

Better information for victims and greater transparency – Parole Board CEO Blog

The Parole Board is often misunderstood by victims, the public and sometimes in Parliament, because there is a lack of understanding of the work it does. I am therefore keen to ensure we raise greater awareness of the work we do.

Victim engagement

The Parole Board make 25,000 decisions each year. I am deeply conscious, having spoken to many victims, that our decisions have a significant impact on them. That is why the Board has committed to ensuring that they are treated with humanity and respect. Crucial to this is ensuring that they have access to information on their entitlements.

A victim is now entitled to:

- receive regular updates on a prisoner's progress in custody (including when their parole hearings will be).
- submit a Victim Personal Statement to the Parole Board (and can read it out if they wish).
- request licence conditions.
- request a summary of a parole decision.
- ask for reconsideration of a parole decision via the Secretary of State (as of 22 July 2019).

Over 2,000 parole decision summaries have now been released by the Board - most of which have been for victims – which reflects the appetite for better information.

Access to these legal entitlements for Victims largely depends on people being signed up to the Victim Contact Scheme and therefore knowing about the scheme in the first place. We have provided [guidance on this](#) and made a video available on YouTube to show what these entitlements are.

[A Victim's Guide to Parole](#)

In my experience, many problems stem from the fact that victims are not fully aware of their rights. For example, after an often difficult and distressing criminal trial, a Victim may not know that they can sign up to the Victim Contact Scheme. They may well then be surprised and disappointed if they hear in the news or on social media that the offender is being considered for release. It is crucial that more is done by all agencies to ensure victims are more aware of their rights. Any eligible victim can email the victim contact service: vcenquiries@justice.gov.uk.

Public Understanding

The other real difficulty we face is misunderstanding about the role of the Parole Board and how sentencing works. By law, the Parole Board only considers release once a prisoner has served the period for punishment set by the court.

Our role is not to determine whether the punishment imposed by the court is appropriate; our sole focus is to assess risk.

In any given year over 60,000 people are released from prison. However, under 5% of those released (just under 3,000 people) are released by the Parole Board, with the majority being subject to automatic release. Contrary to popular belief, three-quarters of people whose cases go to the Board are deemed too dangerous to be released – and the Parole Board ensures that the ongoing detention is lawful.

When someone is released by the Parole Board, they will be supervised 'on licence' in the community by the Probation Service. This supervision will last until the end of their sentence, which in some cases will be for the rest of their lives.

Whilst we do not have a crystal ball, the proportion of people who are alleged to have committed a serious further offence after being released by the Parole Board are consistently at or below 1% and the number actually convicted, even lower. Every one of those cases is rigorously reviewed to identify what lessons can be learnt.

We have already taken a number of steps to open the doors to the public so that they can better understand our work. including making another video to explain parole:

[About the Parole Board](#)

A member of the public can also request a summary of a decision, and access multiple resources on our website. More than 5,000 people are now following the Parole Board twitter accounts to access key statistics and updates; read my CEO blogs that are published on multiple platforms (like this one). Finally, we are also working on a BBC documentary that will show in detail how we make our decisions.

Reconsideration mechanism

Whilst I think our decisions are sound– I have recently welcomed [the introduction of a reconsideration mechanism](#), as a check on ensuring our decisions are fair and rational. The new mechanism allows a party to the review to challenge a parole decision made on or after the 22 July 2019.

The reconsideration mechanism gives people the right to ask for a parole decision to be looked at again by the Parole Board if they have reasons to show the decision is either:

- Procedurally unfair – the correct process was not followed in the review of the offender for parole – for example, important evidence was not taken into account
- Irrational – the decision makes no sense based on the evidence of risk that was considered and that no other rational panel could come to the same conclusion.

I am pleased to say that, so far, the mechanism is working well. The latest available figures show we have received 47 applications (only 2 from the Secretary of State) and issued 39 decisions. Three decisions have been directed to be reconsidered so far.

To further improve transparency, we are planning to start publishing reconsideration decisions to increase public and legal understanding of our work.

Whilst change can be turbulent, it is also an opportunity. I am confident that greater transparency and better information for victims will increase confidence that we have a fair and effective parole system that strives to ensure the protection of the public.

Birmingham gang member who violently attacked victim by public restaurant receives longer jail term

A man who took part in a group violent attack and fatal stabbing in Birmingham has had his sentence increased by the Court of Appeal following intervention by the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Warsame Mohamed, now aged 24 took part in a violent attack and stabbing resulting in the death of a young man. In September 2016 the victim, Zakir Nawaz, aged 21 was with an old school friend when the car they were in was involved in a collision. As a result the victim set out to find the group responsible.

As the victim approached a group outside a restaurant he was attacked. Mohamed, alongside a further group of other individuals, exited the nearby car shortly after to join in the violence against the victim. The group violently attacked the victim for some time, using punches and kicks to injure him.

As the victim tried to flee the scene, another individual fatally stabbed him. While Mohamed did not deliver the fatal stabbing, he did inflict kicks and punches to the victim.

