

Press release: Parole Board information on Indeterminate Sentence Prisoners (ISPs)

Indeterminate sentences carry a minimum term, or tariff, for the purposes of punishment and to reflect the gravity of the offence. Once an indeterminate sentence prisoner's minimum term has been served, he/she is eligible to be considered for release by the Parole Board. The law states that the offender is no longer held in prison as a punishment and can only remain in prison if they pose a risk to the public. It requires a court, in this case the Parole Board, to decide that issue.

Whilst the Board is committed to ensuring that victims are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, the Board is governed by statute. Parliament has, since 1997, determined that the sole task of the Board is to consider the risk posed by the prisoner at the time of his or her parole hearing. Deciding whether to release a prisoner is a matter of judgement, based on all the evidence presented to the panel.

The Parole Board makes these decisions by assessing the risk the prisoner presents to the public. It may only direct the release of a life sentence prisoner if it is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for him/her to be detained in order to protect the public from serious harm. If it is so satisfied, it is required to release the prisoner. The Parole Board is not legally permitted to consider whether the prisoner has been punished enough, instead it must focus solely on how dangerous the prisoner is.

When making its decision the Parole Board will take into account the nature of the index offence, the prisoner's offending history, the prisoner's progress in prison, any statement made on behalf of the victim(s), psychologist's reports, probation officer's reports, prisons officer's reports and any statistical risk assessments that have been completed. There must also be a comprehensive resettlement plan in place.

Any indeterminate sentence prisoner released will be managed in the community by the probation service under strict licence conditions. Should a prisoner breach one of these licence conditions they can be recalled to prison.

Any indeterminate sentence prisoner not released must, under current legislation, have their continued detention reviewed periodically, but at least every two years. The date of parole reviews is set by the Secretary of State for Justice.