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Position statement **Northamptonshire Review Panel Meetings**

The Magistrates Association (MA) is aware of the hard work that has been done by a group of passionate youth practitioners – especially Dominic Goble and Quentin Goodman – in Northamptonshire to introduce an informal Review Panel process for selected children and young people on a Youth Rehabilitation Order. Although there has not been a full evaluation of the process, an initial assessment highlighted anecdotal evidence that everybody involved felt the process was very positive. In particular, the magistrates who attend the review panel meetings reported finding it very helpful and informative. The Senior Presiding Judge has now indicated support for Youth Offending Teams across England and Wales considering incorporating the model in their practice.

The MA has led calls for judicial monitoring to be introduced, with legislation available to allow this in both adult and youth jurisdictions, which just needs enacting. In order to enable magistrates to review YROs, Paragraph 35 of Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 should be brought in. The MA believe that introducing Paragraph 35 would ensure a consistent approach is followed across England and Wales, without entailing some of the risks involved in an informal process – including those identified in the initial assessment of the Northamptonshire model. As well as providing greater consistency, Paragraph 35 would allow the benefits resulting from the reviews in Northamptonshire on a statutory basis. This would ensure full transparency, which would produce subsequent positive impacts on procedural fairness, legitimacy and confidence for all parties. Introducing reviews under Paragraph 35 would also allay concerns about the lack of clarity around the role of the magistrate in review meetings (any lack of clarity could potentially leave magistrates unprotected if problems arose due to their involvement in a meeting) and that informal review meetings go ahead without the child or young person concerned being present. Carrying out reviews within a legal structure would also ensure HMCTS involvement, which would minimise problems with magistrates having to recuse themselves from certain hearings. It is also important to ensure any process implemented is practical for busy courts, and focused on the cases where judicial monitoring will be most effective.