

Parole Board Decision Summaries

WHAT DOES THE PAROLE BOARD DO?

Our job is to determine if someone is safe to release. We do so with great care, and **public protection** is our number one priority.

We deal with 25,000 cases a year which are referred to us once the prisoner has served the punishment determined by the courts. We act as a court-like body and are **independent** from government.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION?

Hearings are conducted by Parole Board Members who sit as a panel. They are **public appointees** recruited by the Secretary of State for Justice. All Parole Board members receive extensive training. They come from a variety of backgrounds, including specialist members who may be judges, psychiatrists or psychologists. Panels are made up of 1 to 3 members and specialist members will be allocated based on the facts of a particular case.

HOW DOES AN ORAL HEARING WORK?

The panel will consult a wide range of reports and hear evidence from professionals that are working with the prisoner.

They are looking for **evidence of change** in behaviour and attitude since their offence was committed: what was it about their situation that led to offending behaviour? Have they addressed those issues?

HOW DOES THE PANEL REACH ITS DECISION?

Parole Board decisions are solely focused on whether a prisoner would represent a **significant risk to the public** after release. It is up to the offender to demonstrate that they are safe for release, and that is hard to do.

If the panel decide, after weighing the evidence, that an offender should be released - this is not because they think that they pose no risk, but that the likelihood of re-offending is now small enough to be effectively managed in the community. The prisoner's Offender Manager (also called a Probation Officer) is required to submit a **risk management plan**, outlining how they will manage the offender in the community if released. The panel will consider whether this plan is robust enough when making their decision.

Once an individual is released, they will be managed in the community by the National Probation Service for the remainder of their sentence under a strict set of **licence conditions**. A breach of any of these could result in a return to prison. If anyone has information regarding a potential breach of a licence condition, they should contact the National Probation Service or the police.

WHAT DON'T WE DO?

It is not our role to assess whether someone has been sufficiently punished or whether their original sentence was long enough.

WHAT ROLE CAN VICTIMS HAVE IN THE HEARING?

Victims can submit a Victim Personal Statement (VPS). This is about the impact the crime had on the victim at the time and continues to have in the present day. A victim can ask for certain conditions to be set should the offender be released, for example to include an exclusion zone of where the victim lives.

The VPS does not directly influence the decision. This is because the Parole Board's focus is risk assessment and the VPS does not contain information about risk. If a victim does have information that relates to a prisoner's risk then that information should be passed on to the probation service, who will consider including it in their report. The VPS does allow the panel to direct questions to the prisoner regarding the impact of their behaviour, insight into their behaviour, remorse and empathy. It gives the panel insight into the original offence and its impact. It also helps the panel decide on appropriate licence conditions, if the prisoner is to be released.

WHAT IS A SUMMARY?

A summary will describe the reasons for a panel's decision. A summary will include details of what evidence was received (i.e. evidence and recommendations of individual witnesses) and explain the assessment of evidence; and how the panel came to the conclusion they did.

WHY IS THIS IN A SUMMARY?

The summary will set out information about the prisoner's risk and the prisoner's progress in custody. If a prisoner is going to be released, the summary will include some information about the licence conditions that will be in place to enable the National Probation Service to manage them in the community.

Information contained in the document will only be what is relevant to the panel's decision.

WHAT WILL NOT BE IN SUMMARY?

Details of the offence(s) will not be included to protect the privacy of victims where possible.

Information about specific licence conditions, including release addresses and exclusion zones will not be included to protect the safety of the offender.

There will be occasions that information will be amended or withheld completely because of **Data Protection** principles. As we are acting as a court we can disclose personal information but only where it is fair, relevant, limited to what is *necessary* and is **relevant to risk**.

This includes information relating to a person's:

- Racial or ethnic origin;
- Political opinions;
- Religious or philosophical beliefs;
- Trade union membership;
- Genetic data, biometric data;
- Data concerning health (mental and physical);
- Sex life;
- Sexual orientation;
- Criminal history

Information can also be redacted, amended or withheld completely if the information could or does:

- Adversely affect the **successful rehabilitation** or progress towards rehabilitation of any offender;
- Place the safety of any person/s in jeopardy, through threats or other harmful behaviour;
- Pertain to a young offender - under the age of 18;
- Pertain to any offender released from a secure Mental Health Unit;
- Breach any outstanding court orders;
- Relate to any ongoing investigations;
- Threaten national security;
- Go against the public interest to disclose

WILL THE OFFENDER KNOW A SUMMARY HAS BEEN REQUESTED?

The Parole Board tells the offender when a request for a summary has been received and whether it came from a Victim Liaison Officer (VLO), the media or a member of the public. No names are ever provided to the offender.