

**Martin Jones, Chief Executive**

2 June 2021

the  
**Parole  
Board**

working with others  
to protect the public

Ed Cornmell

By email: [Ed.Cornmell3@justice.gov.uk](mailto:Ed.Cornmell3@justice.gov.uk)

Dear Ed

### **PAROLE BOARD BUSINESS AND COVID**

I am writing this letter to thank senior leaders and staff on the ground in HMPPS for their support and hard work in maintaining parole business in the face of the significant disruption caused by COVID-19.

As you will know in March 2020 the Parole Board took the decision to pause all face to face hearings to ensure the safety of all participants in the process. We committed to progress cases via remote hearings and paper reviews.

Through hard work, co-operation and coordination with HMPPS, MOJ digital, and others, we have progressed significantly more cases than expected and reduced overall waiting times for parole hearings.

According to the latest figures since COVID hit:

- We have made 28,202 Parole Board decisions (including sending a case to an oral hearing);
- 11,138 remote hearings have taken place;
- 4,658 directions for release have been made (more than we would ordinarily expect as our work has accelerated). Our release rate has been broadly consistent with previous years;
- 13,784 prisoners have been lawfully detained in custody following a Parole Board decision that their imprisonment remains necessary for the protection of the public;
- The number of people waiting for a parole hearing is down by around a third.

Whilst over 99% of hearings have taken place remotely, a limited number of "Covid safe" face to face hearings have now taken place, primarily for prisoners with vulnerabilities, in line with risk assessments agreed with the local prison.

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These agreed arrangements seek to minimise the number of people needing to attend in person and ensure that adequate social distancing can be maintained.

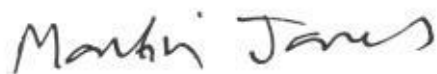
I expect the overwhelming majority of hearings to continue to be taking place remotely until the Autumn. It is a judicial decision whether a case is suitable for a remote hearing or not. Dependent on the latest Government advice, it is likely that an increased proportion of cases will be able to take place in prisons from October onwards, but we remain ready to switch to a wholly remote model in the event of a spike in COVID cases.

Given the fact that over 99% of parole hearings have been taking place remotely over the last fifteen months we see no reason why a very significant proportion of cases should not be taking place remotely in the future once the risk from the virus has dissipated, provided they are appropriate and fair. Our starting point is that all cases should be suitable to take place remotely; but that each case will need to be considered on its individual merits. The Parole Board will only undertake a face to face hearing where it is safe to do so. Even if a case needs to take place in person, remote witness attendance will of course remain an option, where appropriate.

As we have discussed, it would be helpful if we could keep under review the equipment available to facilitate remote hearings across the prison and probation estate to ensure that all parties reap the maximum benefits from the new model. Particularly given that 'hybrid' hearings are likely to increase, so properly equipped rooms would help to resolve potential issues arising with both remote and hybrid hearings going forward.

I would be very happy for this letter to be cascaded.

Yours sincerely



Martin Jones  
**Chief Executive**  
The Parole Board for England and Wales

Cc  
Sonia Flynn  
Chris Jennings  
Gordon Davison  
Angela Cossins