

Martin Jones, Chief Executive

6 August 2018

the
**Parole
Board**

working with others
to protect the public

David Gordon
Commission on Justice in Wales
Welsh Government
Crown Building
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Dear Mr Gordon

Commission on Justice in Wales – submission from the Parole Board

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the Parole Board for England and Wales to submit comments on this Consultation, beyond the official deadline. This extension is greatly appreciated.

The Parole Board is an independent body that carries out risk assessments on prisoners to determine whether they can be safely released into the community. It was established in 1968 under the Criminal Justice Act 1967 and became an independent executive non-departmental public body on 1 July 1996 under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

The cases dealt with by the Board include all life sentences, indeterminate sentences of imprisonment for public protection (IPP), parole eligible determinate sentences and many recall cases. The Board can also advise on moves of some prisoners from a closed to an open prison.

The Parole Board deals with approximately 25,000 cases a year, which are referred to us by the Secretary of State for Justice. Parole Board decisions are solely focused on whether a prisoner can safely be released back into the community. The over-riding priority when making such decisions is the protection of the public.

This response is based on feedback from Parole Board members and ongoing work being undertaken in collaboration with colleagues in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) at a regional level. For ease of reference we have set our response out under headings.

Prison Establishments

We have concern that there is a lack of categories of prisons based in Wales, including those for young offenders, which can have a significant impact on rehabilitation whilst in custody, and often involving difficulties for offenders maintaining contact with family and other support. Women and young offenders are very poorly served.

As we understand it 39% of Welsh prisoners are held in custody in prisons in England. Developing services geared for Welsh prisoners will need to consider the whole estate across England and Wales and not just those establishments located geographically in Wales.

Suitable Release Accommodation

We believe there is an URGENT need for more approved premises in Wales, including for women. The pressure on the current Approved Premises means that we are sometimes told that no spaces will be available for more than six months. This makes the assessment of risk at the time of actual release difficult, and creates great frustration for offenders, probation officers and Parole Board members alike. It can impact on resettlement as some offenders are offered a space in another part of the country, often a significant distance from home.

Offenders with Mental Health Issues or other health issues

It can be very difficult to access mental health aftercare which can significantly delay the release of an offender. Travelling is a major issue for offenders who may have to travel for hours to and from appointments with services, i.e. Forensic Mental Health is located in the North and South coastal strip. As it currently stands we do not believe that there are sufficient resources to meet the demand for mental health services. As NHS Wales covers the whole country there is potential for a much more joined up approach to criminal justice and Mental Health.

We are concerned about the consistency of provision of treatments where offenders are transferred from English prisons to Welsh prisons, particularly for drug treatments.

Women Prisoners

There are currently no female prisons or approved premises for women in Wales and this creates significant issues for female offenders maintaining contact with family, whilst in custody, and for resettlement, once release is directed by the Board.

Welsh Language Provision

Prisoners must be provided with services and resources in Welsh, if this is their first/preferred language. We have been in discussions with HMPPS colleagues on developing options for offenders who wish to communicate in Welsh during their parole review. We are about to publish our revised Welsh Language Scheme (subject to approval from the Welsh Language Commissioner) and are committed to supporting offenders, wherever possible. However, we are clear that this will only succeed by a whole system approach and we would like to see appropriate resources to enable prisons and probation staff to meet these needs. We would like to see some more data that sets out the demand for these services so that appropriate services can be commissioned. We are aware that in Gwynedd there are some 400 probation clients of whom around 375 prefer to speak in Welsh, around half of whom are in custody.

We also wish to support the Public Appointments Team within the Ministry of Justice to consider how to attract Welsh speakers and those with an understanding of the administration of justice in Wales to apply to become Parole Board members, in order to meet demand.

Probation Services

The Probation Service is currently introducing the Offender Management in Custody model (OMiC) and we would want to ensure that the needs of Welsh offenders are adequately addressed. The Government has recently issued a consultation on the future of probation services and we would caution against making any recommendations about probation in isolation of this work.

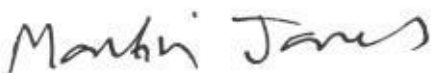
Conclusion

We believe a partnership approach is required that looks at the needs across the spectrum of levels of security, custody and community, health and penal systems, gender and age, and takes into account the geography, the buildings and the provision within the establishments. A whole system approach that aims to get things working together.

We are aware that the Justice in Wales Operations and Strategy group considers many of these points and we hope that they will be consulted. We would also make reference to the recent report from the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University & University of South Wales "Imprisonment in Wales: a factfile" which articulates many of the points we have mentioned.

The Parole Board would be happy to provide further detail on any of the points above and is keen to see how this inquiry progresses.

Yours sincerely



Martin Jones
Chief Executive
The Parole Board for England and Wales