

Press release: Justice Secretary announces ambitious first steps in overhaul of Parole Board

Justice Secretary David Gauke ordered a review of Parole Board processes in January, with the purpose of increasing its transparency, restoring public confidence, and improving the treatment of victims. The [findings of the urgent review have been published](#) alongside a comprehensive package of reforms that include:

- Initial legislation to immediately remove the ‘blanket ban’ on transparency and a change in the rules to allow the Parole Board to explain its decisions to victims, media and the public
- Proposals to, for the first time, allow Parole Board decisions to be challenged through a judge-led process that could in some circumstances be open to the public
- Immediate changes to expand the Victim Contact Scheme to include more people and to improve the way the department communicates with victims

One immediate result of this work is the introduction of transparency to the parole process by amending Rule 25 to remove the blanket ban that prevents the Parole Board from disclosing information about its decision-making.

This change will also require the Parole Board to provide an overview of the arguments it heard in a case, the recommendations of expert witnesses, the offender’s progress and risk factors, the evidence provided by the offender and the reasons for the panel’s decision.

The removal of the ‘blanket ban’ and amending Rule 25 is an immediate first step on transparency which ensures compliance with the ruling of the Judicial Review of the Worboys case. But we will not stop there.

The department will carefully assess the impact this has on the Parole Board’s operation, on offenders, and on victims, including whether there are legal challenges, with a view to increasing transparency further, for example potentially automatically publishing summaries online.

We will also consider, as set out in the Terms of Reference for the wider Parole Board Review, whether information about panel members and other details should in some situations be made public.

Increasing transparency was always a priority for the review, but the Justice Secretary has also committed to much wider reforms. This includes a proposal for a new mechanism to force the Parole Board to reconsider a decision, ensuring that victims do not have to resort to Judicial Review to make the Parole Board look at a case again.

This change will be subject to a [consultation](#) launched today, but it is

envisaged that the reconsideration would be led by a judge and oral hearings would be open to victims, media and the public.

The Parole Board's decision to release John Worboys made clear the urgent need to overhaul the process of providing information to victims.

As a result, numerous changes will be made to the Victim Contact Service (VCS) service, including extending it to victims of more types of offences, for example road traffic offences resulting in serious injury, and to victims in cases where a serious charge lies on file but has not resulted in a conviction.

Immediate improvements will also be made to the VCS, including new training for Victim Liaison Officers, better working with other agencies to ensure services are more joined up and making it easier for victims to opt in to the scheme at a later stage in the offender's sentence.

At the same time, the department will explore the potential for changing the scheme so that victims are asked at the beginning to opt-out if they don't want to be kept informed, rather than to opt-in if they do.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Today I am announcing a package of measures to reform the Parole Board and introduce transparency of its decisions. But we are going further and consulting on a new way to challenge Parole Board decisions that would be judge-led and could, in some circumstances, be open to the public. And we're not stopping there.

Today I also produce the terms of reference for our comprehensive review of the entire Parole Board, including whether we should in some circumstances name panel members, whether we should define the panel composition and what kinds of further scrutiny measures should be introduced.

We will also improve the process for victims, who in this case were clearly let down. It is my ambition that the outcome of this process will mean victims have more confidence in the system.

We have moved at pace to address the shortcomings of the Parole system which the Worboys case has brought to light. But we must take a balanced approach. I am determined to lead a thorough reform process, the first action of which we launched today.

Also published today are the [terms of reference](#) for the full review of all 27 Parole Board rules. The terms of reference allow for consideration of whether certain panels should include a judge or psychiatrist, how the Board's decisions should be scrutinised internally before a decision is finalised and how further improvements can be made to transparency. The findings of this work will be published later this year.

The [consultation on a re-consideration mechanism for Parole Board decisions](#) will close in July. The department particularly welcomes submissions from victims and those who have experience of the Parole process.