

# Statement to Parliament: Transparency of the Parole Board and Victim Support

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Parole Board's decision to release John Worboys and the government's response to the issues raised by this case.

I should like to start by echoing the statement made by my predecessor at the weekend, and to express my unreserved sympathy to all of the victims. They will never erase the emotional trauma of his crimes and the Parole Board's decision to order his release must have brought back painful memories. These were horrific crimes and I take the concerns raised, including by many colleagues of this House, very seriously.

John Worboys was convicted of 19 offences in 2009, and received an indeterminate sentence of imprisonment for public protection with a minimum tariff of 8 years in custody. Following the expiry of the tariff, he was eligible for review by the Parole Board, which was required to consider whether to release him.

The Board reviewed his case at a hearing on 8 November 2017, by which time he had served 10 years in custody including a period on remand. A three person panel considered a detailed dossier of evidence. Its subsequent decision to release him was communicated to my department on 3 January.

There are two main concerns in respect of the contact with victims that I think it essential to address today: whether the correct procedures were followed in this case; and whether those procedures are right, or whether improvements are needed.

Turning first to whether procedures were followed in this case, all victims of the crimes for which he was convicted have a statutory right to receive information about parole hearings and decisions under the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS). On the basis of the information I have received since arriving in the department yesterday, it appears that in relation to these victims, those who opted to remain in contact via the VCS were informed of the parole hearing. Of the victims currently in contact with the Scheme, those who chose to be informed of the Parole Board decision by phone or email were contacted immediately on 3 January, although I have just become aware of a case where a victim did not receive the email. Letters were also sent immediately to those who chose to be informed that way, but these of course took longer to arrive. Some victims entitled to this contact chose not to opt in, which of course is their right.

Any victims whose crimes were not prosecuted do not fall within the statutory remit of the VCS, and so the arrangements are different. Discretionary contact can be considered, but in this instance, the National Probation Service has no record of any requests for discretionary contact.

However, while it appears that the correct procedures were followed, the fact that some victims learned of the decision from the media suggests that there is a need to review these procedures and examine whether lessons can be learned and improvements can be made.

It is a priority for this government that victims of rape and sexual assault have full confidence in the criminal justice system. Sentence lengths for these horrific crimes have increased by over 30% since 2010 and more victims are coming forward, but there is still more to do.

I should be absolutely clear that I think that that the Parole Board should remain an independent body, responsible for making decisions about the ongoing risk that individuals pose after serving their tariff.

But I agree with my predecessor's assessment that there is a strong case to review the case for transparency in the process for parole decisions and how victims are appropriately engaged in that process, and consider the case for changes in policy, practice or the Parole Board Rules, or other guidance or procedures including the Victims' Code. With that in mind, I can confirm that I have instructed my officials to establish a review to examine these questions and I will share more information on this shortly.

I think it is appropriate that the department leads this work, but that it consults victims' groups and others. I have spoken to the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, and the Chair of the Parole Board, Nick Hardwick, to discuss what changes we could make and how best to draw on their expertise and insight in this review.

Finally, I note that the Chair of the Justice Select Committee has announced his intention to hold an evidence session. My department stands ready to provide the committee with any information it may require.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to prioritise this review and it will conclude before Easter. I hope that this course of action reassures the House of the importance and priority I attach to this. As such I commend this statement to the House.

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## **Press release: Work starts on major Northumberland flood scheme**

Work has started on a major £600,000 flood scheme which will protect homes and businesses in a Northumberland coastal town from tidal flooding.

The project in the Cowpen area of Blyth will see an existing 180m flood wall upgraded and extended to create a 380m wall to reduce the risk of flooding to the town.

When taking climate change into account these new defences, from Crawford Street to Quay Road, will protect over 1,000 properties into the future while also offering immediate improved protection from tidal flooding to 58 properties.

The work is being funded by the Environment Agency but is being built by Port of Blyth as part of their wider redevelopment of the adjacent Bates and Wimbourne Terminals. The flood defences are due to be completed in Spring 2018.

While the Environment Agency has advised on the specifications and design of the flood wall, Port of Blyth will own and maintain the wall. The Environment Agency will carry out annual inspections.

Leila Huntington, the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Manager for the North East, said:

This is a great example of a partnership project which protects homes and businesses now and into the future. We have been working closely with Port of Blyth to support the development of a flood wall as part of a wider land development scheme.

By working together it means a greater standard of flood protection improvements can be provided at a reduced cost and with less disruption to the local community.

We're committed to increasing protection for our at-risk communities and are continuously looking for opportunities to collaborate with our partners and provide the best possible solutions.

Martin Lawlor, Chief Executive of Port of Blyth, added:

This project is a real win-win for the town of Blyth and the Port. As a result of this programme of flood defence work, a huge number of homes and businesses within Blyth will be protected by the flood risks presented by global warming.

On top of this, the scheme enables the Port to move forward with our development plans for connecting our Bates and Wimbourne Quay terminals which will attract inward investment into the town.

A Flood Warning service is available for Blyth residents considered to be at risk of flooding, one for the North Sea at Blyth and another for the North Sea at Blyth Town Centre.

To check if you are at risk of flooding and to sign up for free flood warnings call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or visit the [gov.uk web pages](#)

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L-R Phil Rothwell, Chair of the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Martin Lawlor, Chief Executive of Port of Blyth, and Tristan Drought from the Environment Agency.

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## **Press release: Support deal worth £100m agreed for Puma helicopters**

£100 million deal to provide future support to the Royal Air Force's fleet of Puma HC Mk2 helicopters. Crown copyright.

The deal will sustain around 25 jobs at Airbus Helicopters UK Ltd in Oxfordshire at the company's base in Kidlington and at RAF Benson, where the front line squadrons are based and many more across the supply chain.

The support arrangement will enable planned and responsive Puma operations to take place and ensure the maintenance of the aircraft as it provides support to ground troops on the battlefield and to civil and emergency services responding to disasters and emergencies.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin said:

This £100 million investment will ensure our Puma helicopters continue to transport British troops and kit to the front line – helping us provide vital support quickly in rapidly evolving situations.

The deal – part of our £178 billion Equipment Plan – will not only give our Armed Forces the kit they need to deal with intensifying

global threats, but will also sustain British jobs at Airbus Helicopters.

The contract, which is intended to eventually provide support until the Puma HC Mk2 out of service date, currently planned for March 2025, will provide technical services to support safety management and fault investigation and materiel support including repair and overhaul of major components. It will also provide a training service for RAF maintenance engineers.

The Puma HC Mk2 was the first helicopter deployed to the Caribbean from the UK to provide emergency humanitarian relief to the islands left devastated by Hurricane Irma back in September 2017.

Deploying rapidly, the aircraft provided relief to people who saw their homes destroyed and helped deliver supplies and aid as part of the wider UK emergency response within 72 hours of receiving the call. Separately, the Puma HC Mk2 has been deployed to Afghanistan since 2015 as part of the UK's contribution to the NATO Afghanistan Mission named Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT.

Air Vice Marshal Graham Russell, Director Helicopters, for the MOD's procurement organisation, Defence Equipment and Support said:

The Puma HC Mk2 is carrying out a vital role in troop transport, load movement and humanitarian operations around the world. The upgraded helicopters represent a significant increase in capability over the Mk1.

This support arrangement, which embraces learning from the early days of operating the Mk2 aircraft, will ensure that cost-effective support is always available to allow the user to deliver the capability wherever and whenever it is needed.

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## [News story: Redundancy payments hotline restored](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The Redundancy Payment Service helpline is operating as normal once again.