Following the incident Mohamed and the individual suspected of stabbing the victim fled the country, resulting in a delayed trial causing the victim's family further distress.

On 10 July 2019 Mohamed was sentenced at Birmingham Crown Court to 4 years and 6 months' imprisonment for manslaughter and 2 years' imprisonment for the count of violent disorder, to be served concurrently.

The Court of Appeal increased this to 7 years' imprisonment, after the sentence was referred as being unduly lenient by the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

After the hearing the Solicitor General said:

"The offender acted in a way that caused harm and suffering to the victim, before fleeing justice. A longer sentence is appropriate in this case."

[UK's Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues visited Lithuania](#)

On 14-16 October UK's Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues the Rt Hon Lord Pickles paid a visit to Lithuania, to learn more about historical memory of the Holocaust as well as endeavors to preserve Jewish heritage before 2020, the year of Vilna Gaon, Lithuanian Jews and Sugihara.

Honouring the victims of the Holocaust at Paneriai Memorial

During the three day trip, accompanied by the British Ambassador to Lithuania Brian Olley, Lord Pickles visited the memorials of Holocaust victims in Paneriai and Kaunas, laid flowers at the memorial stone for Righteous Among Nations, met different state officials and visited a number of Jewish-related cultural and historical places. During his visit Lord Pickles not only emphasised the importance of speaking the truth, but also focused on the importance of preserving historical memory, citing London's new world-class Holocaust Learning Centre's as an example of advancing Holocaust education around the world.

Replica of British Heroes of the Holocaust medal to Sir Thomas Preston presented to Sugihara House in Kaunas

The visit also provided an opportunity to commemorate the legacy of former British diplomat Sir Thomas Hildebrand Preston, British Consul and later Charge d'Affairs in Kaunas, who in 1940 provided illegal Palestine

certificates for Jews, to enable them to escape from Lithuania through Istanbul to Palestine. He also provided 800 Jews with legal travel certificates, a few hundred of which were able to cross the Baltic Sea to neutral Sweden.

His efforts were recognised in 2017 with a British Heroes of the Holocaust medal and in 2018 in the British Embassy Vilnius exhibition "Building Bridges". In order to continue preserving the memory of Sir Thomas Preston in Lithuania, Lord Pickles presented a replica of Sir Thomas Preston's British Heroes of the Holocaust Medal to The Sugihara Foundation in Kaunas, becoming one of a small number of artefacts, included in their public exhibition.

Moment from the visit

The UK's Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues later described his three day engagement as:

an interesting visit to Lithuania on Holocaust Issue. Moving and poignant, forming links that we will build on.

[Home Office launches £1 million advertising campaign for EU Settlement Scheme](#)

A new £1 million wave of UK government advertising to encourage EU citizens to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme has launched today (18 October 2019). It builds on the £3.75 million campaign which supported the full Scheme launch in March 2019.

Outdoor advertising in around 2,400 places across the UK will be followed by eye-catching adverts on catch-up TV, radio and social media over the coming weeks.

Adverts will also appear in foreign language newspapers and radio stations right across the UK.

Minister of State for Security and Deputy for EU Exit and No Deal Preparation Brandon Lewis said:

I'm thrilled we've had more than two million applications to the EU Settlement Scheme already but there's always more to do to raise

awareness.

That's why I've launched this nationwide campaign which will reach people up and down the country through billboards, radio and social media so that EU citizens know how to apply and can get the status they need.

To help raise awareness of the EU Settlement Scheme at a local level, the Home Office is also holding a series of innovative pop-up events across the UK where staff will answer questions and help people to apply in person.

Home Office Minister Brandon Lewis attended the launch in Great Yarmouth on Friday 6 September 2019 and other events this month will be taking place in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Tower Hamlets, Nottingham, Leeds and Birmingham.

The Home Office has also released a beta version of the EU Exit ID Document Check App for iPhone devices. The App is being tested on the Apple App Store for iPhone 8 and above, and will be available on iPhone 7 and 7 Plus following an upcoming iOS software update.

Individuals can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme using any laptop or mobile device. The App is entirely optional and is just one of several ways people can verify their identity, including by post or at one of the more than 80 locations across the UK where applicants can have their passport scanned and verified.

There is a wide range of support available for EU citizens and their families to help them apply. For example, the government has awarded up to £9 million to 57 voluntary and community sector organisations across the UK who are helping vulnerable people such as the homeless, disabled and elderly.

Additional support is also available to those EU citizens in the UK who do not have the appropriate access, skills or confidence to apply online. This includes more than 300 assisted digital locations across the UK where people can be supported through their application.

EU citizens have until at least December 2020 to apply.

ACMD advice: future use and purpose of Temporary Class Drug Orders

Dr Owen Bowden-Jones, chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) writes to the Home Secretary in response to a July 2017 commissioning letter which asked the ACMD to consider the future use and purpose of Temporary Class Drug Orders (TCDOs).

The ACMD's response concludes that TCDOs remain a highly useful tool that can enable immediate action on substances of severe harm, and that the mechanism should remain unchanged at the present time.