

A photograph showing a person's hands typing on a keyboard. In the foreground, a book titled 'BOARD HEARING law and practice' is visible. The text 'BOARD HEARING' is in large blue and yellow letters, and 'law and practice' is in smaller white letters. The background is a solid purple color.

Our strategy for 2025-2028

The Parole Board for England and Wales

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Foreword

– A joint message from the
Chair & CEO of the Parole Board for England and Wales



We have great pleasure in publishing our strategy which sets out the direction of travel for the Parole Board over the next three years. It also clearly sets out our purpose, vision, mission and values which underpin everything that we do.

The Strategy builds on the enormous amount of work which has been undertaken over the last five years, including implementing the changes in the Victims and Prisoners Act, reducing delays in the parole system, reducing queues for prisoners awaiting paper reviews, welcoming and training new members and piloting victims' observations of private oral hearings.

Change will continue over the next three years, as the Board adapts to incorporate the changes to the sentencing framework expected in the Sentencing Bill. This will impact the work, and therefore the shape of the Board. But throughout this period, we will continue to be focused on the delivery of our four strategic aims and their underpinning objectives. Taken together with the activity in our business plan, these represent an ambitious but achievable plan of work to help the Parole Board deliver our priorities. Doing so will also require a cross-system effort, and we look forward to deepening our collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service and the many other organisations working across the parole system.

We would like to put on record our thanks to our staff and our members for all their hard work in enabling the Parole Board to provide a fair, efficient, evidenced-based service for prisoners, victims and survivors, and the public.

Alexandra Marks

Alexandra Marks, Chair

Cecilia French

Cecilia French, CEO

Introduction

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The Parole Board is an independent organisation that uses evidence to decide whether people can be safely released from prison and managed in the community. In doing so, it exercises judicial functions and acts as a court for the purposes of Article 5 (4) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Parole Board makes these difficult decisions in a fair and balanced way to keep the public safe.

Who we are

What we do

The primary function of the Parole Board is to determine whether prisoners referred to it by the Secretary of State for Justice continue to present a risk to the public. It also offers advice to the Secretary of State on whether prisoners can be safely managed in open prison conditions. The Parole Board is guided in its work by the Parole Board Rules.

385

Members*



232

Staff*

*Figures correct at 31 March 2026

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Our purpose, vision, mission and values

Our purpose is to make independent, risk-based decisions about whether prisoners are safe to release into the community.

Our vision is a Parole Board constituted as a court, which protects the public by making fair, transparent and timely decisions on the safe release of prisoners into the community.

Our mission is to improve our performance, expand our powers and deepen our partnerships and through greater transparency, increase confidence in our decision-making.

Our values; we will strive for excellence, openness and innovation in all that we do. In carrying out our functions we will respect all those with whom we work.

We value fairness, independence and transparency.

We are confident, collaborative, reflective and respectful.

Strategic context

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Over the last **ten years**, the Parole Board has changed considerably to meet the challenge of an increasing demand and remit.

2015/16

7,148 oral hearings conducted

2025/26

8,835 oral hearings conducted

Our caseload has more than doubled since 2015/16.

This has meant that the demand for our work has increased significantly over the last decade. The total number of hearings we conducted in 2025/26 (both at paper and oral hearings) was 32.5% higher than 2015/2016.

Despite increasing the number of decisions we make, the number of those convicted of a Serious Further Offence (SFO) following a Parole Board release decision remains at or below 0.7%. We are committed to learning from these tragic cases, and this forms part of one of our strategic aims.

