

No girl should ever be in a prison with men or boys

The Women's Rights Network (WRN) welcomes the announcement that the placement of girls in prison accommodation is under review by the Ministry of Justice, and the appointment of Susannah Hancock to lead this review.

Girls are currently held in mixed-sex settings including Secure Training Centres, secure children's homes and a secure school. They have also been held in Wetherby Young Offender Institution, an establishment for boys, in conditions which are a longstanding cause of grave concern for WRN and were extensively criticised in a recent report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

WRN holds that prisons for women and girls of all ages should be single-sex, both for prisoners and for staff. The practice of using mixed-sex accommodation for under 18s is one which breaches the human rights and safeguarding needs of girls; a position successfully won by Elizabeth Fry for adult women over 200 years ago. The argument that prison accommodation for children should be mixed-sex in order to mirror the outside community is utterly flawed - it is that outside community which has abused and traumatised girls, who require a therapeutic and trauma-informed service.

Heather Binning, Executive Director of WRN said:

"WRN has invited Susannah Hancock to engage with us on her vital work to improve prison services for girls in England and Wales. We have campaigned on the unacceptable practice of holding girls in a prison for boys and young men for many years since our members raised their concerns, and invited the Secretary of State and justice ministers to take urgent action. We welcome this review, which is urgently needed to address the failure of the Youth Custody Service to meet the basic needs of girls in the justice system, who have almost always been exploited and traumatised by men. We look forward to working with Susannah to improve the system for girls".

Notes:

1. The Women's Rights Network is the largest grassroots network of women in the UK, with a focus on protecting and furthering the rights of women and girls.
2. <https://www.womensrights.network/post/get-those-girls-out-of-wetherby-now> link to WRN blog on placement of girls in HMYOI Wetherby, a prison for boys and young men.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/susannah-hancock-to-lead-independent-review-into-girls-in-custody>
4. https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/hmyoi-wetherby/ report from HM Inspectorate of Prisons on Wetherby, which found girls stripped by adult male staff.