

[Press release: Video released to help victims understand what to expect during the parole process](#)

A new video to help victims of crime understand what to expect during the parole process has been released by the Parole Board.

“A Victim’s guide to parole” shows the different stages of parole from a victim’s point of view – from being told a parole review has started, to receiving a summary of the final decision.

[A Victim’s guide to parole](#)

This is part of the Board’s wider commitment to make the parole process clearer for victims and the public. It was made in partnership with the Victims’ Commissioner and professionals who support victims during the parole process.

Baroness Newlove, Victims’ Commissioner for England & Wales, said:

I know from personal experience that, for these victims, the notification of a Parole Board hearing can be distressing.

The prospect of their offender being released or moving to open prison can be difficult to come to terms with. And drafting their victim personal statement can retrigger pain and sorrow.

More and more victims are choosing to read their statement to the Parole Board panel. This takes great courage and, as I know only too well, sitting in front of a panel is daunting.

For these reasons, I was keen to ‘voice’ the Parole Board’s new video – A Victim’s guide to parole. It gives valuable insight into what happens, how victims can be involved and what to expect.

I encourage victims to take a look – anything that explains parole clearly, is a positive step, providing some reassurance and helping victim to understand the next stage in their criminal justice journey.

News story: New projects to strengthen families and keep children out of care

Children in and on the edge of care will benefit from £84 million of new investment for projects designed to strengthen and support families – marking the 30th anniversary of the Children Act by reaffirming its core principle that, where possible, children are best brought up with their parents.

Up to 20 councils will receive funding to help improve their practice, supporting families to stay together wherever appropriate, so that fewer children need to be taken into care and giving them the best chance to succeed in life.

Three ‘early adopters’ have been unveiled to deliver one of three landmark projects originally run through the Department for Education’s Innovation Programme: Darlington, Cambridgeshire and Middlesbrough.

The launch of the government’s Strengthening Families, Protecting Children [programme](#) will start work to roll out the three successful projects to other eligible councils, where there are persistently high numbers of children being taken into care.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Every child deserves to grow up in a stable, loving family and go through life confident that someone always has your back. But for too many children, this is simply not a reality. With the number of children in care rising, many of these children face a far starker version of reality, one where their parents are in the grips of their own nightmare, through mental health problems, the trauma of domestic violence or an addiction.

We must assist those parents facing difficulties and work with them to strengthen their family relationships so they can properly support their children. In the year that sees the 30th anniversary of the Children’s Act, we must stay true to its heart – that where possible and safe, children are best brought up, loved and supported by their parents.

As a government, we want to strengthen families so that, wherever possible, they stay together and provide their children with a safe and stable home life. As Education Secretary, it’s my job to make sure what works to keep families together and change lives, is available to more children and families in need.

The projects were originally developed by Leeds, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire councils – all rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted. They aim to build resilience among more vulnerable families and improve how councils

design and run services. They also support social workers to confidently identify where families can stay together in the home safely, without putting children or partners at risk.

The three projects being introduced in 20 new areas are:

- [Leeds Family Valued](#): working with the whole family unit and any support network to encourage long term changes at home that keep children safe, working with families rather than imposing measures on them. Independent evaluation of the project's impact on the target population shows that between 2011 and 2017, Leeds reduced the number of children on children's services Protection Plans by nearly 50% (974 in 2011 down to 515 in 2017).
- [Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding](#): creates teams consisting of mental health practitioners, domestic abuse workers, probation officers and children's social workers to strengthen the bond between couples, support fathers and male partners to prevent violent behaviour. Evaluation shows this resulted in a 39% reduction in the number of days children spent in care, for cases allocated to the safeguarding team, a 53% drop in hospital admissions for adults in that family, and a 66% reduction in contact with the police.
- [North Yorkshire No Wrong Door](#): creates 'hubs' where young people at risk of going into care get targeted support to cope with the multiple issues they face, including lack of accommodation or contact with the police. Independent evaluation showed the programme saw a 38% fall in arrests of individuals involved during the first 18 months of the programme and a 57% reduction in A&E visits.

Jenny Coles, Director of Children's Services at Hertfordshire County Council, said:

This enlightened approach has helped so many families in Hertfordshire. I'm proud of what the safeguarding team has achieved and the difference they are continuing to make for children in our county by turning accepted practice on its head and managing safeguarding in a totally different way.

The success of this innovative project is down to the partnership approach we have taken to implement this new way of working across such a large geographical area and the individuals working in the safeguarding team, whose enthusiasm has driven this ambitious project.

