

[News story: Parole Board Chief Executive's blog – June 2019](#)

Recruitment update

I have spoken at length about the lack of diversity amongst Parole Board members and the urgent need to change this, so that the Board better reflects the community.

To start to address this issue, we wanted to approach our most recent recruitment campaign differently.

The campaign focused on three regions in the North of England, rather than the whole of England & Wales. This is the first time we have recruited in specific regions and it really helped us share the campaign in a more targeted and thoughtful way, working with local charities and media outlets to reach as many potential applicants as possible.

However, words and aspirations are not enough – results are what the Board is going to be measured by. Therefore, I am glad to say that the signs are promising after the first stage of the recruitment campaign.

We had unprecedented interest following our campaign, with 590 people applying to be an independent member. Of these applicants, 27% identified themselves as being from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

There was an even higher proportion of candidates from BAME backgrounds who passed the sift of applications, making up 45% of the 130 candidates invited to interview. I think these numbers are very encouraging, both in terms of the overall number of people applying and the diversity of the applicants.

I wish every candidate the best of luck and I am excited to work with our cohort of new independent members once they have been announced.

Czech delegation visit

We had the pleasure of meeting a delegation of policy makers, probation workers and judges from the Czech Republic. They have been running a project to introduce parole in the Czech Republic for the past 10 years and wanted to learn more about how parole works in England & Wales.

Their project 'Fragile Chance' has clear parallels to our system – panels of people making decisions on the potential risk of releasing someone, assessing if there have been signs of positive change during their prison sentence. However, there are also some stark differences, not least that people have to request to be considered for parole, rather than it being an automatic right.

The delegation wanted to learn how Parole Board members make risk assessments and so we arranged for them to observe a hearing from our offices via a

video-link to a prison. This was the best way to demonstrate how parole works in practice.

We also invited senior leaders and professional practitioners from probation and the Public Protection Casework Section to speak to the delegation about their roles in the parole system. This really demonstrated that for parole to work, agencies throughout the justice system must work together.

Visits like these give us opportunity to learn from others but also to reflect on how we are doing things. What is clear from the discussions we had with our Czech colleagues is that the Board has done a lot of positive work over the past year and is continuing to improve parole by working with others in the justice system.

Visiting Rye Hill Prison

During May I also had the pleasure of visiting HMP Rye Hill.

The day was a real success. I was really impressed with all the residents and staff that I had the pleasure of meeting, all of whom communicated and engaged both confidently and articulately.

I hope that my visit went some way to demonstrate that the independent Parole Board is committed to reviewing each case on its merits and ensure that people who no longer represent a significant risk to the public are progressed or released.

I would like to sincerely thank all of the staff and residents at Rye Hill for the insightful and impressive day that I had.

[News story: National Drought Group – EA Chief Executive’s Statement](#)

The National Drought Group (NDG) brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of dry weather by coordinating action to maintain water supplies and protect the environment.

The NDG met on Tuesday 4 June, chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, to assess the latest water resource situation and actions being taken to reduce the risk of drought this summer.

Current situation

After the heatwave last year and a dry winter, this spring again saw lower than average rainfall. Low rainfall in April and May, particularly in the

East of England, has seen some river flows decline to lower than normal for the time of year. In the south and east, rainfall has not replenished groundwater stores, with levels now declining. While there is no threat to public water supply, these conditions are putting particular pressure on the environment and agriculture. It will be some time before conditions can return to normal. Rainfall over the next few weeks will not be sufficient.

Position of the water companies

It is the responsibility of the water companies to maintain supplies. Despite the lack of full recovery in the water resources position over winter, most water companies have good reservoir storage for the summer.

The water companies confirmed they do not expect to need to bring in household water restrictions this summer (“hosepipe bans”) unless the next few months are exceptionally dry. One or two companies may need to apply for drought permits later this year, allowing them to take more water than usual from rivers or boreholes. While the current situation is manageable and there is no present threat to public water supplies, a third dry winter in 2019/20 would cause significant problems for summer 2020.