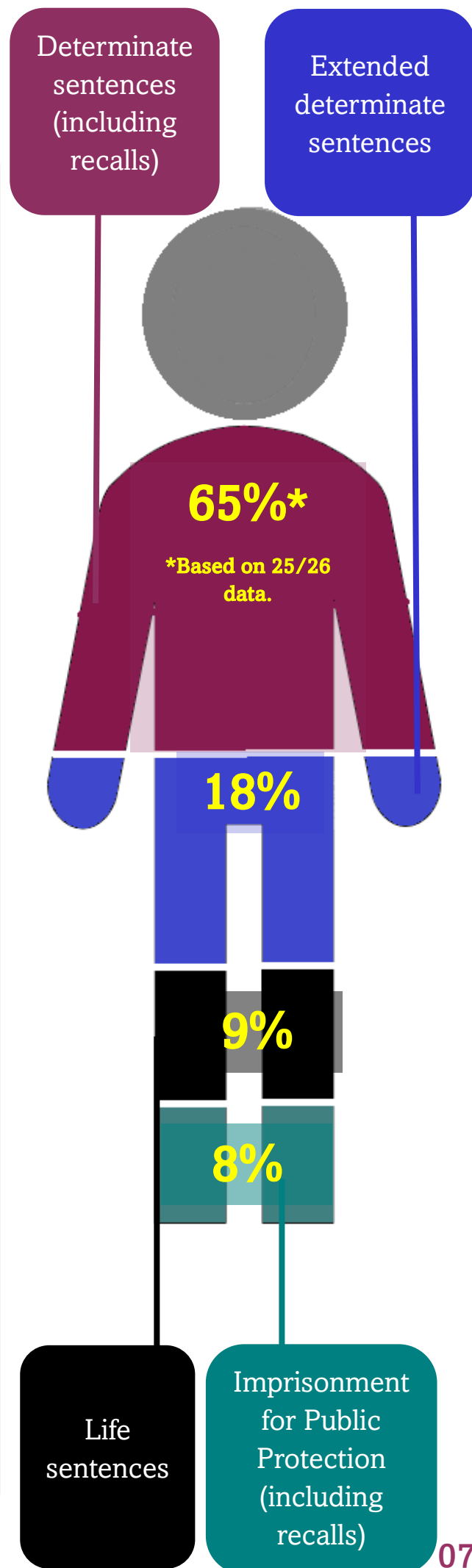
We are now a paperless organisation and 96% of our hearings take place online. Ten years ago, less than 1% of our hearings were held online.


The Parole System Oversight Group (PSOG) was introduced in 2023 to bring together senior leaders from all agencies who collaborate with the Parole Board and form part of the parole system, like probation, prison and psychology services, with the aim of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the end-to end parole process.

Our remit has expanded over the years.

In 2020 the law changed to direct that all terrorism prisoners should be considered by the Parole Board before any automatic release. This led to an increase in referrals and the Parole Board now receives over 200 referrals each year for prisoners convicted of terrorism offences. These cases are managed by a cohort of trained and appropriately vetted members and secretariat staff.

We also welcomed the Government's reforms in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024. From February 2025 those Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners who had not had their licence reviewed by the Parole Board, and who were not yet eligible for automatic termination, were entitled to have an earlier one-off licence termination review by the Parole Board. We created an IPP specific taskforce to provide a dedicated resource to progress these reviews, where it is safe to do so, which is why our IPP caseload has reduced. The changes in the Sentencing Act which received royal assent in January 2026 will lead to a reduction in the number of standard determinate sentence recalls referred to the Board, as many of these are replaced by fixed term release following a recall to prison. In the meantime, the number of standard determinate sentence recalls considered by the Board increased over the last year, due to a significant increase in the overall recall population. The number of life sentence prisoners referred to the Board was unchanged, however they now form a lower percentage of the overall caseload.





Our people - Over the last decade we have more than doubled the size of our membership. Over the next three years we expect our membership to stabilise as we adapt to a changing caseload following the measures in the Sentencing Act which will replace standard recalls with fixed term recalls in the majority of cases.

The professional background of our membership has evolved. As well as recruiting judicial and specialist members such as psychiatrists and psychologists, we have recruited members with expertise in terrorism and law enforcement.

In 2018, only 5% of our members were from minority backgrounds. This figure is now 17%. We are committed to continuing to invest in this as part of one of our strategic objectives.

In the last decade, despite an increase in our caseload of 160%, our Secretariat has grown by 109%, demonstrating our increased efficiency in dealing with our workload.

Around 25% of our secretariat staff are now based at national locations around the country.



Our transparency remains a key priority.

Since 2022, anyone can apply for a hearing to be heard in public. At the time of publication of this strategy, we have conducted nine public hearings.

From 1st April 2025 victims and survivors have been able to apply to observe parole hearings throughout England and Wales. 416 victims applied to observe a hearing in 2025/26 and 82% of applications reviewed were approved. We want to make sure that victims understand the process and will be introducing a number of digital resources to help them.

Changes in legislation in 2018 allowed us to create summaries setting out the reasons for our decisions. In 2025/26 we issued over 2,338 summaries, primarily used by victims and the media to better understand how we have reached our decisions. We are committed to expanding on the information we publish. Further details can be found [here](#).

In 2019, we introduced the reconsideration mechanism, which allows us to revisit our decision if any party thinks there was an error, procedural unfairness or it was an irrational decision. All our reconsideration and set aside decisions are published online and you can view them [here](#).

