely. The only feelings were anger, isolation and loneliness.

It is also apparent that all those who had experienced separation recognised the need for it to be done. The practice is also that after incidents of both restraint and separation it is explained to the young person why it had to happen, although the young people already understood why.

One person said about having to be checked after 72 hours, this check was by a Governor, and his welfare would have been checked regularly by wing/unit staff to ensure the individual was okay.

Conclusions

In this section we focus on the young people's ideas for improvement.

In relation to complaints, young people asked for a personal face-to-face response and explanation from a senior member of staff, so that they could feel they were being taken seriously. Many saw an impersonal written response delivered "through the cell door" as unsatisfactory and felt that it invalidated their complaint. The need for effective communication between the young people who were complaining and the staff who were managing the process emerged frequently in the data.

The conclusion of many young people was that the complaints system could be regarded more highly if it was significantly speeded up, and both written and oral feedback were provided, particularly from senior staff, such as members of the governor grades.

Full searches were seen by many young people as a necessary part of the regime to ensure safety, but they raised strong and different emotions, and there was a distinct gender dimension to the responses. Consideration should be given to how establishments' full search procedures can take into account the traumatic experiences young people may have suffered prior to custody. Young people's key suggestions for improvement were for the standard use of dressing gowns, curtains and electronic equipment such as scanners, metal detectors or wands, so that full naked exposure is minimised.

It is clear from the feedback on the helplines at the STC – where all the young people reported a high degree of satisfaction, particularly with Barnardo's approach – that helplines can be seen to be useful. The young people who had used the Barnardo's helpline suggested that their approach – where the emphasis is on support and a personal approach – be used more widely.

In relation to separation, most of the participants reported feeling cut off and estranged, and they strongly disliked the experience. They did not propose any suggested improvements to this area, but did highlight the use of specific separation "blocks" as producing a more negative experience.

It is very early days in terms of user-run consultations within the secure estate for children and young people, and there is much more to learn. However, the evidence gained during this consultation provides powerful insights into the reality of young people's lives. The style and method of facilitation clearly enabled many young people to open up and share. It takes courage on the part of service providers to listen and act on direct and blunt feedback like this. The task ahead now is to pay attention to this valuable evidence and take these young people's views fully into account within the planning process and any forthcoming changes.

Appendix 1: Consultation format

Each consultation was divided into two sessions where possible.

Session 1: *Time:* 60 to 90 minutes. *Participants:* up to 20

This session was intended to address a large group of young people (up to 20). The aim was to motivate the young people and ensure that they fully understood the implications and benefits of participation. User Voice introduced the consultation and the people involved, and described what the participants were being asked to do. This included an estimate of the possible levels of involvement and the implications of participation. The session was structured as follows:

- who we are
- the aims of the consultation
- what is being asked of the participants
- understanding the impact participants can have
- understanding how this can influence decisions that affect the lives of people like them in the secure estate
- describing how participants will receive feedback about the results of the consultation.

The consultation offered young people two levels of possible involvement. Firstly, those attending this first session were offered the opportunity to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire. This gathered a brief snapshot of their views and experiences, which enabled a surface-level analysis. After this, those who did not wish to have any further involvement in the consultation were offered the opportunity to leave. The second level is described below.

Session 2: *Time:* 60 to 90 minutes. *Participants:* 10 to 15

The young people who chose to participate in this session were asked to take part in a workshop divided into two sections. The first section was designed to gather their thoughts and experiences under the main consultation themes. Following on from this discussion, the second section enabled participants to make some recommendations for change.

Although it was intended that each section of the workshop be structured, there were opportunities to improvise and be creative. The workshop involved ice breakers, discussions, role-plays, games and group work, as young people often respond better to workshops that they can get involved in rather than talks or lectures reciting facts. Where possible, opportunities were created for smaller groups to work together and explore relevant themes and ideas, and to encourage experiential development.

During the workshop, the young people were asked to provide insights from their experience of the secure estate in relation to the four areas considered by

the consultation. The participants were then asked what changes they would make relating to safeguarding if they were in charge of the establishment they were in or had been in, and what their reasons were. The suggestions were then discussed to establish whether they were realistic, how important they were and the popularity of each proposed change within the group. As a result, a number of key recommendations were made and areas of consensus and disagreement set out.

Appendix 2: Information sheet provided to young people

Invitation to participate

You are being invited to take part in a consultation exercise. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the consultation is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information – our contact details are at the end. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this information sheet, which you should keep if you decide to take part in the study.

What is User Voice?

User Voice exists to reduce offending by presenting the voice of the most marginalised people in and around the Criminal Justice System to decision-makers. User Voice is an organisation led and delivered by ex-offenders. This gives us the unique ability to gain the trust of, access to, and insight from offenders within the Criminal Justice System.

What is the purpose of the consultation?

The primary aim of this project is to obtain the views of young people placed in the secure estate by the YJB on remand or in custody, specifically around safeguarding. The findings will be documented in a report which will be used by the YJB to improve its services offered.

Why have I been chosen?

Participants have been chosen to participate in this consultation exercise as a result of your experience of the secure estate.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care or the service you receive.

What do I have to do if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part you will be asked to take part in a discussion about services you have experienced and to complete a short questionnaire.

What are the benefits of taking part?

The main benefit of taking part is that your views will be used to make recommendations to the YJB about how it can make improvements to the services it offers.

What if I have a complaint about the study?

If you are unhappy with how you have been treated at any point in this consultation and wish to make a complaint please contact one of the following people:

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

I can assure you that everything you tell me is completely confidential. You need not give me your name and no information which can identify you will be passed on to anyone outside the consultation team. Only members of the consultation team will have access to the information collected during this study.

Notes from the group discussions will be taken. Only members of the consultation team will have access to these notes, and they will be destroyed after five years. Until then, the notes will be kept in a locked cupboard. When we write the final report and any other publications, we will not use your name and nothing that can identify you will be contained in it.

Please think about what information you are happy to share with us given that the information may be included in a report for the YJB and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

What will happen to the results of the consultation?

The results of the consultation will be used to write a report that will be presented to the YJB and the Office of the Children's Commissioner and published in 2010. Participants will not be identified in the report and views will remain anonymous. If you want to receive a copy this can be arranged.

Who is organising and funding the consultation?

The consultation is being organised and funded by the YJB and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Who has given permission for the consultation to go ahead?

The YJB and the manager of your YOI/STC/secure children's home/YOT have reviewed this consultation.

Contact for further information

For further information please contact:

Daniel Hutt
Head of Policy
User Voice
19 Buckingham Street
London WC2N 6EF
Tel: 020 7968 2740
Email: daniel@uservoice.org

Appendix 3: Consent form

I have been asked to voluntarily take part in a consultation workshop carried out by User Voice on behalf of the Youth Justice Board and the Office of the Children's Commissioner and understand that my views will be captured in an audio recording.

The consultation has been explained to me and I am happy for my thoughts and views to be used anonymously as part of a report. I reserve the right to withdraw both myself and views at any point during the consultation.

Name:

Date:

For more information please contact:

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