



HM Government

Rape Review Progress Update

December 2021



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Foreword by Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor

Rape is one of the most terrible crimes in our society, inflicting appalling physical harm and leaving mental scars which can last a lifetime. It is unacceptable for any victim of this horrific crime to be denied the justice they deserve. But just 3.6 percent of rape victims currently see their complaints result in suspects being charged.

So, our criminal justice system must do better.

The government is determined to do more to support victims and bring about a rise in the number of complaints progressing through the system. That is the most effective way to deter rapists and protect the public from harm. So, we have set an aim to more than double the number of adult rape cases reaching court by the end of this Parliament.

The Rape Review Action Plan we published in June outlined how we would tackle systemic failings on rape and this report evaluates our progress, focussing on seven critical levers.

First, criminal justice scorecards. We've published the first ever adult rape scorecard and next year will publish localised scorecards to demonstrate performance. This will allow us to understand where the system is failing to deliver for victims and to spread best practice.

Second, the police. We've recruited more than 11,000 new officers and are on track to recruit 20,000 by the end of this Parliament, so that there is more investigative resource to pursue criminals generally, and rape complaints in particular. We've also recruited almost 500 new Crown Prosecution Service staff and trained 100 rape and sexual assault specialists.

Third, our phone swap-out pilot. We've launched a scheme working with the five police forces and, by April next year, 24 police forces will have received additional technology to examine mobile phones – so that victims won't be without their phones for longer than necessary and are more likely to see through complaints.

Fourth, Operation Soteria. We've started to roll out a new approach to investigating rape, which focuses on the suspect's – rather than the victim's – behaviour. There are five police forces already piloting Operation Soteria and we're beginning a programme of expansion to take the pilot to a further 14 police force areas and their corresponding Crown Prosecution Service areas.

Fifth, a Victims' Law. We've launched a consultation on a Victims' Bill. The key measures in our proposals include better communication between prosecutors and victims, mainstreaming the use of community impact statements, better engagement with victims in the parole process, clearer and sharper lines of accountability, improved complaints processes, and an increase in the Victim Surcharge. We're also increasing funding more broadly by the end of the Parliament, which will allow us to increase the number of Independent Sexual and Domestic Advisers we fund to over 1,000.

Sixth, court recovery. We now have 470 crown courtrooms in operation, which is comparable to pre-pandemic numbers and means we are getting through the backlog of cases brought about by COVID-19 – so that victims can get justice more quickly. This year our planned recruitment will bring in additional judges, so that we can build capacity and further increase our activity.

Seventh, Section 28. Between September 2020 and October 2021 over 1,800 vulnerable and intimidated witness used Section 28 to give pre-recorded evidence, rather than go through the trauma of doing it in the full glare of the courtroom. We want to extend this so that more victims, subject to judicial discretion, can avail themselves of this option. We intend to continue to the rollout of Section 28 to all Crown Courts for victims of sexual and modern slavery offences next year. This report demonstrates areas of focus, where we expect to deliver more for victims of rape over the next 6 months and beyond. As the first adult rape scorecard also demonstrates all too clearly, we have a long way to go. I am determined to drive improvements across the criminal justice system – to ensure that victims of rape get the justice they deserve.