The water companies set out the actions they are taking to ensure maintenance of supply over the coming months, including:

- refilling their reservoirs where possible.
- taking action to find and reduce leaks.
- making water transfers around their networks and between companies to meet demand and rest some sources.
- taking forward a range of other work to increase the resilience of their networks, including bringing unused sources online and testing water standards.
- seeking to minimise the risk of unplanned outages and infrastructure failure by reviewing their assets and tackling known issues such as algal growth.
- working with farmers locally to identify ways to sustain and share water supplies
- ensuring that all potential sites are application-ready for drought permits.
- continuing to promote water efficiency and metering, including widening campaigns to target specific zones or groups of customers.

The Environment Agency

The Environment Agency:

- has permitted temporary flexible abstraction to allow rapid access to water for abstractors within environmental limits. During 2018, it received 150 requests to flex of which two-thirds were agreed. In 2019, so far the EA has received 94 requests of which 90% have been approved.
- has extended the licence trading map from East Anglia to Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, East Midlands and West Midlands, to help abstractors look for opportunities to potentially access other abstractors’ unused

water

- is reviewing the groundwater and surface water position to consider if more water could be made available during peak demands – by the means of flexible abstraction and rapid trading – wherever this can be done without damaging the environment and ensuring lawful abstraction is maintained.
- is ensuring that the water transfer schemes it owns and operates which support public water supply, such as the Ely Ouse Essex Transfer Scheme are operating, or are ready to operate when needed.
- is operating compensatory pumping schemes to support low river flows and protect the environment, such as the Slea augmentation scheme in Lincolnshire.
- has taken proactive action to protect wildlife and the environment, for example by installing aerators on the Ouse washes earlier than normal to enhance oxygen levels to protect fish, and by loaning aerators and dissolved oxygen meters to angling clubs and fisheries across East Anglia.
- is continuing its enforcement activity to ensure abstractors comply with their licences to help minimise the impact on the environment.

Agriculture

Low rainfall this winter and spring is causing increasing concern for water resource availability, both in surface water and groundwater abstraction for the forthcoming irrigation season, particularly in the east of England.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) and farmers are working closely with the EA, Internal Drainage Boards, water companies and Defra to manage the situation and sustain farming production, including through water trading and flexible abstractions that are now in place in some catchments. Working with the NFU and CLA the EA has held five advice sessions for farmers since January 2019.

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) have produced advice for farmers on coping with drought and securing resilient water supplies.

Environment

We have seen some environmental issues including fish incidents, algae bloom and wildfires, comparatively early this year. Groundwater chalk streams remain vulnerable if dry weather continues and is exacerbated by high temperatures.

The group noted growing concern over the potential impacts of prolonged dry weather on the environment and the cumulative effect from last year. Another dry summer could cause significant and widespread impacts on the environment.

Navigation

The Environment Agency and Canal and Rivers Trust are working together to advise boaters of best practice to help conserve water in the lock systems and asking them to consider sharing locks where possible – as they always do

in summer.

Advice to the public

There is enough water for all if water resources are managed properly. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that this happens. At present the average person in the UK uses 140 litres of water a day: long term water security will require all of us to reduce that figure.

The NDG reaffirmed its core message to the public: please use water wisely.

Conclusions and next steps

The Environment Agency, water companies and others agreed to sustain their efforts to ensure that water users and the environment continue to get the water they need, and to further strengthen their collaboration to this end. They agreed to stay in close touch at national and local level, and that the NDG would meet again in late July to assess the latest situation and take any further necessary measures.

Press release: Drive to unleash potential of North East's youngsters stepped-up

Schools across the North East are being urged to come forward with ideas to help children fulfil their potential as they move from primary to secondary level.

The performance of young people in the North East means the region's primary schools are the highest-ranked outside of London, now the government is stepping-up efforts to ensure young people continue to reach their potential at secondary school.

To do that, the Department for Education (DfE) has today (4 June 2019) published a call for proposals to draw on the expertise of teachers, school leaders and local authorities in the region by asking them to pitch ideas to help children fulfil their untapped potential, supported by funding from the DfE's £24 million Opportunity North East programme.

Every school and local authority in the North East is invited to get involved as Schools Minister Lord Agnew seeks the views of local educators on how to maximise the talent of youngsters when they move to high school – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The best proposals will be granted up to £1.8 million for projects to help

boost the prospects of young people across the North East – schools or local authorities interested in putting forward a proposal must submit an expression of interest by 24 June 2019 and can apply [here](#).

Schools Minister Lord Agnew – chair of the Opportunity North East board – said:

Nobody knows the children and young people in the North East like the teachers in schools across the region, so it's absolutely crucial that we tap into their knowledge in a way that helps deliver long-term improvements in secondary schools.

