



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

# **Provisional statistics on the timeliness of criminal court cases**

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## Background

This note provides provisional statistics on the timeliness of criminal cases heard in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court to support the "*Swift and Sure Justice: The Government's Plans for Reform of the Criminal Justice System*" white paper.

This release provides detailed provisional statistics on the timeliness of criminal proceedings, from offence to sentencing, by the different stages in the process and the type of offences brought to justice. The following new information is being made available:

- The mean time taken from offence to completion by offence type
- The median time taken from offence to completion by offence type
- The average time taken from offence to completion by initiation type
- The average waiting time in the Crown Court by stage of plea
- The estimated average waiting time for witnesses

The "offence to completion time" refers to the time taken between the date an offence is committed and date of the final acquittal or sentence outcome (completion) of the defendant's case, in either the magistrates' courts or the Crown Court.

The time between the date of an offence and the date of charge/laying of information involves gathering evidence and charging or laying information against the defendant.

The time between the date of the first hearing in the magistrates' court, also known as the first listing, and the date a case was completed in the magistrates' courts or Crown Court, relates to the time taken to conclude the case in court. Of those cases sent or committed to the Crown Court, this includes the time is spent by the defendant waiting for a trial hearing or other main hearing to conclude the case in the event of a guilty plea.

Statistics are regularly published in the Court Statistics Quarterly Bulletin on the timeliness of cases from offence to completion and the average waiting time in the Crown Court. This publication can be found at the following internet address:

[www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/courts-and-sentencing/judicial-quarterly](http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/courts-and-sentencing/judicial-quarterly)

## The average time taken from offence to completion

Since the distribution of the time taken includes a large number of cases with a relatively shorter time between offence and completion, and a smaller number of longer-running cases, the median provides a useful measure for understanding how long cases typically take to process. The median time provides a measure of the middle point in the distribution of time taken, with half of cases taking less than the median time and the other half of cases taking longer.

For criminal cases concluded in 2011, the average offence to completion time for all criminal cases was 154 days; however half of cases are completed within 133 days or fewer.

The average time taken from charge/laying of information to completion for all criminal cases was 67 days, with 34 days being spent between charge/laying of information to first listing and 33 days between first listing and completion in the criminal courts.

Of the cases concluding in 2011, around half of cases were completed in 45 days or fewer from the date of charge or laying of information. Similarly half of cases took longer than 45 days.

Table 1 provides the both the mean (average) and median time taken from offence to completion by stages in the process, for defendants involved in summary criminal damage, theft from shop, actual bodily harm and common assault offences. These are high volume offences and as a result are less likely to be skewed by extremely long or short case durations. Quality assurance has been completed on the information in table 1.

Provisional statistics on the offence to completion time by all offences are planned for publication for September 2012, following further quality assurance on the other offences on the administrative dataset.

**Table 1. Average time taken by stage of proceedings by offence, all completed criminal cases, England and Wales, 2011**

Offence	Average number of days from offence to completion				Median number of days	
	Offence to charge or laying of information	Charge or laying of information to first listing	First listing to completion	Offence to completion	Charge or laying of information to completion	Offence to completion
Theft from shops	18	14	24	56	18	27
Common assault & actual bodily harm	33	17	77	127	69	94
Summary criminal & malicious damage	29	15	36	80	29	50

Source: Libra Management Information System Timeliness Analysis Report (TAR) and CREST linked court data, HM Courts and Tribunals Service

## The average time from offence to completion by initiation type

In charged cases the defendant is arrested and formally accused of a crime at a police station. In summons cases the information is laid, whereby the defendant receives a written summons advising that an action has been taken against them, and that they are required either to appear in person, or to respond in writing, to the court regarding the alleged offence.

On average criminal cases initiated by summons take longer to complete than cases initiated by charge, due to the longer time taken from the offence to first listing in the magistrates' court.

In 2011, the average time from offence to completion for all criminal cases for those summonsed was 182 days compared with 109 days for those charged.

Table 2 and table 3 provide the average time from offence to completion for charge and summons cases by stage of proceedings.

Table 2. Average time taken (days) by stage of proceedings for all defendants in completed charge cases, England and Wales, 2011

Completion	Charge cases			
	Offence to charge	Charge to first listing	First listing to completion	Offence to completion
Offence to magistrates' court completion	37	15	34	<b>86</b>
Offence to completion in all criminal courts	37	15	57	<b>109</b>

Table 3. Average time taken by stage of proceedings for all defendants in completed summons cases, England and Wales, 2011

Completion type	Summons cases			
	Offence to laying of information	Laying of information to first listing	First listing to completion	Offence to completion
Offence to magistrates' court completion	118	47	16	<b>181</b>
Offence to completion in all criminal courts	117	47	17	<b>182</b>

Source: Libra Management Information System Timeliness Analysis Report (TAR) and CREST linked court data, HM Courts and Tribunals Service

## The average waiting time in the Crown Court by stage of plea

The 'average waiting time' refers to the average time between the date of sending or committal to the Crown Court and the start of the substantive Crown Court hearing.

