



Criminal Justice Board Minute

Held on 17 March 2025, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Shabana Mahmood MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

Attendees

- Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chair) – Rt. Hon. Shabana Mahmood MP
- Secretary of State for the Home Office – Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
- Attorney General – Rt. Hon. Lord Richard Hermer KC
- Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Ministry of Justice – Lord James Timpson OBE DL
- Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services, Ministry of Justice – Sarah Sackman MP
- Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sentencing, Ministry of Justice – Sir Nic Dakin MP
- Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Victims, Ministry of Justice – Alex Davies-Jones MP
- Minister of State for Police and Crime Prevention, Home Office – Rt. Hon. Dame Diana Johnson DBE
- Chair, Criminal Justice Action Group (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice) – Dame Antonia Romeo DCB
- Chief Executive, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service – Nick Goodwin
- Director of Public Prosecutions, Crown Prosecution Service – Stephen Parkinson
- Chief Executive, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and Chair, Criminal Justice Board for Wales – Amy Rees
- Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service – Sir Mark Rowley QPM
- Criminal Justice Lead, National Police Chief's Council – Rob Nixon QPM
- Chair, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners – Emily Spurrell

- President of the King's Bench Division – Dame Victoria Sharp DBE PC
- Senior Presiding Judge – Lord Justice Green
- Director General of Operations, National Crime Agency – Rob Jones CBE
- Chair, Youth Justice Board – Keith Fraser
- Chair, Bar Council – Barbara Mills KC
- President of the Law Society – Richard Atkinson
- Victims Commissioner – Baroness Helen Newlove
- Chair of the Independent Sentencing Review – Rt. Hon. David Gauke
- Chair of the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts – Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Leveson
- Director, Strategy, Capabilities and Resourcing, Home Office – Bethan Page-Jones
- Incoming Criminal Justice Lead, National Police Chiefs' Council – Sacha Hatchett

Apologies

- Chair, National Police Chiefs' Council – Gavin Stephens QPM
- Director General, National Crime Agency – Graeme Biggar CBE

Agenda Item 1: Introduction

1. The LORD CHANCELLOR welcomed new members of the Board; Sarah Sackman MP, Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services, Barbara Mills KC, Chair of the Bar Council and Richard Atkinson, President of the Law Society. She thanked Rob Nixon, Criminal Justice Lead for the National Police Chiefs' Council, ahead of his retirement at the end of March, for his service and contributions to the Board. She congratulated Dame Antonia Romeo, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Justice, on her appointment as Home Office Permanent Secretary after four years at the Ministry of Justice, noting her exceptional support to the Lord Chancellor since her arrival in the Department.
2. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that prison capacity pressures had increased despite measures taken to mitigate them last year. Measures to maximise the prison estate would be taken and HMPPS Gold Command and the Criminal Justice System Strategic Command would be stood up as of 17 March to ensure cross-system coordination. She thanked members for their continued support in these challenging times.
3. The HOME SECRETARY said that the last meeting of the Safer Streets Mission Board had focussed on the restoration of neighbourhood policing to increase confidence in the police. The Board was committed to ensuring data was robust and portrayed an accurate and transparent picture of the state of policing. The Board intended to focus on town centre crime over the coming months and were keen to work with cross-system partners on this.

4. LORD TIMPSON said that the Women's Justice Board (WJB) had been established to reduce the number of women in custody and ultimately the number of women's prisons. The group was focussing on four workstreams: early intervention and diversion; community solutions; the needs of mothers and pregnant women in prison; and reducing the number of young women entering the criminal justice system. The WJB had met with David Gauke and had fed into the Independent Sentencing Review.

Agenda Item 2: Violent Disorder Lessons Learned

5. The LORD CHANCELLOR noted that at the October 2024 meeting, the Board reflected on how effectively the system came together to respond to the violent disorder that took place last summer. The Home Office had been commissioned to carry out a lessons learned exercise to identify key successes of the system's response and how they might be applied to other areas to drive improvements.
6. BETHAN PAGE-JONES thanked colleagues for their response to the disorder and said that the Home Office had engaged extensively with partners throughout their lessons learned exercise. Much of the response had relied on pre-existing structures, relationships and commitment from operational colleagues. 'Swift justice' had been delivered in these cases as they were state-based crimes with high quality evidence which allowed them to move through the courts quickly, however, applying this principle to other, more complex, crime types would need careful consideration.
7. KEITH FRASER said that a disproportionate number of children had been involved in the unrest.
8. During the discussion the following points were raised:
 - i. A cross-system risk register should be developed to allow the system to be more prepared for future crises.
 - ii. The principles of 'swift justice' could be tested on select crime types, such as town centre and organised crime, however this could not be applied to all crime types. It would be important to understand the downstream impacts on prisons and courts before progressing with this work.
 - iii. Applying 'swift justice' would rely on continued cross-system collaboration, and it would be useful to consider how existing governance frameworks could join up to highlight risks and gaps to plug.
 - iv. The system had proved itself agile in response to the disorder, however there were limits to how long delivery at this pace could be sustainable for.

Agenda Item 3: Independent Sentencing Review Update

9. The LORD CHANCELLOR said the measures taken last year to stabilise the prison population were difficult but necessary to relieve immediate pressure. She was committed to stabilising the prison population in the longer term and had therefore asked David Gauke to review the current sentencing framework.

10. DAVID GAUKE said that the review had been established to ensure that the demand for prison places did not exceed supply and was sustainable in the longer term. A panel had been established and had engaged with cross-system partners both nationally and internationally, and a Call for Evidence had been carried out. An interim report had been published, providing an overview of the history and trends in sentencing which have led to an increase in the prison population. Part 2 of the review was due to be published in Spring setting out recommendations.
11. During the discussion the following points were raised:
- i. Public protection concerns and the voice of victims should be considered in light of any recommendations.
 - ii. It would be important to ensure that serious crime sentences maintained the confidence of the public.
12. The LORD CHANCELLOR said that in order to get the prison population number down to a sustainable number, deflationary measures would be necessary. These measures would be carefully considered before implementation.

Agenda Item 4: Independent Review of the Criminal Courts

13. SIR BRIAN LEVESON said that radical reform would be needed to stabilise and improve the system and provided members with an overview of the direction of his report.
14. During the discussion the following points were raised:
- i. Operational colleagues would be supportive of options for radical reform.
 - ii. It would be useful to consider the impact on the magistrates' courts as well as the Crown Courts.
 - iii. Public protection concerns and impact on victims should be considered in light of any recommendations.
 - iv. Recommendations from both the Independent Sentencing Review and Independent Review of the Criminal Courts should be considered in conjunction to ensure correct sequencing.
15. The LORD CHANCELLOR thanked Sir Brian Leveson and David Gauke for their work on the reviews and said that support from partners would be crucial in the delivery of system reform. Following the publishing of both reports, the Board should consider policy decisions to be made and their cross-system impacts. She asked the Senior Presiding Judge to update the Board on the work the Criminal Courts Improvement Group (CCIG) was doing around efficiency at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 5: AOB

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

Action 1: The Board agreed that following the Home Office's Violent Disorder Lessons Learned exercise a cross-system risk register should be developed.

Action 2: The Board agreed that Sir Brian Leveson and David Gauke should update the Board following their full reports being published so that members could discuss policy options.

Action 3: The Board agreed that the Senior Presiding Judge should provide an update on the work that CCIG was doing on efficiency.