I am pleased our model has been recognised by government and we look forward to working with other councils to share our learning and help implement the family safeguarding approach to achieve positive outcomes for children across the country.

Steve Walker, Director of Children and Families at Leeds City Council, said:

Leeds Children and Families services are excited to be part of the Strengthening Families programme. We are keen to work with colleagues in other authorities to improve outcomes for children. We are looking forward to sharing the approach we've developed in making Leeds a Child Friendly City – using restorative practice to change the way we work with children and families, supporting social workers to develop excellent practice and creating new services to reduce the impact of domestic violence.

Outcomes for children in care are poor compared with their peers. They are half as likely to meet the expected standards at age 11 and are a quarter as likely to achieve good GCSEs. Into adulthood they continue to have poor outcomes: 39% of all care leavers are “not in education, employment or training” against 12% of their peers, and are five times more likely to experience the criminal justice system.

The new drive will help avoid taking children into care when they can be kept safely with their family, while the department continues to raise the bar in helping young people in by recruiting the next generation of talented social workers and providing a spectrum of support to care leavers.

The first three local authorities to benefit from this programme – Darlington, Cambridgeshire and Middlesbrough – have started discussions and are due to start work soon. Eligible councils must meet a core criteria of being rated ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted and having either high or rising rates of children in care over the last three years.

Cllr Simon Bywater, Chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council’s Children and Young People’s Committee said:

This is incredibly exciting news that will make a real difference to the lives of our most vulnerable children and mean that – when it is in their best interests – more children can stay safely at home. We know that this approach will work as it has been successfully rolled out in neighbouring Peterborough and will put children’s services in Cambridgeshire at the forefront of innovation and best practice.

Suzanne Joyner, Darlington Borough Council’s Director of Children and Adult’s Services, said:

We’re thrilled to be one of the early adopters in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. I’ve been impressed with the impact of the Family Valued project in Leeds and look forward to seeing it make a positive difference to the lives of families and children in Darlington.

Helen Watson, Middlesbrough Council’s Executive Director of Children’s

Services, said:

Ensuring children have the best possible start in life is one of our key priorities, and central to that is keeping families together wherever possible.

The right sort of support and timely intervention can prevent the need for children coming into care, and that brings with it enormous long-term benefits.

This welcome project will help us further develop and strengthen our approach, and will undoubtedly change lives for the better.

Press release: Homes England appoints Chief Digital Officer

- Brian McIntyre is set to join Homes England from design and engineering consultancy Atkins Ltd.
- As Chief Digital Officer, Brian will be responsible for designing and delivering Homes England's digitalisation strategy
- He will also ensure digital becomes ingrained in the business, building sustainable digital capacity across the agency.

Brian McIntyre is set to join the agency from design and engineering consultancy Atkins Ltd, where he has held several leadership and strategic client roles over the last nine years, including Head of Digital Advisory and Chief Technologist for a major UK Government department. He is also a Fellow of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

In its five-year Strategic Plan, published in October 2018, Homes England committed to putting new technologies in place to enable modern business processes and improved stakeholder interaction. Digitising systems is central to this transformation, allowing the agency to work more efficiently with partners and respond to the changing needs of the housing market.

As Chief Digital Officer, Brian will be responsible for designing and delivering Homes England's digitalisation strategy, making sure that digital becomes ingrained in the business and building sustainable digital capacity across the agency.

Homes England Chief Executive Nick Walkley said: "Appointing a Chief Digital Officer to lead the organisation's digital transformation demonstrates our commitment to create a 21st century agency fit to tackle the housing challenges our country is facing.

“I look forward to working with Brian and welcoming him on board.”

Brian McIntyre commented: “Housing under-supply is a previously intractable problem that Homes England is addressing with fresh thinking, deep insight and dynamism.

“A transformed suite of Digital tools for customers, partners and our workforce will allow digital disruption to be a catalyst for the wider disruption of the housing market. I am thrilled to be joining at this exciting time for the agency.”

ENDS

For more information contact Sarah Tucker, PR and Media Officer at Homes England 020 7393 2261 or email sarah.tucker@homesengland.gov.uk

[Press release: HM Land Registry is making it easier to remortgage](#)

Millions of people across England and Wales can now sign their mortgage deeds online, as high street lenders sign up to use the service.

As well as making it easier to remortgage, HM Land Registry is also looking to the future through its Digital Street research project and has successfully used a blockchain prototype to show how buying a home can be made simpler and quicker.