Increasing the public's understanding of what we do will continue to be a key focus. The Parole Board makes difficult decisions which are far-reaching within communities. It is understandable that the public will sometimes take a keen interest in our work. We welcomed the opportunity to work with the BBC on the Parole documentary and to allow the filming of a number of our oral hearings. There have now been two series broadcast which have helped build awareness of the risk-based decisions we take.

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Our strategy at a glance

Our purpose is to make independent, risk-based decisions about whether prisoners are safe to release into the community.

Our vision is a Parole Board constituted as a Court, which protects the public by making fair, transparent and timely decisions on the safe release of prisoners released into the community.



Our 2025-28 strategic aims

1. Parole decisions which are independent, impartial and fair.
2. Working efficiently and effectively in order to provide value for money and ensure our parole decisions are timely.
3. To be as open and transparent as possible in the way that we work and to support victims and survivors.
4. To be diverse and inclusive in the way that we work and to represent the community.

Myth-busting:

- Parole is not a resentencing exercise.
- Parole is not a route to early release.
- Prisoners do not apply for parole, they are referred by the Secretary of State.
- The Parole Board is independent of Government.
- Most people released from prison each year are released automatically without Parole Board consideration.

We value fairness, independence and transparency.

Our strategic aims

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- To make judicial decisions which are **independent, impartial** and **fair**.
To work **efficiently** and **effectively** to provide value for money and ensure our parole decisions are timely, working collaboratively with key partners to achieve this.
- To be as **open** and **transparent** as possible in the way that we work, to support victims and ensure prisoners understand the parole process.
- To ensure we are **diverse** and **inclusive** in the way that we work, representing the wider community.

To make judicial decisions which are independent, impartial and fair.



In fulfilling its functions, the Parole Board is driven by impartiality and fairness. Making fair decisions, consistent with processes in other courts, respecting the rights of the prisoner whilst prioritising public safety is fundamental. The Board will continue operating like a court by making difficult, risk-based judicial decisions. We will safeguard our independence and operate a reconsideration and set aside mechanism that allows us to look again at decisions, where appropriate. We will provide our members and staff with high quality training to carry out their role effectively and to maintain high standards. We will seek further powers to effectively manage hearings and increase efficiency and compliance with Parole Board directions.

To deliver this we will:

- Continue to publish reconsideration decisions and set aside applications and share the learning from those and Review Committee outcomes with our members to ensure that best practice is embedded in decision-making and our SFO rate remains as low as possible;
- Publish clear, practical and accessible guidance for members and staff following key judgments and legislative changes that impact decision-making;
- Complete the delivery of a new programme of member induction, Member Case Assessment (MCA), chair and continuous development training with a focus on high quality, evidence-based and timely judicial decisions, made within a structured decision-making framework and applying the Parole Board Rules;
- Enable the new Director of Education and Learning, Training Co-ordinator, and Practice & Quality Developers to deliver high-quality training and quality assurance outcomes and ensure all members receive post accreditation feedback from the quality development programme.
- Seek a power for the Parole Board to deal with contempt of court, and a power to restrict and prevent the publication of any matter covered in a public hearing, and review the need for more powers to help increase efficiency and compliance.

Key results:

Maintaining and developing the Parole Board's culture of high quality, fair and prompt decision making;

A new contempt of court and a restriction order power to reinforce our case management powers and strengthen our ability to hold public hearings;

A consolidated and streamlined set of Parole Board Rules.

There is a risk...

that delays lead to increased **litigation** and successful compensation claims affecting our ability to make best use of our budget.

that our **quality assurance** processes are insufficiently robust and could lead to an increase in granted reconsiderations if decisions are unclear.

that sensitive information may be released without the **right powers** to prevent this.

To work **efficiently** and **effectively** in order to provide value for money and ensure our parole decisions are timely, working collaboratively with key partners to achieve this.



As well as delivering fair judicial decisions, the Board must work efficiently and effectively, securing best value for the public purse. This means ensuring we have sufficient funding in place to discharge the functions of the Board, achieving high-quality decisions, to our quality standards, whilst keeping on top of demand. We also want to maintain productive relationships with stakeholders to deliver this and ensure that our members and staff are fully supported and equipped to discharge the unique functions of the Board. We want to work innovatively and creatively, learn from feedback and research and harness technology.