Defendants can enter a guilty plea at various stages in the court process, such as at the magistrates' court initial hearing, the plea and case management hearing (PCMH), after a trial date is set, on the day of the trial or even as late as during the trial. The earlier an accepted guilty plea is entered, the sooner a case can conclude.

Overall defendants who enter a guilty plea are dealt with faster than those who enter a not guilty plea, since a full trial is not required to reach a verdict and sentencing can occur sooner if required. In 2011, the 'average waiting time', for defendants where a not guilty plea was entered, was 24 week (171 days) compared to 12 weeks (84 days) when a guilty plea was entered.

Similarly, defendants who enter a guilty plea before or at the PCMH are dealt with faster than those who enter a plea later in the process. On average defendants who enter a guilty plea before or at the PCMH wait eight weeks (58 days), compared to 21 weeks (150 days) for those who enter a guilty plea later in the court process.

Table 4. Average waiting times for defendants dealt with in the Crown Court, by plea, England and Wales, 2011

Plea entered	Average Waiting Time (weeks)		
	All trial cases	Committed for trial (Either-way offence)	Sent for trial (Indictable only Offence)
Not guilty plea	24.4	21.8	28.6
All Guilty plea	12.1	10.4	15.1
- At Plea or PCMH	8.2	6.9	10.8
- After PCMH	21.4	19.4	24.7
- Other point	11.8	10.2	14.5
All cases	15.8	13.7	19.5

Source: HM Courts and Tribunals Service CREST system

### The average waiting time for witnesses on the day of trial

In November 2011, witnesses waited an estimated two hours on average before giving their evidence in the Crown Court and an hour and a half in the magistrates' courts.

Management information on waiting times has sourced from the witness waiting time survey, which is an internal survey conducted to help understand and monitor case management. This survey is carried out twice a year and is based on a limited number of cases.

## Data sources & notes

### Timeliness statistics

Experimental statistics on timeliness of cases are sourced from the administrative data systems used in the magistrates' courts (Libra MIS) and the Crown Court (CREST), with overall timeliness data calculated by linking together records held on the two data systems.

The datasets are produced by firstly collecting all Crown Court cases disposed of in the specified period and looking for a match for the defendant with the same offence in the magistrates' court data. Records are linked based on a combination of variables including given name, middle name, family name, date of birth, sex, postcode, a committal date, and two identifiers: the Arrest/Summons Number (ASN) and Pre-Trials Issue Unique Reference Number (PTIURN). Where the case is fully disposed in the magistrates' courts during the specified time period, the timeliness data for such cases is collected from the Libra MIS extract and added to the dataset.

A range of quality assurance measures have been carried out on the data. These include ensuring the data are complete, case events follow a logical date sequence with recorded offence information, and all breach cases are excluded. The CREST system and Libra MIS reports provide good quality data and a high rate of data linking, with typically around 95 per cent of Crown Court records on CREST being successfully linked to a defendant recorded at a magistrates' court case on the Libra MIS extract.

The offence to completion timeliness statistics provided here include all criminal cases which have received a verdict and concluded in the 2011, in either the magistrates' courts or Crown Court with the exclusion of cases with an offence to completion time greater than ten years. Only one offence is counted for each defendant in the case. If two or more offences with a case complete on the same day, the case with the longest duration is counted.

The average waiting time statistics are sourced from CREST. Guilty plea classification is based on guilty pleas to all counts and not guilty plea classification is based on cases where defendant pleads not guilty to all or some counts. Statistics excludes cases where a bench warrant is issued, no plea is recorded, there is an indictment to lie on file and the defendant is found unfit to plead. The figures on the timing of the guilty plea are based on valid conviction and verdict dates, and pleas entered after the PCMH include those cases which crack as a result of a late guilty plea.

### Management information on witness waiting times

Management information provided on the average witness waiting times has been sourced from the witness waiting time survey. This is an internal survey conducted on a biannual basis. It is issued to, and completed by, every Crown and Magistrates' court in June and November of each year. The survey is conducted over a two week period and collects information on the time a witness was asked to arrive at court, their actual time of arrival and the time they were called to give evidence or released without giving evidence. This is a sample survey and therefore does not collect information on all witnesses (only those covered by the survey period) and as a result

all estimates which are subject to a degree of error. The survey is limited to 30 returns from each court, with a survey form completed on each day of a trial for each courtroom. If a court completes 30 forms before the end of the survey period, the survey is concluded the particular court.

## Contacts

All enquiries about these statistics should be directed to the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division of the MoJ:

**Iain Bell**  
Statistician  
Justice statistics Analytical services  
Ministry of Justice  
7th floor  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9AJ  
Tel: 020 3334 3737  
Email: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

General enquiries about the statistics work of the MoJ can be e-mailed to [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

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