[Lord Henley, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#), said:

People are doing an ever-increasing amount online, from shopping to banking, e-learning to gaming. Now they can remortgage their home online as it's quicker, more convenient, and fits their busy lives.

HM Land Registry's digital transformation is continuing to make it easier for homebuyers by embracing new technologies like blockchain, enabling them to become the world's leading land registry.

Digital mortgage

One year on from the signing of the UK's first digital mortgage deed, HM Land Registry's digital service '[Sign your mortgage deed](#)' is now being offered by major high street lenders.

The digital service enables people to sign their mortgage whenever and wherever they are, including on their phone or computer. It removes the need for 'wet' (pen-on-paper) signatures, and witnesses no longer need to be present when the documents are signed. Homeowners no longer face delays from having to print out forms, find an independent third party to witness their signature, and pay to return the forms by post.

Nationwide, HSBC, RBS and NatWest and Atom Bank were among the first mortgage lenders to sign up, allowing their customers to use the new service. More people are applying for their mortgages using paperless processes and HM Land Registry's free service brings the sector one step closer to an end-to-end paperless process.

Mr and Mrs Perchard, who used the service to remortgage their house in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, commented:

We have been extremely pleased with how the whole application, including the online mortgage deed worked. The speed from initial contact to completion of the new mortgage was astonishing.

The HM Land Registry digital mortgage service is an example of the Government delivering world-class services that offer people value for money and that are built around their needs. The [#SmarterGov campaign](#) aims to drive innovation, savings and public service improvement across the public sector.

Blockchain

As well as helping homeowners today, HM Land Registry's successful Digital Street research and development project is looking at ways of improving the homebuying process in the future. HM Land Registry has rigorously tested the technology and has successfully used their blockchain prototype to show how buying and selling a home can be made simpler, quicker by demonstrating a digital transfer of ownership.

The sale of a semi-detached house in Gillingham, Kent, was used to show how the emerging technology could be used to reduce uncertainty and delays when buying a home. Delays can cause unnecessary stress for the buyer and seller and sometimes even cause sales to fall through.

Stefan, the seller of the house in Gillingham who took part in the trial, commented:

It was really straightforward. It shows how technology like this can help make everything so much quicker and you can see clearly what's happening at every stage. If this is the way forward, it's going to make everything easier.

The prototype has been developed as part of the organisation's Digital Street research project. The blockchain technology has been developed through

conversations with stakeholders across the property market, and tested with the close cooperation of Mishcon de Reya, Premier Property Lawyers, Shieldpay and Yoti.

Background

'Sign your mortgage deed'

1. The following lenders are all now ready to use the digital mortgage service: Atom Bank, Coventry Building Society, Clydesdale Yorkshire Banking Group, First Direct, HSBC, Metro Bank, Molo Finance, Nationwide and The Mortgage works, Platform (a trading name of the Co-operative Bank), Principality Building Society, RBS and NatWest, Santander, Skipton Building Society and West Bromwich Building Society.
2. The following conveyancers are now ready to use the service: Enact, Hugh James, MyHomeMove and O'Neill Patient.
3. Customers with the mortgage lenders listed above should talk to their customer support team about using the free and fast new service.
4. HM Land Registry is working with other mortgage lenders and conveyancers to help them get ready to use the new service. Mortgage lenders and conveyancers who are interested in using the service should contact digitalmortgages@landregistry.gov.uk.
5. The service has been shaped with support and feedback from Coventry Building Society and Enact Conveyancing during the initial development phase.
6. Using the 'Sign your mortgage deed' service will mean the borrower will no longer need to apply pen to paper and will instead digitally sign their deed online.
7. Borrowers will save time as they won't have to get their signatures witnessed or risk their documents being lost in the post. They will be able to log in and sign their deed at any time, meaning their application is more likely to move along more quickly.
8. To sign their deed, the borrower uses [GOV.UK Verify](#) to confirm their identity. This provides an additional level of identity assurance that does not exist when signing a paper deed. The digital deed is also more secure than a paper deed as it is always held on HM Land Registry's IT infrastructure so cannot be lost or tampered with.

9. The first digital mortgage was registered on 5 April 2018 on a house in Rotherhithe, London.
10. The service is currently available for people applying for a remortgage on their house, with no immediate plans to expand to all mortgages until further testing is complete.
11. Conveyancers and lenders who would like to sign up to use the service can contact HM Land Registry's digital mortgage team by emailing digitalmortgages@landregistry.gov.uk.
12. Recent UK Finance figures show that the lenders using the service collectively hold 58.2% of the market share of mortgages. In January 2019 there were 47,400 remortgages representing £8.7bn.