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP

Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary

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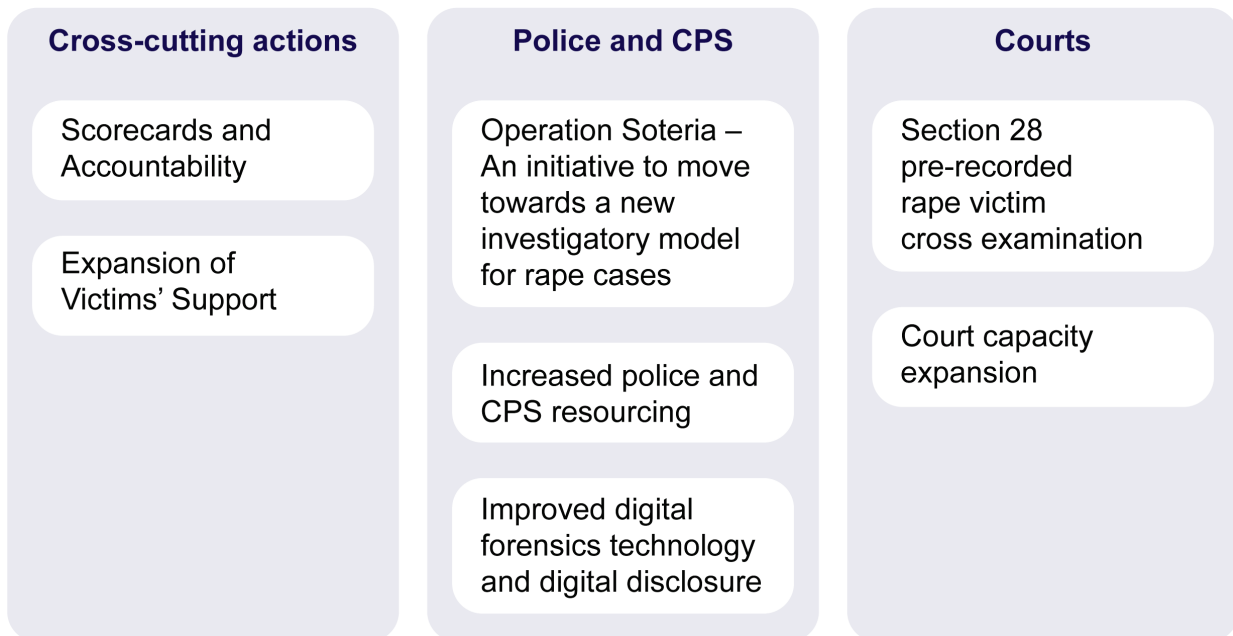
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Introduction: six months on from publication of the End to End Review of Rape

- The Rape Review Action Plan commits the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to a conscious reversal in the trends of the last five years, more than doubling the number of adult rape cases reaching court by the end of this Parliament.
- Our aim is to improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system, increase the numbers of victims that stay engaged, and build better, stronger cases so that more people are charged, we hear more guilty pleas, and more rapists are going to prison.
- At the heart of our approach is the belief that improvements to the systems will be made through greater transparency and accountability. That is why we committed to providing six-monthly updates on the progress we have made against the Action Plan, and why we are publishing quarterly scorecards which draw together key performance metrics to demonstrate how the system is responding to rape.
- Since June, we have made significant progress in delivering actions to change the system for the better. Whilst the majority of actions are on track and have been delivered in the timescales we intended, there is much work still to do to ensure that the actions are having the impact they need to.
- The first published national scorecard has demonstrated that we are yet to see positive impacts against key metrics in the system. That is not surprising: we are still in the implementation phase of the Review, and we have been upfront that the culture change needed – across the criminal justice system – is significant. However, we expect this to improve incrementally as the delivery of actions progresses.
- To ensure this happens, we are closely monitoring the latest data, and holding delivery partners to account for delivery of their actions.
- Under our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty: We are working to improve the data we collect about the characteristics of offences, suspects and victims. We must also capture better data on the victims' experience of the criminal justice system at each stage of the process.
- The current situation is totally unacceptable and the Government is determined to change it: we owe this to every victim and are extremely sorry that the system has reached this point.

Seven key levers

- Whilst all of the actions in the Rape Review Action Plan play an important role in improving the way the criminal justice system responds to rape, we have identified seven key levers which we expect to have the most significant impact on 'moving the dial' on the number of cases progressing through the system. These areas will have the greatest impact on the volumes of quality cases reaching court, victims experience and timeliness. We have structured this report to reflect our focus in these key areas.



- We are still progressing the other actions in the Rape Review not connected to these levers and will continue to report against them.

Cross-cutting actions – key progress to date

Scorecards and Accountability

- The criminal justice system will be accountable to the public and be clear about what is working and what isn't, and in doing so will drive performance and improve the way all agencies deal with these cases.
- **We have:** published the first national scorecard for adult rape, alongside an all-crime national scorecard. The adult rape scorecard tracks performance against key outcomes including improving quality, timeliness, victim engagement and increasing volumes of cases going through the system. It will be published quarterly from now on.
- **We will over the next 6 months:** publish localised scorecards in early 2022, which will allow the public to track performance at a more granular level. This will also be published on a quarterly basis.