This expertise will help build on the work already underway as part of Opportunity North East – to ensure more people leave schools in the North East with the qualifications and skills they are capable of achieving.

The Department for Education will host an event at Shotton Hall Research School, Peterlee, on Wednesday 26 June to invite suggestions from local education leaders – and applicants have until 19 July 2019 to submit proposals.

Successful applicants will help to build on the momentum of the Opportunity North East programme – launched last year by the Education Secretary Damian Hinds – which pledged up to £24 million to tackle issues holding back young people in the North East, including the fact that the region has:

- Some of the best performing primary schools in the country, but secondary school performance is below other regions; and
- One of the highest proportions of young people not in education, employment or training after year 11. Opportunity North East aims to tackle these issues by:
 - Investing £12 million in targeted approaches to improve the transition from primary to secondary school, drive up standards – particularly at secondary level – and improve outcomes for pupils post 16;
 - Working with secondary schools and colleges to encourage young people to consider university, degree apprenticeships and other high quality technical education options;
 - Partnering with local businesses to improve job prospects for young people across the region; and
 - Investing a further £12 million to boost early career training for new

teachers and help improve the quality of teaching and raise standards in the region's schools, ahead of roll-out in other regions.

Today's announcement follows the news that 30 under-performing schools will be partnered with successful schools to raise standards and help boost the prospects of 25,000 young people and offer extra more support as they move from education to work or further education.

Next Wednesday (12 June) the board of the Opportunity North East programme – comprised of local school and college leaders, local authorities, businesses and higher education institutions – will meet in Darlington to continue the group's efforts to tackle the issues holding back young people in the region.

[News story: More than a third of the capital's boroughs attend workshop on housing for Veterans](#)

Thirteen local authorities were represented at a housing policy for Veterans workshop held at the RAF Club in London on Monday, June 3.

Delegates discussed homelessness and Veterans; the allocation of social housing to Veterans and working with others to achieve a coherent approach.

London VAPC chairman Lynn Verity said she was delighted with the commitment shown:

We hope the workshop will lead to a coalition of the willing. Housing is an incredibly complex and emotive subject; put it together with a special group like Veterans and it can become even more so.

But after today we think it's possible agreement may emerge on, for example, what is best practice; something that could be of real use not just in London but also in other parts of the UK.

The event, organised by London VAPC, included as stakeholders the University of Kent Law School, the Royal British Legion and Renewing the Covenant in the Capital.

In addition to the boroughs, GLA members, major military charities and organisations involved in the welfare of ex-servicemen and women, including Veterans UK and the MOD, also attended.

Contributions from the delegates will now be analysed by the University of Kent, who will formulate a research programme. The aim is to work with local authorities and interested groups to produce practical outcomes.

London VAPC would like to thank the following local authorities for attending: Bromley, Camden, Greenwich, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Haringey, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, Newham, Richmond, Southwark, Wandsworth and Westminster.

In addition, we appreciate the contributions made by Len Duvall, Gareth Bacon and Deborah Halling from the GLA, charities Blesma, COBSEO, Stoll and Veteran's Aid and the RAF.

We're extremely grateful to the Royal British Legion and Tesco for financial support and the RAF Club for hosting the event.

A copy of [Homeless Veterans in London, Investigating Housing Responsibilities report 2019](#) (PDF, 534KB, 6 pages) .

[News story: Rory Stewart statement on number of Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

The number of reported cases of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has exceeded 2,000, the country's Ministry of Health confirmed today (Tuesday 4 June).

The UK remains one of the largest donors to the outbreak and last week the Department for International Development announced new UK aid to help the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) carry out safe and dignified burials.

International Development Secretary Rory Stewart said:

More than 2000 people have now contracted Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is more important than ever that we grip this outbreak.

The UK continues to be at the forefront of the response, but this needs to be a global effort with others stepping up their support. This outbreak is potentially devastating for the region. It could spread easily to neighbouring provinces and even to neighbouring countries.

Last month I convened a meeting of experts and concluded as well as

funding, we need more people on the ground to help coordinate efforts to contain this deadly disease. We need to act fast, and we need to act generously.

Last week, [Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin visited the DRC for the first time since the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri provinces began last August.](#)

ENDS