

the BOARD SHEET

the
Parole
Board
working with others
to protect the public



Chair's Introduction

Sir David Calvert-Smith

Welcome to this end of year edition of the *Boardsheet*. It has been some time since the last one and, as I am sure you know, there have been significant changes across the CJS. We have seen the arrival of a new Secretary of State, more implementation of new ways of working across the National Probation Service and prison regimes, as well as increasing challenges for everyone in the parole system as the workload shows no sign of abating. The long term effect of *Osborn* has left its mark on the system, and while an immense amount of all our work continues to be focused on reducing delays to cases to conclusion, and in fact results are coming through, we are still some way from ensuring that all prisoners receive a timely review. More of that in our next edition.

As I write this note the senior management team are looking at how the Board can respond to the spending review, and play its part in making savings where it can, without impacting on frontline services.

We are also contributing to the system-wide review of the parole process which Ministers have commissioned, and hope

that new and innovative ways of working can be identified to allow all of us to work even more efficiently.

As the new Secretariat team forge ahead with taking the Parole Board into 2016 I must pay tribute to the staff who have now left the organisation including the Chief Executive, Claire Bassett, the Director of Business Development, Martha Blom-Cooper, Natalya O'Prey, Legal Adviser, Jonny Twidle, Senior Operations Manager, and Jacob Asare, IT Manager. Their departure, and the loss of other staff during a 4 month period from the summer, left a huge gap and understandably generated some uncertainty.

We have also seen the departure of a number of long serving members and their knowledge and expertise will be sorely missed. Our members are now delivering on unprecedented oral hearings with reduced numbers, which is a staggering achievement. However, such a position is not sustainable long term and we are looking at ways to support the membership through this challenging period.

However you, the stakeholders have made sure that during this anxious period we have continued to perform the vitally important public service that we are here to do and to maintain the improvements to those services which have been implemented since *Osborn*. Thank you all very much indeed.

Martin Jones, the interim Chief Executive, has hit the ground running and I know many of you have met him personally. He is steering the new team into 2016 and has set out his aims, and a little bit more about the senior management team, below.

It just remains for me to say that 2016 will be just as "full on", but working together and with our stakeholders across the system will provide the opportunity to share good practice, and identify ways through the challenges.

I wish you all a peaceful and relaxing seasonal break.

David



Message from the Interim Chief Executive Martin Jones

It has been 10 weeks since I joined the Parole Board as interim Chief Executive. As I have said before I was delighted to arrive here and have enjoyed the last few weeks.

I have spent the majority of my public service career working in the justice system, most recently as the head of sentencing policy within the Ministry (including responsibility for abolishing the IPP sentence), and before that in a range of posts within the Courts and Tribunals Service so I thought I understood how much the Parole Board matters.

Having now observed a number of hearings and spoken to a number of members, I now understand that I underestimated the importance of what the Parole Board does! It plays a critical role in the protection of the public, but just as critically in the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society. Every decision the Board makes is vitally important to fairness to the prisoner and overall public confidence in the justice system.

But the Board's job would be impossible without the support and commitment from everyone else involved in parole, either directly with frontline services or, more indirectly through back office support and assistance.

At the end of year it is important we celebrate our successes. Everyone involved in the parole system is acutely aware of the delays in parole following Osborn. We are now making progress with the number of outstanding cases, which is down 22% since the start of the year. Whilst the delays have been largely unavoidable, we all know that there is a very real human and financial cost to this. Stress, anxiety and uncertainty for offenders, victims and families of both, and additional work in preparing further reports and updates by practitioners and legal representatives.

There are currently offenders serving prison sentences who could be safely released more quickly if it were not for delays. Through re-doubled efforts and working with all partners in the parole system, I am confident we can reduce (if not entirely eliminate) the backlog, next year.

I would like to pay tribute to the work that we have undertaken in the last year to embed significant changes. We have successfully introduced the Members Case Assessment process – and are now finding deferrals are slowly coming down. We have introduced regionalisation into our operational teams and are seeing better links between members, regional stakeholders and case management teams.

We have also seen a number of changes to the faces at the Board. Apart from myself, I am delighted that Faith Geary and Nigel Patterson have joined the Board as the new Directors of business development and corporate services respectively, and Balbir Matharu has joined us as the new head of legal services. They join Miranda Biddle and Stephanie McIntosh to ensure we have the leadership and skills we need going forward.

I know we will face further change next year. We will be saying a sad but fond farewell to Sir David, and welcoming a new Chair. We should be welcoming new members to give us increased strength for the long term. We will also begin the e-dossier pilot in the New Year, as part of our digitisation and improvement work.

I do believe we are well placed to respond to these changes. Thank you **all** for your efforts. Have a good and restful Christmas and a happy new year.

Martin

COMPLAINTS POLICY – REVISED AND UPDATED

The Board aims to provide the highest standards of service and to get things right. The complaints that we receive help us to better understand how we are doing, lessons we can learn and the improvements we can make. We have spent a lot of time reviewing how we deal with complaints and have made a number of changes.

We now have a new Code of Conduct for Parole Board Members which sets out the expectations we have of our members. We also have an updated Complaints Policy. We would like all those who come into contact with the Parole Board to understand the Board's purpose, powers and duties and as such, have included an introductory section in each document about this. We have designed a simple template form which we would like people to use if they want to make a formal complaint.

All of these documents will be published on our web pages early in the new year. We are making arrangements with prisons for copies to be accessible for prisoners.

FEEDBACK PROCESS

In January we will be running a pilot to see how we can set up a feedback system for stakeholders engaged in the parole process. For some time there has been a gap in our understanding of the experiences of stakeholders in parole, either in the lead up to the MCA assessment stage, or beyond into oral hearings and deferrals/adjournments. Currently there is only the formal complaints process, as mentioned above, and whilst this has an important place in the process it does not allow us to capture feedback in a more informal way. We are therefore setting up a Survey Monkey questionnaire to provide the opportunity for individuals to provide comments that we can then evaluate adapt and adopt best practice, as well as putting in place interventions where things are running less smoothly. We are also always keen to hear of where things have gone well or where there is best practice to share so we are looking for positive feedback as well. Please look out for more information early in the New Year.

FOR THE NEW YEAR

In the next edition we will have more detailed information on the following, but there are links to our web pages where further information is already available:

- Delays and Deferrals
- Review of Member Case Assessment (MCA)
- Effective use of MCA response forms

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fair-for-the-future-update-march-2015>

- Regionalisation of case manager teams and further changes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/announcements?departments%5B%5D=parole-board>

- Review of Victims involvement and experience of parole

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parole-board-information-booklet-for-victims>

- Further work around guidance produced by the Board, including Easyread documents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-guides-for-prisoners>

- Update on Litigation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parole-board-litigation-strategy-for-legal-practitioners--2>

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