Expansion of Victims' support

- To achieve the goal of increasing rape prosecutions, support for victims is being expanded to ensure that all victims feel able to stay engaged with the criminal justice process and see their case through.
- **We have:** secured £185m for victims' support services by 2024/25, which will increase the number of Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) from 700 to over 1000. We have launched the Victims' Bill consultation to guarantee that victims are at the heart of the criminal justice system. We have launched a pilot with Thames Valley Police that allows victims to challenge requests for personal information from the police.
- **We will over the next 6 months:** develop the content of the Victims' Bill in close consultation with victims and those that represent them, and publish the response to the consultation in May. We will put in place a 24/7 support service for victims of rape and launch a consultation with victims' groups on enhancing support and legal advice for victims on disclosure decisions.

Police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – key progress to date

Operation Soteria

- We are transforming the way that rape investigations are handled, with a focus on the suspect as opposed to the victim, which should reduce victim attrition, reduce the likelihood of reoffending and make investigations more thorough and effective. Given the need to 'bed in' new tools and techniques and the time needed for cases to progress, we anticipate it will take several months for the impact to be seen in national metrics.
- **We have:** started piloting the new approach in 5 police force/CPS areas: Avon and Somerset/CPS South West, the Met/CPS London South, Durham/CPS North East, West Midlands and South Wales/CPS Cymru.
- **We will:** conduct academic deep dives into rape case files for each pilot area, begin implementing the academics' recommendations by end of 2021 and begin a programme of expansion to a further 14 police force areas and their corresponding CPS areas.

Increased police and CPS resourcing

- Having the right number of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) trained police officers and CPS prosecutors will be critical in ensuring cases are progressed. This includes both increasing the number of police officers and prosecutors working on this area, but also ensuring they have the right expertise and are trauma-informed. This will help increase both the volume and quality of cases that are being progressed and at the same time ensure that victims are supported through out the process. By the end of the Parliament, the remainder of the 20,000 police officers will be recruited and we will recruit further CPS prosecutors and staff in other crucial frontline roles, such as paralegals.
- **We have:** recruited 11,053 additional police officers (working towards the 20,000 target); recruited 470 new members of staff into the CPS across a mix of roles to contribute to efficiency and resilience, trained 100 new prosecutors on RASSO, and started to develop a joint CPS and police learning offer for further training in relation to the needs of rape victims and rape prosecutions.
- **We will over the next 6 months:** have recruited 12,000 police officers by March. We will deliver training to rape investigators and prosecutors. We will appoint 70

experienced staff into RASSO posts in the five pilot Operation Soteria areas within the next three months.

Improved digital forensics technology and digital disclosure

- We have committed to ensuring that no victim of rape will be without a mobile phone for more than 24 hours by the end of this Parliament. We are working to ensure that victim's mobile phones are only examined where necessary, and only retained for short periods of time where they are. Together with policing, we are deploying new technology to increase police capacity, have introduced training to improve skills to examine digital devices and are engaging with the tech sector to identify innovative new solutions to reduce victim attrition. We have introduced, in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill, new statutory powers to extract information from devices with the agreement of the device user. This will be accompanied by a statutory code of practice that will provide detailed guidance on the appropriate use of these powers, as well as providing specific guidance for police on working with vulnerable victims of crime.
- **We are:** running a pilot scheme with the five Operation Soteria forces with the major mobile operators where rape victims can get a loan replacement or 'swap out' phone if the police need their phone for longer than 24 hours. The findings from the pilot will be used to inform a potential national rollout.
- **We will over the next six months:** provide 24 police forces with new technology that ensures victims are not without their phone for long periods and with fewer victims having to go into a police station to have it examined.

Courts – key progress to date

Section 28 – pre-recorded rape victim cross examination

- Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides the option for victims of sexual abuse to pre-record evidence in advance of a trial. By expanding the availability of this provision, which will continue to be subject to judicial discretion, we aim to improve the quality of evidence given and reduce the distress experienced by some witnesses giving evidence to a full courtroom at trial. It is anticipated that by expanding the availability of this provision will have a positive impact on both early guilty pleas and victim attrition.
- **We have:** expanded the current pilot of Section 28 for intimidated witnesses, including witnesses in sexual violence and modern-day slavery offences, from three to seven Crown Courts on 30 September 2021.
- **We will:** prepare for full roll-out, working with criminal justice system partners to make the operational changes needed to increase Section 28 availability to all Crown Courts as soon as practicable. Test the use of s.28 for vulnerable witnesses and victims in the Youth Court.