HM Land Registry Digital Transformation

1. The 'Sign your mortgage deed' service is just one of many innovations from HM Land Registry which the organisation is hoping to introduce to make the buying, renting, selling, financing, building and managing property easier.
2. The recently launched Local Land Charges Register will bring data from local authorities across England and Wales to a central database. This will remove the need for manual searches in overworked local offices and remove weeks of potential delays from each sale. The data from five local authorities have been successfully transferred so far, including Warwick District Council, City of London and the Isles of Scilly.
3. Homebuyers can use the 'Find Property Information' service to quickly find information about properties they are interested in at the start of the transaction, rather than waiting until an offer has been accepted.
4. Running in parallel to all new service development is 'Digital Street': a research and development project designed to drive innovation with the aim of making buying and selling property simpler, quicker and cheaper. Now in its second year, the project is exploring the use of blockchain technology and smart contracts to bring greater transparency, speed and trust to property transactions.
5. The project engages key stakeholders from across the industry, including PropTech (property technology) specialists, data experts, conveyancers, property developers, mortgage lenders and others. Over the coming years HM Land Registry will be exploring how innovative uses of technology can make the land registration process simpler, faster and cheaper.

HM Land Registry

1. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership. The Land Register contains more than 25 million titles showing evidence of ownership for some 86% of the land mass of England and Wales.
2. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. Its ambition is to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.
3. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry.
4. Follow us on [Twitter](#), our [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

[Press release: Government continues to protect the most vulnerable and supports people into work](#)

These include more generous work allowances for disabled people and families with children and extra financial support in the workplace through the government's Access to Work scheme.

Other changes include increasing the State Pension, Maternity Allowance, most benefits for the additional cost of a disability and for carers, ensuring the government is supporting the most vulnerable.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Amber Rudd, said:

"Our benefits system must be an ally of the people it serves, ensuring we are supporting the most vulnerable and that work always pays.

"That's why we're bringing in a number of changes to put more money in people's pockets, while protecting families, pensioners and disabled people. Our reforms are creating a fair compassionate society where everyone can reach their full potential, while maintaining a safety net for those who need it."

1 April

Access to Work cap increase

People will now be able to claim up to an extra £2,000 a year to help pay for additional support that they may need in the workplace through the government's Access to Work scheme, meaning the maximum annual grant is £59,200.

Access for Work can cover workplace adaptations, assistive technology, transport and interpreters.

6 April

Automatic enrolment into a workplace pension

To help workers to save for their future, the automatic enrolment pension contribution rates will increase from 5% to 8% on 6 April 2019.

Automatic enrolment was created to help people with their long-term pension savings and works by requiring employers to enroll all eligible staff into a workplace pension.

More than 10 million people are newly saving or saving more and the increase in minimum contribution rates will build on this success.

State Pension

The State Pension will also increase in line with the 'triple lock'. The full basic State Pension will be up by 2.6% to £129.20 a week. This means that the Government will have raised the full basic State Pension by £1,640 a year since 2010.

The full rate of the new State Pension will also increase by 2.6%, to £168.60 a week.

8 April

Universal Credit Work Allowances

The amount which families with children and disabled people can earn before their Universal Credit is gradually reduced (work allowances) will increase, meaning that people can earn an extra £1,000 a year before their Universal Credit starts to reduce.

This change will see 2.4 million families keep up to an extra £630 per year of what they earn.

Maternity Allowance

Maternity Allowance may be paid to people who do not qualify for Statutory

Maternity Pay. It can be claimed from the 26th week of pregnancy, and payments can start up to 11 weeks before the baby is due. Maternity Allowance will increase to £148.68 per week from £145.18.

Other changes coming into effect in April

Disability and carers' benefit rates

Most of the benefits for the additional costs of disability and for carers have been increased by 2.4% in line with prices from 8 April.

The main rates for most working-age benefits in addition to Child Benefit, and certain elements of Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, will remain the same.

This is the final year of the 4 year benefit freeze announced at Summer Budget 2015.

National Living Wage

The National Living Wage will increase by almost 5% to £8.21 per hour, benefiting 1.8 million workers from April.

Full-time workers earning National Living Wage will receive an additional £690 over the year and be more than £2,750 better off compared to 2015, when the rate was first announced.

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