



Jake Richards MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Gemma Abbot,
Legal Director, Independent Restraint Review Panel (IRRP)

11 August 2026

via email: gemma.abbott@howardleague.org

EVALUATION OF PAVA SPRAY IN THE YOUTH ESTATE

Dear Gemma,

Thank you for your letter of 7 July 2026 regarding the evaluation of PAVA spray in the children and young people secure estate.

You ask whether the use of PAVA has been authorised beyond the original 12-month period and about the arrangements for the ongoing review.

Following a cross-government write-round and a full review of the current authorisation, the Government has decided to extend the use of PAVA incapacitant spray in the public sector Young Offender Institutions at Feltham A, Werrington and Wetherby for a further 12 months. The current authorisation, which was due to expire in August 2026, has therefore been extended until **13 August 2027**.

This decision has not been taken lightly. Violence within the children and young people's secure estate continues to present significant challenges, and staff must be equipped to respond effectively to the most serious incidents in order to prevent harm to both young people and staff. The extension will allow PAVA to remain available under strict safeguards while further evidence is gathered on its effectiveness and impact.

Our long-term ambition is to significantly reduce the use of force across the youth secure estate. Achieving this will depend on our ability to deliver a sustained reduction in violence across the youth estate.

This is a key objective of the Youth Custody Transformation Plan, which is due to be published in autumn 2026. Alongside this, we will continue to drive progress on improving standards for children in custody.

The decision to extend the current authorisation reflects a number of considerations, including the continuing challenges posed by serious violence in the children and young people's secure estate and the need to ensure that staff have appropriate tools to respond to the most serious incidents. The extension will also enable further evidence to be gathered on PAVA's effectiveness, including its role in preventing escalation and serious injury, while strengthened training, monitoring and operational oversight continue. The review will consider the operational data and wider evidence gathered through the period of PAVA use, alongside findings from existing scrutiny and oversight processes, to inform any future decision about its use beyond 13 August 2027.

All use of PAVA will continue to be subject to strict reporting and oversight processes, including local and central reviews of incidents. Given the sensitivity of this issue, particular attention will continue to be paid to issues of disproportionality, including any impact on Black children and children who are neurodiverse. Disproportionality will be closely monitored throughout the extension period, supported by expert advice, challenge and existing oversight mechanisms. We are also updating the Children's Rights Impact Assessment and associated operational guidance to reflect these concerns and the mitigating actions being taken.

You also requested disclosure of documents relating to the evaluation methodology, including any minutes of meetings where an extension to the authorisation period was discussed and agreed. Requests for information held by the department should be made through the appropriate statutory information access routes and will be considered in accordance with the relevant legislation and established procedures.

I hope this clarifies the current position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jake Richards', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JAKE RICHARDS MP