

Press release: Chief Executive's Blog – 3rd Edition – October 2018

October has been another busy month and one that has asked questions about how we can shape the future of the Parole Board.

Justice Select Committee, 10 October

I appeared at the Justice Select Committee on 10 October to speak about the work of the Parole Board and how the prison population can be safely reduced, as part of the “Prison Population 2022: planning for the future inquiry.”

The evidence I gave showed the work being done by the Parole Board and its justice partners to reduce delays caused by unnecessary deferrals and adjournments – important work which I spoke about in my last blog. I also spoke about the fact that the backlog of outstanding parole cases that had occurred after the 2013 Osborn Booth & Reilly Supreme Court Judgment has been cleared. This backlog had a peak of over 3000 prisoners in 2015 and it was a huge success to eliminate it. To do this we had to completely change how we worked and now hold more oral hearings than we have ever held before (and 5 times the amount held in 2005/6!).

Despite the success of getting rid of the backlog, the number of parole eligible prisoners remains at a high level and we cannot stop working and innovating to ensure that they are provided with fair and timely hearings.

The IPP sentence

Prisoners sentenced under the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) are a contributing factor to the high prison population. My evidence to the Justice Select Committee explained that there are many reasons why the IPP population isn't going down as quickly as we would like.

The IPP sentence was abolished in 2012, but not retrospectively, and many prisoners remain in custody years after their original tariff has expired. Since the abolition of the sentence, the headline IPP prison population has now fallen by 57% – from a peak of 6,080 in 2012 down to 2,598 by 30 September 2018. These cases are some of the most complex that come before the Board and so, despite increased progression rates in recent years, there is further work to be done across the system.

Whilst this progress is encouraging, the number of IPP prisoners recalled to custody continues to rise. Without further legislative change the legacy of IPP prisoners will remain for many years to come, not least because and it can be expected that the rate of progression will slow down as the number of IPP prisoners in the system falls.

IPP Families Event in Parliament

On 17 October I spoke at a policy launch event on 'The Secondary Pains for Family Members of Indeterminate Imprisonment'. The research by Drs Harry Annison and Rachel Condry (from the Universities of Southampton and Oxford respectively) examines the challenges faced by family members of prisoners sentenced to the indeterminate Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence.

What is clear is that the Parole Board can play its part to help family members of IPP prisoners. For example, the work we are carrying out to reduce the number of deferrals – we know the impact such delays have on prisoners and their families.

Another way we can help is by doing our main role well – ensuring that we continue to deliver timely hearings in a safe manner. To do that we need a steady stream of members joining the Parole Board.

New Members Joining on 1 November

On 1 November we welcome 25 new members to the Parole Board (13 judicial members and 12 psychiatrist members). This comes at an important time – a lot of our members came to the end of the tenure in September 2018 and we need these new members to fill the gaps that our very experienced former colleagues have left. We held a great New Members Training event in Derbyshire last week and I am sure that our new 2018 cohort will be a credit to the Board.

Welcome Caroline

And last – but by no means least – Caroline Corby starts her tenure as permanent Chair of the Parole Board on 1 November. She has been our Interim Chair since the Spring and I have every confidence that she is the right person to guide us through the reforms that are happening, and help make the Board more effective than ever before.