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Andrew Selous MP
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation
Ministry of Justice
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22 October 2014

Dear Minister,

Thank you for meeting yesterday with me and a number of the other co-signatories to last week's *Telegraph* letter to discuss your plans for a 'secure college'. I thought I would follow up on a couple of the points raised in the meeting. I will be sharing this letter with the *Telegraph* letter co-signatories. I am, though, writing in my own capacity, not on behalf of the wider group.

I was encouraged to hear from you and Simon Hughes that the proposals for girls to be held at the secure college remained open to a rethink. I was also heartened to hear from you that the current proposals regarding control and restraint were open to revision. I would urge you to make changes to both proposals to meet the concerns of the many critics of the proposals within and outside parliament.

During the meeting I made reference to the Ministry's recent 'Fact Sheet' on secure colleges. It states:

'The pathfinder Secure College... if proven successful, will provide a blueprint for a network of Secure Colleges across England and Wales to replace most existing youth custodial provision... the Secure College will allow us to close expensive STC provision and a number of places in SCHs, as well as YOIs'.

A key rationale for the secure college therefore relates to reduced per capita costs: an estimated £100,000 per annum in contrast to the Ministry's estimate of around £200,000 in the case of secure children's homes. You reaffirmed at yesterday's meeting that secure children's homes will remain an important part of the custodial estate. I would be interested to learn how the Ministry intends to ensure that this will be the case, and that price competitive pressures in favour of the secure college do not, over time, result in the closure of secure children's homes.

The current youth custodial population in England and Wales is approximately 1,000. The planned 320 places in the secure college will therefore account for one third of the entire youth custodial population when it is operational. If, as the 'Fact Sheet' states, this is to provide the model for future youth custodial provision, the implications are clear: a few large custodial facilities holding most young prisoners, drawing in young people from many miles away. At our

meeting yesterday your ministerial colleague Simon Hughes said that he would be keen to ensure that young people were not bussed in from far and wide to populate the College. It strikes me as highly likely that bussing in will be the rule, rather than the exception. I would be interested to learn how the Ministry's plans will ensure that young prisoners are held in custodial facilities close to home, given that its long-term vision is of a few large institutions holding most young prisoners.

At the meeting you emphasised the government's ambition in relation to the youth custodial estate. I am sure that all of those around the table yesterday, as well as the wider group that co-signed the *Telegraph* letter, would share your view that radical improvement to the youth custodial estate is urgently needed. We perhaps differ on what an ambitious agenda might look like.

Five years ago some 3,000 young people were held in custody. Today it is around 1,000. This is a very important development of which the government should be proud. An alternative, more fitting and ambitious, agenda would involve continuing to encourage reductions in the youth custodial population, with small custodial units, close to home, being the default option for all young prisoners. This would contain costs in the short-term and reduce them in the long-term in a manner that will be far more sustainable than will be possible through the construction of large secure colleges.

Finally, I would like to put on record my concern that a number of the *Telegraph* letter co-signatories were not invited to yesterday's meeting. I hope that the conversation that started yesterday might be continued with all interested parties at a future date.

Yours,

Richard Garside

Richard Garside
Director

Cc. Simon Hughes MP