Court capacity expansion

- Expanding court capacity will help to deliver swift access to justice for victims of crime by increasing the number of jury trials dealt with by the courts, therefore improving timeliness and victim attrition.
- **We have:** invested a quarter of a billion pounds to support recovery in the courts in the last financial year, removed the limit on the number of days the Crown Court can sit, and opened two new ‘super courtrooms’ in Manchester and Loughborough – further increasing capacity for large trials.
- **We will:** use the £477m secured for criminal justice system recovery in the Spending Review to expand the capacity of the courts to hear more cases and will reduce demand in the Crown Court by legislating for more powers to return cases to the magistrates’ courts through the Judicial Review and Courts Bill (due to receive Royal Assent early 2022).

Annex – Detailed Summary of Actions

Key lever 1: Scorecards and Accountability

Background and anticipated impact

- Strong leadership and accountable organisations are critical to ensuring that the changes we need are implemented and sustained. The scorecards will enable us to hold the key system players to account for their performance, ensure each part of the system is driving improvements and drive positive behavioural change, leading to sustained cultural shifts across the system.
- The adult rape scorecard contains key metrics to measure performance on areas including timeliness, victim engagement and the ambitions we are working towards to increase the number of cases referred by the police, the number of CPS charges and Crown Court receipts back to the volumes they were at in 2016.
- Clear leadership of this work and accountability to the highest levels of government will improve cooperation across government and agencies to deliver on the agreed ambitions. That is why we have set up the ministerially-chaired Rape Review Taskforce.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
Published first update on progress through a performance scorecard that shows how we are delivering against our ambitions and implementing the actions that will deliver improvements.	Completed
Set up cross-system governance to drive progress and accountability, including the ministerially chaired Rape Review Taskforce and structures for stakeholder engagement, including the Implementation Advisory Group and stakeholder roundtables.	Completed

Key actions for next 6 months

- Early 2022: Publication of localised recorded adult rape offences scorecard.
- June 2022: Publication of second progress report on Rape Review action plan delivery.

Key lever 2: Expansion of Victims' Support

Background and anticipated impact

- We must support victims who come forward to report a rape, to stay engaged throughout the investigation and prosecution of their case. We are committed to ensuring that every victim of rape and sexual assault has access to quality support, appropriate to their needs, when they need it.
- We also want to ensure that victims of rape and sexual assault are easily able to understand and access information about their rights. Criminal justice agencies must ensure that victims are provided with these rights and must be held to account when they do not.
- By expanding the support available to victims, we expect to see a decrease in victim attrition as a higher number of cases, supported by better quality evidence, progress through the system.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
CPS launched a “digital walkthrough” of the criminal justice system for victims of crime so they know what to expect, with specialist content for rape victims: this includes written and video content explaining the prosecutorial process to victims of crime and developed with input from key stakeholders.	Completed
Developed a targeted research programme with rape victims to inform the design of support for sexual violence victims.	Completed
Scoped and designed the 24/7 support service for victims of rape and sexual violence, ahead of the service being commissioned.	Completed
Created a self-assessment tool with criminal justice agencies to complete to examine their delivery of the Victims Code's 12 rights.	Completed
In the Victims' Bill consultation, consulted on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of community-based sexual violence support services; • strengthening the role of the ISVAs; and • how to ensure criminal justice agencies are delivering victims' rights, (including those in the Victims' Code) and the consequences if they do not. 	On track
Consulted on how to enhance support and access to legal advice for rape victims so they can understand and challenge information requests.	February 2022
We have launched a pilot with Thames Valley that allows victims to challenge requests for personal information from the police.	On track

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
Published a series of user-friendly guides for victims of rape and sexual assault: which explain how the criminal justice system works and the support available.	On track
Published a Victims' Funding Strategy, covering commissioning principles and sustainable funding models to align funding processes across government.	March 2022

Key actions for next 6 months

- Jan 2022: Update content to the digital walkthrough based on feedback received.
- Feb 2022: Undertake targeted research with rape victims to better understand their experiences and what they want from support services so that future provision meets need.
- Feb 2022: Consult on how to enhance support and access to legal advice for rape victims so they can understand and challenge information requests.
- March 2022: Publish Victims Funding Strategy.
- April 2022: Start recommissioning work on the national Rape Support and Sexual Abuse Fund.
- May 2022: Launch a 24/7 support service that provides rape victims with easy access to immediate support, whenever and wherever they require it.
- May 2022: Publish Victims' Bill consultation response.

