

Press release: National Audit Office investigation into the Parole Board

The Chair of the Parole Board, Professor Nick Hardwick, has welcomed the publication of the National Audit Office's findings following its investigation into the work of the Parole Board.

He said: "I am pleased the NAO has recognised the huge challenges the Parole Board faced as it dealt with more cases and more oral hearings with fewer Parole Board members. As a result, the backlog of outstanding cases grew, with unacceptable delays for victims and prisoners. Given the scale of the challenge it has taken time to put things right.

I am pleased the NAO recognises the progress we have made. We have a new strategy, have recruited over a 100 new members and our backlogs are down by over a third. There is more to do and the NAO report helpfully highlights a number of areas for us to focus on. I am confident we will continue to make progress whilst making sure that in each of the approximately 7,000 cases we decide every year we protect the public whilst treating prisoners fairly."

Martin Jones, Chief Executive said:

"I welcome this report, as a timely examination of the challenges facing the parole system. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number of cases needing to be heard by the Parole Board and this has led to excessive, often unacceptable delays. We are now making steady progress in reducing those delays and are committed to ensuring that we deal with all cases fairly and in a timely fashion, whilst ensuring the protection of the public; but there remains more to do.

The appointment of new members, who are now starting to sit on hearings, will enable us to sustain our good progress in bringing the backlog down. Also, our digital project which aims to have paperless hearings by October, is helping to make the Parole Board run more efficiently. The majority of our members have transitioned from paper to digital working, saving the Board time and money. The backlog at present is 2,030 cases, down over a third from its high point of 3,163 cases in 2015, and we are on track to eradicate the delays by the end of the year."

Notes to Editors

A full copy of the National Audit Office's investigation report (HC 19/2016-17) is available on the NAO website at www.nao.org.uk

The Parole Board Strategy 2016-2020 is available on the Parole Board web pages at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/parole-board>

The Parole Board is an independent body that works with its criminal justice partners to protect the public by risk assessing prisoners to decide whether they can safely be released into the community. The Board has responsibility

for considering life sentence prisoners (mandatory life, discretionary life and automatic life sentence prisoners and Her Majesty's Pleasure detainees; and prisoners given indeterminate sentences for public protection); and determinate sentence cases (discretionary conditional release prisoners serving more than 4 years whose offence was committed before 4 April 2005; prisoners given extended sentences for public protection for offences committed on or after 4 April 2005; and prisoners given an Extended Determinate Sentence or Sentence of Particular Concern after 3 December 2012). The Board considers initial release into the community and re-release following a recall to prison.

For further information please call Glenn Gathercole, Business Development Directorate on 0203 334 4392 during office hours, or 07725-927954 out of hours, or e-mail glenn.gathercole@paroleboard.gsi.gov.uk