the Parole Board

THE PAROLE BOARD

What it does and how rehabilitation is relevant.

About the Parole Board

- **Court like body** - The Board is an independent court like body whose members, sitting as panels, make judicial decisions on whether prisoners who have committed serious offences need to remain in prison for the protection of the public.

- **Focus on risk** - The parole process is focussed solely on risk, and public protection is always the Board's key consideration. The Board can only consider release after the prisoner has served the period set for punishment by the Court.



Who are the members?

- Currently around **295 Parole Board members**.
    - 56 psychologists
    - 22 psychiatrists
    - 181 independent members
    - 36 judges
- **18% from black and other ethnic minority groups**
    - *a commitment to improving the diversity of its membership saw this increase from less than 5% in 2016*
- **Members are from a range of professional backgrounds** including police and probation, but many have no criminal justice experience.

Sentence types

- **Not all cases go to the Parole Board to decide release. Those that do include:**
  - Indeterminate sentences
    - *Life sentence*
    - *IPP sentence (abolished 2012)*
  - Extended determinate sentences, and:
- **Release following recall.**

Key statistics

- 22,082 cases referred to the Parole Board in 2022/23.
- 8085 oral hearings.
- 3637 release decisions.
- 416 recommended for open conditions.
- 11,466 refused release.
- Majority of hearings held remotely during this time.
- The overwhelming majority of people released by the Parole Board are safely managed in the community.
  - *Our convicted SFO rate is consistently around 0.5%.*

The Legal Test



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The Parole Board must not give a direction [for release] … unless the Board is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public that the person should be confined.



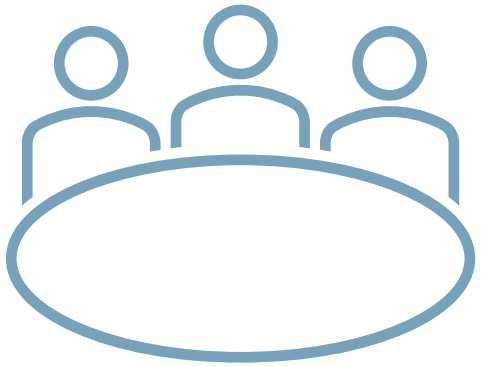
Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO)

Making decisions

- First stage is MCA – Member Case Assessment.
- At the MCA or 'paper' stage, it may be decided that an oral hearing is needed.
- Directions – at any stage directions for more information can be made.
- The main priority for a panel is: **Is the test for release met? This is a test set out by law.**
- Members will use the published decision-making framework when making parole decisions.
- If an oral hearing is directed, then this will be listed for one, two or three members to attend.
- After the hearing, a decision will be sent to the prisoner within 14 days.

An oral hearing

- An oral hearing is an opportunity for Parole Board members to ask further questions.
- An oral hearing can be convened remotely (via phone or video link) or face to face at the prison. In some cases, it may be a hybrid arrangement.
- The panel will ask questions to give them a full understanding of the case.



What does a panel consider?

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Dossiers are usually 200 - 300 pages long but some are over 1000 pages.

There is a great deal to consider and each case is different.

Some examples of what panel members might ask about are:

- *Reports from professionals*
- *Programme participation and completion*
- *Behaviour in custody*
- *Attitude towards offending behaviour*
- *The risk management plan*

Risk assessment

- A risk assessment must be based on established, evidence based risk factors which have been found to be linked to different kinds of offender and offending behaviour.

- Criminal justice staff and forensic psychologists have different approaches to assessment and there are a number of risk assessment instruments or tools.
  - *For example –OASys, OGRS and HCR-20.*

Risk and Protective Factors

- Risk factors are the things about a person or their life that make it **more** likely that they will offend.
  - *For example, attitudes that support the use of violence, and drug or alcohol use.*

- Protective factors are the things about a person or their life that make is **less** likely that they will offend.
  - *For example, family support.*

Rehabilitation

- The Parole Board does not get involved in sentence planning but does review the progress made by each prisoner including considering engagement with interventions to address areas of risk.

- Interventions can include:
  - *accredited offending behaviour programmes,*
  - *working with psychologists, for example therapeutic communities,*
  - *working with substance misuse services.*

- Rehabilitation is not just about ticking a box of completing a programme.

  Changes in attitude (evidenced by custodial behaviour), having positive reports from staff, undertaking employment, complying with the regime, can all provide relevant evidence of change.

Possible outcomes

- Remain in prison for the protection of the public



- Be released into the community with a robust plan for their management in the community – this is binding on the Secretary of State.



- Recommended for progression to open conditions –



If the prisoner is serving an indeterminate sentence there may be a recommendation to move to or remain in open conditions.

Victims

- Victims have a role in the parole process.
- The Parole Board is committed to treating victims with respect and humanity.
- Victims may submit a victim personal statement for a parole hearing, and may choose to attend to read their victim statement to the panel.
    - *There is a pilot in place in certain parts of the country where victims can request to observe the whole hearing.*
- The role of the Parole Board is to assess risk; victims may not comment on risk in their victim statements, or ask the board to take a particular view.
- Victims can ask for a summary of the decision.

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Questions?