Key lever 3: Operation Soteria

Background and anticipated impact

- Operation Soteria is a joint police-CPS programme designed to drive improvements aiming to (i) reduce the proportion of cases that end due to victim withdrawal and (ii) develop new tools and techniques to ensure investigations of rape are thorough and effective. The programme will ensure that investigations become more focused and efficient, with the aim of increasing timeliness and the volume of cases progressing through the system. Through this work police officers will be more skilled and experienced, and thereby better able to support victims, leading to a reduction in victim attrition. Given the need to establish new tools and techniques and the time needed for cases to progress, we anticipate it will take several months for the impact to be seen in national metrics.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Launched pilots in five areas to test innovative ways for the police and CPS to investigate rape cases (Operation Soteria). This work includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The five pilot police force areas are participating in intensive academic-led research exercises in the police forces, before embedding the resulting recommendations, tools and techniques. • The academic team are working with Avon and Somerset police to restructure rape and sexual offence teams to have two investigation officers working side-by-side, one focussing on gathering evidence and working with the CPS to build a case, and the other focussed on liaising with ISVAs and victims. They are also putting in place standard communication plans for engagement with victims and implement a more reflective practise in investigation of rape and sexual offence cases including regular peer and senior case reviews. • The embedding of recommendations to achieve best practice has already begun in Avon and Somerset. • London Met’s research phase began in early September, with findings expected by the end of the year. • A national RASSO learning network event took place on 17 November to disseminate early learning nationally. • We have also set up joint CPS and Police ‘no further action’ scrutiny panels in all pilot areas and streamlined case progression processes. The CPS have also provided more early advice in these areas to build stronger cases in partnership with the police from the start. 	On track

Key actions for next 6 months

- End 2021: Begin a programme of expansion in a further 14 police force areas and their corresponding CPS areas.
- Jan 2022: Begin intensive academic-led research exercise in Durham and commence implementing recommendations in the Met.
- Mar 2022: Conclude intensive academic-led research exercise in Durham and begin implementing recommendations.
- Mar 2022: Begin intensive academic-led research exercises in West Midlands.
- Jun 2022: Begin academic deep dive in South Wales and begin implementing recommendations in West Midlands.

Key lever 4: Increased police and Crown Prosecution Service resourcing

Background and anticipated impact

- Capability and capacity in rape investigation and prosecution will be improved through resourcing and training.
- An additional £200m funding has been allocated to the CPS over the Spending Review period, to meet additional demand, including for investment in its response to rape and serious sexual assault cases
- In addition to the 20,000 officers being recruited into policing, the National Police Chiefs' Council is working with partners to review and enhance the training package for officers, encourage and monitor its uptake amongst forces and develop and implement joint training for police and CPS on areas such as decision making, an approach which focuses first on the suspect, reasonable lines of inquiry and the impact of trauma on victims.
- Increasing resource will lead to improvements in timeliness, which should help improve victim engagement and reduce attrition.
- Work to improve effectiveness of police and CPS joint working will increase case work quality and improved working on case progression and trial readiness.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Delivered learning and development and increase resourcing to improve capability and capacity in rape investigation and prosecution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two joint training packages across CPS and police being developed on digital devices and third-party material. • 470 new CPS staff recruited between April and September 2021. • 100 new prosecutors trained on RASSO. • 674 prosecutors trained in suspect-centric approach (35% of all prosecuting lawyers, including all 358 prosecutors in our RASSO units). • 176 prosecutors trained this financial year on the impact of trauma on memory. 	On track

Key actions for next 6 months

- March 2022: CPS forecast it will appoint 70 experienced staff into RASSO posts in the five pathfinder areas within the next three months.
- Ongoing: Provide RASSO training to 70 CPS prosecutors within six months of their appointment.
- Ongoing: Delivery of further RASSO induction courses for Senior Crown Prosecutors, with 12 more courses delivered by the end of 2021.
- Ongoing: Continued police recruitment to achieve the target of a 20,000 increase by March 2023.

