

Parole reform to keep dangerous prisoners off streets

Press release

Public protection will be put back at the heart of the parole system to stop the release of dangerous offenders from prison.



- new powers for ministers to refuse release of highest-risk prisoners
- stronger release test to put emphasis back on public protection
- victims able to attend hearings in full – some to be held in public for first time

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab today (30 March 2022) announced a package of landmark reforms designed to restore public confidence in the system, including a tougher Parole Board release test to ensure prisoners who still pose a risk are kept behind bars.

The most dangerous offenders – murderers, rapists, terrorists and those who have caused or allowed the death of a child – will also now face ministerial scrutiny, including a new power to block their release in the interests of public safety. Where the Parole Board cannot confidently say the prisoner is safe to leave prison, they will refer the decision to the Justice Secretary.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab MP, said

Through our parole reforms, we will stand up for the rights of victims and make public safety the overriding factor in deciding on parole decisions.

That's why we are changing the criteria for release, putting more people with law enforcement experience on Parole Board panels, and adding a Ministerial check on release of the most serious offenders.

The package of reforms announced today will strengthen the law to ensure that the parole systems puts the emphasis firmly back on public protection. This includes:

- Enshrining in law the expectation that the Parole Board will take a more precautionary approach. The wording in legislation will leave no room for interpretation and make clear that the only priority is whether a prisoner is safe to release
- Greater ministerial scrutiny on the release of the most dangerous offenders, including a new power to block their release in the interests of public safety
- Changing the law to increase the proportion of Parole Board members from policing backgrounds, and ensure they sit on hearings for the most dangerous offenders. Their first-hand experience in dealing with serious offenders and the risk they pose will put a greater focus on public protection in parole hearings. Currently, less than 5 per cent of the Parole Board's membership falls into this category.

The reforms will also restore confidence in its work and put public safety at the heart of every parole decision. It will put victims front and centre of the process and give them a stronger voice. This will include:

- Parole boards required to consider submissions from victims when making release decisions
- Victims will be given the chance to attend hearings as an observer and ask questions. Currently, victims are limited to a statement shared with the Board explaining how the crime impacted on their life
- The Parole Board will trial more detailed decision letters for victims, explaining their thinking more clearly and increasing transparency
- Along with victims, the media and prisoners will be able to apply for a hearing to be held publicly, with the board considering whether it would be in the interests of justice. This follows the case of rapist John Worboys which prompted calls for the greater transparency.

Today's publication of the 'Root and Branch' review delivers on a manifesto pledge to make the system more transparent and improve victims' experience. Offenders subject to life sentences, indeterminate sentences for public protection, extended sentences and certain recall cases are all subject to the parole process, meaning their release must be directed by the Parole Board.

Notes to editors

- The full [Root and Branch review](#) can be found on GOV.UK
- Currently, parole hearings are conducted by a panel of one to three members who come from a variety of backgrounds, including judges and psychiatrists. The panel considers a wide range of evidence and hears from the professionals working with a prisoner, such as probation officers or prison psychologists, and listens to victims about the impact the crime had on their lives. In order to direct release, the panel must be satisfied that it is no longer necessary for an offender to be in prison in the interest of public protection. In practice this

means ensuring that any risk presented by a prisoner can be safely managed in the community.

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