

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.

Press release: Work starts on major Northumberland flood scheme

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.

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](https://www.gov.uk/web-pages)

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.

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

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

[Press release: Trade Bill second reading](#)

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox today sets out how the government's Trade Bill will benefit businesses and consumers, as the UK progresses towards leaving the EU and shapes its own trade policy for the first time in 40 years.

Dr Fox will explain during the second reading in Parliament today (Tuesday 9 January), how the bill will provide continuity and stability for businesses and consumers by creating the powers necessary to replicate existing EU trade arrangements in UK law.

It will also establish a Trade Remedies Authority to take back powers from the EU to protect UK industry from unfair and injurious trading practices, such as dumping.

This comes after the Treasury's Customs Bill received its second reading yesterday (Monday 8 January), which will allow the government to create a standalone customs regime and amend the VAT and excise regimes. Together the bills will deliver the necessary powers for the UK to be prepared from day one of leaving the EU.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

International trade creates jobs, helps lower prices for consumers and contributes to a growing economy – our Trade Bill will provide maximum certainty and continuity for business and consumers.

As an international economic department our priority is to ensure that we continue to benefit from the trade agreements that the EU already has with other countries, and that we maintain the flow of free trade in both directions at the point we leave. Stability now with the flexibility to seize new opportunities in the future is what we seek.

Measures in the bill will only be used to implement any changes needed as a result of transitioning existing trade arrangements that the UK is part of through our membership of the EU. These have already been scrutinised at an EU level and have been overseen in the UK by the EU Select Committees.

Countries with this type of trade agreement with the EU account for some 12% of UK trade. Ensuring that this trade continues will provide certainty and stability for workers, consumers, businesses, and our international trading partners.

The bill will also provide the legislative basis for UK businesses to continue to have guaranteed access to global public procurement markets worth £1.3 trillion every year, by enabling the UK to implement its obligations as an independent member of the multi-national Government Procurement Agreement (GPA). This will protect continuity of access for UK companies overseas and ensure that we can still tap into international expertise and obtain the best deal for UK taxpayers.

Once the UK leaves the EU, it will take up an independent seat at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva – allowing the UK government to shape global trading policy. DIT has already set up 14 Trade Working Groups across 21 countries to progress existing trade and investment relationships.

Further information

The Trade Bill does not provide for the implementation of trade agreements with countries that the EU does not have an existing trade agreement with and the powers in the bill cannot be used for the implementation of future free

trade agreements with new countries.

The Trade Bill provides the necessary powers so that trade arrangements transitioned with third countries can be fully implemented within UK law, and remain operable over time after EU exit.

Since the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 came into force, the agreements the UK has ratified have already been through a domestic Parliamentary scrutiny process under that Act. The Government has made clear its intention to ratify all EU free trade agreements entered into during our EU membership.

Parliament can approve the terms of the UK membership of the GPA via the process under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

DIT has already sought views on the UK's approach to its future trade policy and published [responses](#) to the [White Paper](#) published last October and we continue to seek views as we develop our trade policy.

The government is preparing for when the UK operates its own independent trade remedies system to protect domestic industry injured by goods being unfairly traded, or by unforeseen surges in imports. It has introduced legislation in the [Trade Bill](#) to set up a new, independent, arms-length body, the Trade Remedies Authority, to carry out these investigations and make recommendations for duties to be imposed. The framework for the new system that the TRA will operate is set out in the [Taxation \(Cross-border Trade\) Bill](#).