

[Press release: Parole Board Chief Executive's Blog – 4th Edition – November 2018](#)

Working to improve victims' experience of parole

The Parole Board makes thousands of decisions each year. The majority of those decisions have the potential to cause anxiety and sometimes upset to victims. Even though the Parole Board's job is focused not on punishment, but on the potential risk if the prisoner is released, we always take careful account of any victim personal statements and should ensure that we treat victims with humanity and sensitivity.

While we can sometimes make unpopular decisions, we should always be prepared to listen and learn. Therefore, I regularly meet with the Victim's Commissioner and with individual victims who have experienced the parole process to consider how we might improve.

Restorative Justice Guides

I am delighted that we have now published some really helpful guides about Restorative Justice (RJ), produced in collaboration with [Why me? Victims for Restorative Justice](#). My thanks go to Lucy Jaffé and her team at Why me? for leading this work.

The initiative for this work came from two very brave women, who were the victims of serious offences. Through RJ, they had both met the men who had been convicted of the offences, and had found the process helpful. They wanted to meet me because they were keen to discuss whether Parole Board members understood RJ and how it works, so that members could make well-informed decisions about the potential relevance RJ may have on parole decisions.

I listened very carefully to these two very courageous ladies and made a commitment to them and the Victims' Commissioner that we would carry out this work. The publication of these leaflets is a great step forward in this work and I am glad that we have delivered on this promise. This was a great piece of work that will undoubtedly help Parole Board members understand more about RJ, and will also help people working in RJ learn about the Parole Board.

For more detailed information about restorative justice and parole, please take a look at the leaflets or go to the [Why me? website](#).

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#RJ Week 18-25 November

The publication of these leaflets ties in nicely with [Restorative Justice Week](#), which is taking place all over Europe, and beyond, this week.

Presumption that a victim can attend an oral hearing

We have already delivered on a recommendation made in [the Government's recent victim strategy](#) that we move to a presumption that a victim can attend an oral hearing to read out their personal statement. This removes the anxious period victims had whilst waiting for a decision from the Parole Board. It is only in very rare occasions that it will be considered inappropriate for a victim to attend, and this will be based on safety or security matters. Even in such cases, victims can still deliver their statement via video-link or other means.

Continuing to reimburse victims for expenses

We continue to reimburse victims for expenses incurred when attending a prison and I hope that this removes some of the barriers and allows victims to contribute as much as possible.

Victim Liaison Events

During October and November, members and staff of the Board have been participating in Victim Liaison Officer briefing events around the country, listening to their concerns and providing advice and guidance. I will be

attending the last one of these events in London next week and look forward to meeting VLOs, who are crucial links when victims are engaged in the parole process.

Next steps

I am carefully reviewing the progress made with providing summary decision letters to victims and am grateful for all those who have provided feedback. We are continually developing our thinking in this area and looking to improve the process as much as possible.

I am also keen to see how the plans for a mechanism to reconsider Parole Board decisions develops, and am working with officials within the Ministry of Justice to see how this could be best implemented.

We welcome the plans to improve the [Victim Contact Scheme](#) to ensure that victims are kept fully informed of their roles and are able to effectively participate in these evolving processes, which the Victim Commissioner has rightly highlighted as a key part of improving victim experience of the parole process overall.

And finally, we look forward to working with colleagues across the Ministry of Justice to review [the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) to make it more accessible to victims whilst providing a clear mandate to those agencies delivering services to victims of crime.