To deliver this we will:

- Implement the measures in the Sentencing Act which will remove the majority of standard determinate recalls from our caseload and ensure that the remaining caseload is allocated fairly between the membership;
- Continue to increase our chairing capability and review the need for further recruitment of specialist and judicial members;
- Develop member and staff capability to ensure members are supported to undertake the full range of their accredited work to meet demand;
- Roll out a new operating model so that more cases are managed end to end by case managers, who can undertake non judicial decisions under delegated authority;
- Harness technology and trial the use of tools to improve the efficiency of administrative tasks and develop bespoke solutions;
- In collaboration with partners in HMPPS (i) capture accurate data on the performance of the parole system (ii) improve the timeliness of cases through the system and (iii) reduce the adjournment rate of oral hearings;

Key results:

Increased throughput of cases and a reduction in the active caseload;

A reduction in the waiting time for the listings queue;

Improved timeliness of cases through the system.

There is a risk...

that we do not have sufficient **member capability** to keep on top of demand leading to delays in taking decisions on cases;

that we are unable to deliver all of our **digitalisation** programme to the timescale and quality required and cannot become more efficient in our processes;

that we do not receive **the resources** we need due to financial constraints in the public sector, meaning we cannot manage the demand in parole referrals.

To be as **open** and **transparent** as possible in the way that we work, to support victims and ensure prisoners understand the parole process



Open justice is a key principle of the justice system. Transparency is important to show the public, victims and survivors and prisoners how parole works, why the Parole Board makes judicial decisions and how panels go about decision-making. We are acutely aware that victims and survivors of crime already have a very difficult journey through the criminal justice system before becoming involved with the parole process. We want every victim who is involved with the Parole Board to be treated with dignity and respect and every victim, witness and prisoner to understand what we are doing.

To deliver this we will:

- Ensure that victims who are signed up to the Victim Contact Scheme, are able to apply to and observe parole hearings with greater ease and support across the country from 1 April 2025;
- Train members and staff to ensure they have the necessary guidance to assist in making victim observed hearings effective;
- Hold more public hearings each year which are accessible to members of the public and the media and provide an improved observer experience;
- Pilot the replacement of the publication of decision summaries with redacted fully reasoned panel decisions, prior to deciding whether this can be rolled-out in all cases;
- Improve the accessibility and quality of information on our website;
- Work with the media and key stakeholders to improve public and prisoner understanding of the parole process through regular engagement opportunities;
- Foster excellent working relationships with other agencies in the criminal justice system.

Key results:

Victims, who wish to engage with the parole process, feel well supported and understand what is happening;

The public will have a better understanding of how parole works;

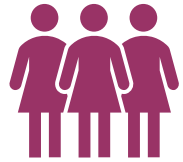
Reporting on the Parole Board is well-informed and factually correct.

There is a risk...

that **adverse publicity** in the media or on social media about one or more release decisions undermines public confidence in the Parole Board.

sensitive information may be released if we do not have the **right powers** to guard against this which may undermine confidence in the Parole Board.

To ensure we are **diverse** and **inclusive** in the way that we work, representing the wider community



We will value and invest in our most valuable resource, our people. By working in collaboration with all staff and members on the decisions and issues that affect them, we will ensure fairness and equality of opportunity. We will foster a working environment that is safe, supportive, and encourages innovation and personal development. As we grow the membership, we want to ensure that our membership reflects the diversity of the wider community in the same way that our staff diversity does, and we will continue to monitor the proportionality of parole outcomes.

To deliver this we will:

- Restructure the Senior Leadership Team and Secretariat to create greater resilience, position ourselves to develop strategically and ensure that we are better able to meet our business objectives whilst providing progression opportunities for staff;
- Promote a diverse and inclusive organisation by providing opportunities for peer support and engagement, ensuring our people are involved in decisions which affect them;
- Ensure the recruitment of new members is reflective of the wider community;
- Continue to publish parole outcomes by ethnicity and gender;
- Ensure that staff get the training they need to carry out their roles effectively, access opportunities for personal development, and have their wellbeing supported;
- Provide members with development opportunities and support to discharge the functions of the Parole Board;
- Develop a People Strategy which set out how the Parole Board will develop its workforce, skills, leadership, and culture and deliver our objectives;
- Create a new sub-committee for “People, Workforce and Culture” to reinforce the governance of the Board and to monitor the progress of all this activity.

Key results:

A diverse and engaged membership of approximately 400;

High performing and supported staff with positive staff engagement scores;

Robust and effective governance structures which support an inclusive culture, enabling us to discharge our role effectively and efficiently.

There is a risk...

that a **lack of diversity** amongst staff and members gives the perception that the Parole Board does not represent the diversity of the community it serves and that impacts on its ability to make fair decisions.