

[Press release: Parole Board Chief Executive's Blog – 6th edition – February 2019](#)

Recruitment and diversity events in Yorkshire

I was delighted and privileged to take part in two events in Yorkshire last week to raise awareness of the work of the Parole Board and draw attention to the importance of improving the diversity of our membership.

These events brought people together from local communities in Yorkshire & the Humber to talk to me and some Parole Board members about our work. In my humble opinion they were a great success, with over 150 people attending and engaging in discussions that hopefully helped them decide to make an application.

I am certain that there were people at these events who would make a positive contribution to the Parole Board if they were to apply. I also hope that those who attended will have greater awareness of the work we do and talk to friends and family who might also be interested.

We owe a debt of gratitude to [JUST Yorkshire](#) – a project promoting racial justice, human rights and equality – and [\(Sheffield & District African Caribbean Community Association \(SADACCA\)\)](#) – who supported the events and invited people from their communities and networks to attend.

So, why did we hold these events?

Simply – we do not have enough members from a Black, Asian or other Ethnic Minority background.

In the current recruitment campaign, we have a plan to address the stark lack of BAME representation in the Parole Board. We are actively trying to change this by doing things differently – holding recruitment events and undertaking outreach via social media, for example – because this really matters.

Firstly, this is important for the confidence in our work. What is the perception of young BAME prisoner when they, sometimes repeatedly, face an all-white Parole Board panel? There is a real risk this can lead to distrust in a system that the Lammy Review has shown is potentially stacked against people from BAME backgrounds from the word go – from stop and search through to arrest, sentencing and prisons.

Secondly, I believe diversity strengthens an organisation. Improving diversity in the membership will ensure we have as many perspectives as possible to challenge the status quo to improve how we work, so that we can carry out our primary duty to protect the public.

Still time to apply

The deadline for independent members is 7 March 2019, so there is still time to apply. We welcome applications from anyone with an ability to make fair decisions and assess evidence, ask questions, and has interest in justice. We want people with sound judgement, wisdom, and humanity.

If you have any questions, our recruitment team can help – workwithus@paroleboard.gov.uk.

Parole Board decisions summaries – 1000 and counting

One of the biggest changes we have made in recent times is to start producing decision summaries for victims and the public. This was an important step for a variety of reasons, but perhaps the main one is that it provides victims with vital information on how a parole decision was made. I have always found it inexplicable that we were unable to explain our decisions to some of the people most affected.

Since 22 May 2018 – [when Rule 25 of the Parole Board rules was amended](#) – the Parole Board has produced over 1,000 of these summaries.

Our summaries team has worked closely with Victim Policy to improve the content in summaries so that they clearly lay out how a Parole Board panel came to a decision. Hundreds of victim liaison officers have also been briefed by the team on how a summary can be requested and what a summary will include, so that they are ready to support victims who may want to request one.

While this is positive news, we are not resting on our laurels and know that to deliver a parole system that is fit for purpose we must carry on this work in collaboration with our partners in the justice system.

Changing the Parole Board

On 4th February the Justice Secretary [announced the outcome of the review of the parole system and the reconsideration mechanism](#). I have warmly welcomed the outcome, as should anyone who is committed to there being an independent, fair, effective and transparent parole system.

It is important to be clear that a key conclusion of the review was that:

Having put a spotlight on the system of parole and examined all the Rules which govern the procedures that the Parole Board follows, it is important to emphasise that this has not revealed profound deficiencies in the way that decisions are reached.

I [the secretary of state for justice] am satisfied, therefore, that the parole system serves its primary purpose of releasing

prisoners who have completed their minimum tariff only after a thorough and independent risk assessment and where the Board is confident they can be safely managed on licence in the community.

Reconsideration mechanism

I remain confident that parole decisions are made with great care, but I see no problem in allowing a victim or a prisoner to test whether our decisions are legally or procedurally flawed. I think it will potentially increase rather than decrease confidence in our work.

When the initial proposals were published, the Board was concerned that the system would be swamped with baseless challenges. I am glad that the ministry listened carefully to the Board's views and has ensured that the new system will be proportionate.

I am also pleased that following the rules review there will be further changes which will allow us to improve the management of cases and for the Board to be more "court like" particularly when it comes to enforcing our directions.

More change to come

Much has changed over the last year. We have set up a process to provide summaries of our decisions at volume; we are now able to digitally record all of our hearings; we have commenced new training to ensure that Parole Board members hone and refine their questioning techniques; we have also launched a new and radically different recruitment campaign seeking to improve minority representation on the Parole Board.

I am certain that 2019 will see further changes to ensure we have a parole system that continues to make independent and fair decisions with protection of the public as the number one priority.