Key lever 5: Improved digital forensics technology and digital disclosure

Background and anticipated impact

- We are working to ensure that victim devices are only examined where necessary and proportionate, and only retained for short periods of time where they are. To achieve this, we are increasing police capacity to examine digital devices such as smartphones by focusing on the technology and skills in policing. We are identifying the best new technology, then validating and evaluating it to ensure it meets rigorous evidential standards so it can be rolled out nationally to improve the experience for victims.
- More officers trained to carry out digital investigations will increase the speed at which devices can be examined, meaning cases can progress through the system more quickly, this in turn should reduce victim attrition.
- These actions will directly impact on the ambition to ensure that that no victim of rape will be without a mobile phone for more than 24 hours by the end of this Parliament.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
Doubled the number of officers receiving digital capability training from the College of Policing, ensuring that police have the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake effective and high-quality digital investigations.	On track
Published revised College of Policing guidance on the extraction of digital data and making further updates to Digital Processing Notices.	Completed
Worked with the mobile network operators and policing to support efforts to provide 'swap out' phones for victims with support from the Home Office. We have launched a phone swap-out pilot scheme in the five police forces involved in Operation Soteria.	On track
Worked with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to standardise the questions asked of suspects about disclosure to ensure they are consistent.	On track
Identified technology gaps and work with industry to develop solutions to speed up and improve investigations whilst reducing unnecessary intrusion.	On track
Hosted a tech summit to deliver technological improvements in the way rape cases are progressed through utilising expertise from industry.	Completed

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Directed £5m to a national fund to accelerate growth in the capacity of police forces to acquire and manage evidence from digital devices so victims get their phones back quicker as part of the Home Office funded Transforming Forensics (TF) programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This includes rollout of digital forensic equipment, portable laptops, kiosks and supporting infrastructure, validation and accreditation • 24 force areas will be participating in the uplift programme and rollout is expected to complete by April 2022. 	Completed
<p>Introduced a new statutory basis for extraction of information from digital devices via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill.</p> <p>This will be supported by the Code of Practice to provide guidance on the lawful use of the powers, with a detailed section on the consideration that should be shown to vulnerable victims, such as ensuring that they can access independent support to help make decisions about whether to provide their information to police and other law enforcement agencies.</p>	Completed

Key actions for next 6 months

- Jan 2022: Procure and begin delivery of Mobile Digital Forensic Units to examine devices at any location and agree regular data collection with policing to systematically monitor turnaround times for victims to receive mobile phones.
- March 2022: PCSC Bill achieves royal assent (date to be confirmed).
- March 2022: Analyse evidence from phone swap out scheme pilot and make recommendations for any national scheme.
- March 2022: Launch public consultation on PCSC Code of Practice.
- April 2022: 24 police force areas will have received additional technology to increase their capacity to examine mobile phones from anywhere and more quickly.
- May 2022: Review outcomes of PSCS consultation and complete final draft of Code of Practice.

Key level 6: Section 28 pre-recorded rape victim cross examination

Background and anticipated impact

- Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides the option for witnesses or complainants considered vulnerable or intimidated, including victims of sexual abuse, to pre-record evidence in advance of a trial. It is part of a range of special measures, intended to enhance the quality of evidence given by the complainant.
- Recorded pre-trial cross-examination aims to help the memory recall of witnesses by ensuring that the evidence is given closer to the time of the offence, and to help reduce distress experienced by some witnesses giving evidence to a full courtroom at trial.
- It is anticipated that expanding the availability of this provision, which will continue to be subject to judicial discretion, will have a positive impact on both early guilty pleas and victim attrition.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Extended existing intimidated witnesses pilot of Section 28 (s.28) for intimidated victims and witnesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolled out to Harrow, Isleworth, Wood Green, and Durham Crown Courts by 30 September 2021. Between September 2020 and October 2021 over 1,800 vulnerable and intimidated witnesses used s.28. • Engaged with police, the CPS, and support services (including ISVAs) to increase awareness and develop training packages and guidance to encourage further take-up of the measure. Updated information animations on the s.28 process designed for court users who are under 18 or have a mental or physical impairment. • Updated legal information for both practitioners and judiciary provided in the pilot courts. 	Completed
<p>Commenced work to test s.28 in the Youth Court to understand how s.28 may work for vulnerable victims and witnesses in the Youth Court:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a Steering Group with Criminal Justice System partners chaired by the senior judiciary to consider operational changes required to commence this test in one Youth Court. 	On track

Key actions for next 6 months

- Ongoing: Continue national rollout of s.28 for intimidated witnesses, including witnesses in sexual violence and modern-day slavery offences in all Crown Courts.
- March 2022: Commenced testing of s.28 in the Youth Court.

