



Ministry
of Justice

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister of State for Justice and
Minister for Afghan Resettlement

Frances Crook & Carolyne Willow
1 Ardleigh Road
London
NI 4HS

MoJ ref: ADR90551

12 October 2021

Dear Frances and Carolyne,

COVID-19 RULES IN THE SECURE CHILDREN'S ESTATE

Thank you for your letter of 3 September 2021 regarding the steps we have taken to protect the health and well-being of children and staff in Youth Offender Institutions (YOIs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs) during the pandemic.

I recognise, of course, the significant compromises made in restricting children's access to face-to-face education, visits and other activities during the pandemic. These extraordinary measures have been necessary during this period of unprecedented challenge, and they have played a crucial role in helping reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the children and young people secure estate and the community. Where possible, the Youth Custody Service (YCS) has ensured full access to education and other activity and where not possible has enabled children to access services in alternative ways. For example, education has been provided using in-room learning and whilst access to social visits has been maintained for the majority of the pandemic, video call technology has been rolled out across the estate so children can remain in regular contact with their families and support networks.

The Government has announced its intention to recommend to Parliament that a number of temporary non-devolved provisions of the Coronavirus Act (2020) should expire, including Schedule 21, to which the Transmission Control Period (TCP) is linked. This may have implications for the temporary changes made to the Prison, YOI and STC Rules, and further detail around this will be made available in due course. As the TCP expires, changes to the YOI Rules will remain in force for a further three-month transition period before expiring, whilst STC Rule changes will expire immediately. A transition period was not included in the STC Rule changes in May 2020 as it was felt that STCs, as smaller institutions, were unlikely to need three months to stand up revised programmes.

Covid-19 remains a risk and the YCS is continually adapting its approach to delivery to meet the needs of children while complying with the guidance from public health bodies. I can assure you that I am keeping the need for any restrictions under constant review.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP