



Criminal Justice Board Minute

Held on 29 April 2024 chaired by the Rt. Hon. Alex Chalk KC MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

Members

- Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Rt. Hon. Alex Chalk KC MP)
- Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP)
- Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Mike Freer MP)
- Minister of State for Crime and Policing, Home Office (Rt. Hon. Chris Philp MP)
- Director of Public Prosecutions, Crown Prosecution Service (Stephen Parkinson)
- Attorney General (Rt. Hon. Victoria Prentis KC MP)
- Solicitor General (Robert Courts KC MP)
- Senior Presiding Judge (Lord Justice Edis)
- President of the King's Bench Division (Rt. Hon. Dame Victoria Sharp, DBE, PC)
- Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service (Sir Mark Rowley QPM)
- National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Criminal Justice (Rob Nixon)
- Criminal Justice Lead, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (David Lloyd)
- Chair, National Police Chiefs' Council (Gavin Stephens)
- Chief Executive, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (Nick Goodwin)
- Director General Chief Executive, HM Prison and Probation Service (Amy Rees)
- Victims' Commissioner, Office of the Victims' Commissioner (Baroness Helen Newlove)
- Director General, Threats, National Crime Agency (James Babbage)
- Chair, Youth Justice Board (Keith Fraser)

By Invitation

- Chair, Bar Council (Sam Townend KC)
- Head of Public and Family Law, Law Society (Arabella Lang)

Senior Officials

- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice (Antonia Romeo)
- Director General Policy, Ministry of Justice (Jerome Glass)
- Director, Courts, Criminal and Family Justice, Ministry of Justice (Ed Lidington)

Apologies

- Director General, National Crime Agency (Graeme Biggar CBE)
- Head of Justice, Law Society (Richard Miller)

Agenda Item 1: Lord Chancellor's Welcome

1. The LORD CHANCELLOR thanked members for their attendance and welcomed the new members of the Board, Robert Courts as the Solicitor General and Sam Townend as the Chair of the Bar Council.
2. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that all the actions from the December meeting would be closed in this meeting.

Agenda Item 2: Prison Capacity Update

3. AMY REES updated the board on the actions that had been taken since the Lord Chancellor's announcement on 11 March and thanked members for their ongoing support and collaboration in managing the ongoing prison capacity pressures. It was expected that in June capacity issues could cause further disruption and all possible measures would need to be used to manage the situation while keeping the public safe.
4. During the discussion the following points were made:
 - i. Disruption due to capacity pressures was not felt equally across the country, and in some regions the pressure was particularly acute. Critical capacity could be reached regionally before national capacity was reached.
 - ii. Local areas were working well together but would need to work even more closely to help manage the pressures.

- iii. Impacts of the capacity pressures would be felt across the Criminal Justice System, and all organisations were coordinating closely to ensure they were joined-up.
- iv. Crimes that warrant remand were increasing so in the view of some members it would be preferable to release people from prison earlier, where it was safe to do so, rather than risk not placing people on remand.
- v. It would be important to do everything possible to increase the provision of secure accommodation.

Agenda Item 3: Early Guilty Plea (EGP) Taskforce Update

- 5. JEROME GLASS said that at the December meeting, the Board discussed how EGPs could be increased, and that since then a number of options had been explored.
- 6. STEPHEN PARKINSON said that it was important to consider legal aid incentives to ensure that defendants had access to timely and effective legal counsel. Part of this would be ensuring that legal representatives were appropriately incentivised.
- 7. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that this was an important issue and thanked colleagues for their ongoing work to address this.

Agenda Item 4: Local Priorities and Escalation Mechanism

- 8. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that it was important for the CJB to support Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs) as they had a vital role in the Criminal Justice System.
- 9. JEROME GLASS said that at the December meeting it was agreed that a set of national priorities and framework to measure them would be developed alongside an escalation mechanism to bring local issues to the attention of the Board. LCJBs and Police Chief Commissioners (PCCs) had been heavily engaged to develop both of these proposals.
- 10. During the discussion the following points were made:
 - i. It would be important for the Lord Chancellor to communicate these priorities to incoming PCCs.
 - ii. It would be important to develop a method of measuring progress against these priorities.
 - iii. The escalation mechanism was important to establish a two-way discussion between the CJB and LCJBs.
 - iv. It would be important to gain an understanding of local demand and capabilities to enable LCJBs to effectively support each other.

Agenda Item 5: Crown Court Outstanding Caseload

- 11. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that despite all of the work being done across the system, the Crown Court caseload continued to increase. At the December meeting the Board agreed that information on cross-CJS work being done to tackle the caseload should be gathered and shared

with the Board, and that the Crown Court outstanding caseload should be a standing agenda item at future meetings.

12. ED LIDINGTON said that the Crown Court caseload was a cross-system issue, and that alongside the caseload increasing, the complexity of cases had also changed significantly. He outlined the ongoing work to reduce the caseload and said given the scale of the challenge it would be important to consider further options.

13. During the discussion the following points were made:

- i. It was important to consider the impact of the outstanding caseload on victims.
- ii. It would be helpful to consider whether examples of local best practice could be more widely shared.
- iii. It should be considered whether some cases could be dealt with at the magistrates' court instead of the Crown Court.
- iv. The availability of legal counsel should be considered in conversations around the outstanding caseload.

AOB and Closing remarks from the Chair

The LORD CHANCELLOR thanked members for their contributions and brought the meeting to a close.