Key lever 7: Crown Court capacity expansion

Background and anticipated impact

- Expansion of court capacity will help to deliver swift access to justice for victims of crime by increasing the number of jury trials dealt with by the courts, improving timeliness and reducing victim attrition.
- We have taken steps to address delays in the courts, including investing a quarter of a billion pounds to support recovery in the last financial year, removing the limit on the number of days the Crown Court can sit, and opening two new 'super courtrooms' in Manchester and Loughborough – both of which can accommodate up to twelve defendants, further increasing capacity for large trials.
- The Spending Review also provided an extra £477m for the criminal justice system to recover from the pandemic. We estimate this will improve waiting times and reduce the number of outstanding cases to 53,000 by March 2025.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Continued operation of the Crown Court at maximum capacity to speed up cases reaching court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded the capacity of the court estate to hear more cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended 32 Nightingale Crown until the end of March 2022 • increased the number of Crown courtrooms available for use, with 470 now available – comparable to pre-pandemic levels. • Included measures in the Judicial Review and Courts Bill to give the Crown Court more powers to return cases to the magistrates' court, freeing up Crown Court capacity. • Continued to prioritise cases involving vulnerable complainants and witnesses. The Judiciary has worked to prioritise cases involving these groups, to ensure that domestic abuse, serious sex cases and those with vulnerable witnesses (including youth cases) are listed at the first available opportunity, as well as Custody Time Limit cases. 	On track

Key actions for next 6 months

- Ongoing: The Judicial Appointments Commission will begin recruitment campaign through which we expect to recruit over 1,000 judges.
- Ongoing: Use the £477m secured for criminal justice system recovery in the Spending Review to expand the capacity of the courts to hear more cases.
- April 2022: Judicial Review and Courts Bill expected to receive royal assent, which will reduce demand in the Crown Court by allowing the Crown Court to return cases to the magistrates' court.

Other actions

Background and anticipated impact

- In addition to the 7 levers described earlier in this report, there has also been good progress in a number of other areas, including through:
 - **The Best Practice Framework** which will draw together best practice in victim experience at the Crown Court. This in turn should result in improved confidence in how the criminal justice system handles rape cases, leading to a virtuous cycle where fewer victims withdraw from the processes at all stages due to fear of having to attend court.
 - **A Law Commission project to examine law, guidance and practice relating to the use of evidence in prosecutions** of serious sexual offence. This is considering the need for reform in order to increase the understanding of consent and sexual harm and improve the treatment of victims, while ensuring that defendants receive a fair trial. It is anticipated that this work will lead to greater assurance that victims will not face rape myths or inappropriate attacks on their reputation in court, and greater certainty that only relevant evidence, including around sexual history and medical records, will be presented in court.
 - Wider work being delivered by the police and CPS, including through the **Joint National Action Plan**, will be critical to improving case work quality. The impact of actions on this commitment are key to improve joint ways of working and are intended to improve quality referrals, through improved case file quality, through monitoring of Action Plans on cases, and joint working on case progression and trial readiness. It is expected that as a result of improvements in police and CPS joint working and the new National ISVA framework, engagement with victims will be more timely and sensitive, which will help to decrease victim attrition.

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Developed a Best Practice Framework (BPF) for the progression of rape and sexual offences cases at the courts stage, including in relation to special measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begun work on development of a three-phase approach to creating, testing and rolling out the BPF. • Engaged with the Judiciary and other agencies to agree next steps and planning. 	On track

Rape Review action due to be delivered by December	Status
<p>Law Commission undertaken a review of the way rape myths are tackled as part of the court process and the way in which evidence about the victim is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begun work on a background paper, including comparative research, with plans for this to be published before the end of the year. 	On track
Published a new National File Standard for submission of rape cases to increase effective joint (virtual) working by police and CPS on rape cases.	On track
Published updated guidance on how to conduct Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews.	Jan 2022
Improved Police and CPS communication with victims through better supporting documents and training around victim contact. Template letters have been developed to improve the quality of communication, focussing on timely contact and sensitivity to needs.	On track
Police and CPS introduced minimum standards on communication and liaison with ISVAs through a National Framework. The ISVA framework includes a set of minimum standards on: multi-agency partnership working, effective processes and supporting victims.	Completed

Key actions for next 6 months

- Jan 2022: Begin trial of the Best Practice Framework.
- Jan 2022: Publish ABE guidance.
- March 2022: Delivery of Joint Learning and Development on RASSO across Police and CPS.



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