

# Justice overhaul to better protect the public and back our police

- punishments to reflect severity of crimes with police given stronger powers and protections
- child sex abuse laws extended to cover sports coaches and faith leaders
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill introduced to Parliament today

Cutting crime and building safer communities will be at the heart of new legislation unveiled in Parliament today, as the government delivers on its pledge to restore confidence in the criminal justice system.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill seeks to equip the police with the powers and tools they need to protect themselves and the public, while overhauling sentencing laws to keep serious sexual and violent offenders behind bars for longer, and placing greater emphasis on rehabilitation to better help offenders to turn their lives around and prevent further crimes.

Measures include widening important laws which prevent adults in 'positions of trust' from engaging in sexual relationships with young people under the age of 18, bringing sports coaches and religious leaders in line with other occupations such as teachers and doctors. The move follows an extensive review which raised concerns that predators could exploit the particular influence these roles can often have in a young person's life – making them vulnerable to abuse.

Meanwhile, new court orders will boost efforts to crack down on knife crime, as well as make it easier to stop and search those suspected of carrying a blade. New laws will also enable police to better tackle unauthorised encampments, and safely manage protests where they threaten public order or stop people from getting on with their daily lives.

The Bill will also enshrine a Police Covenant in law, strengthening the support received by serving and retired officers, staff and their families. In addition, maximum penalties will be doubled from 12 months to 2 years for those who assault police or other emergency workers, such as prison officers, fire personnel or frontline health workers – helping to protect those who put their lives on the line to keep communities safe.

Other sentencing reforms – first outlined in a landmark government white paper last year – will also be brought into legislation to ensure punishments fit the severity of crimes. These include Whole Life Orders (WLOs) for child killers, with judges also allowed to impose this punishment on 18 to 20 year olds in exceptional cases – for example, acts of terrorism which cause mass loss of life. The Bill also introduces life sentences for killer drivers who wreak havoc on our roads, ends the automatic halfway release for serious violent and sexual offenders, and ensures community sentences are stricter and better target underlying causes of crime such as mental health issues, alcohol or drug addiction.

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary, Robert Buckland QC said:

This government has pledged to crack down on crime and build safer communities. Today we are delivering on that commitment.

We are giving the police and courts the powers they need to keep our streets safe, while providing greater opportunities for offenders to turn their lives around and better contribute to society.

At the same time, we are investing hundreds of millions to deliver speedier justice and boost support for victims, and will continue to do everything it takes to build back confidence in the criminal justice system.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

On becoming Home Secretary, I vowed to back the police to cut crime and make our streets safer.

This Bill delivers on that promise – equipping the police with the tools they need to stop violent criminals in their tracks, putting the thugs who assault officers behind bars for longer and strengthening the support officers and their families receive.

The government has already recruited over 6,600 of the additional 20,000 police officers and every single one of them has my full support. This Bill enshrines my commitment to those brave officers who put themselves in danger to keep rest of us safe into law.

Further changes will see tougher penalties for those who vandalise memorials, and a statutory duty placed on local authorities and criminal justice agencies to tackle serious violence through better sharing of data and intelligence.

The legislation builds on extensive work already underway to deliver a smarter, fairer justice system as the country builds back safer from the pandemic. This includes hundreds of millions being invested in courts to deliver speedier justice and reduce court delays, unprecedented funding for victim support services, the recruitment of 20,000 police officers and a £4 billion investment in extra prison places.

The APCC's Criminal Justice Lead David Lloyd said:

The public needs to have confidence in the criminal justice system, or else they will lose faith in reporting crime. By ensuring those who commit the most serious violent crimes spend the bulk of their sentences in prison, we send a clear message that we are on the

side of victims.

But we must look to reduce re-offending through more effective community sentences, for lower level offenders where they are appropriate.

New laws to reform sentencing, the courts and offender management:

- Whole life Orders for the premeditated murder of a child as well as allowing judges to hand out this maximum punishment to 18 to 20-year olds in exceptional cases to reflect the gravity of a crime. For example, acts of terrorism which lead to mass loss of life.
- New powers to halt the automatic early release of offenders who pose a danger to the public.
- For children who commit murder, introducing new starting points for deciding the minimum amount of time in custody based on age and seriousness of offence, and reducing the opportunities for over 18s who committed murder as a child to have their minimum term reviewed.
- Ending the halfway release of offenders sentenced to between four and seven years in prison for serious violent and sexual offences such as rape, manslaughter and GBH with intent. Instead they will have to spend two-thirds of their time behind bars.
- Changing the threshold for passing a sentence below the minimum term for repeat offenders, including key serious offences such as 'third strike' burglary which carries a minimum three-year custodial sentence and 'two strike' knife possession which has a minimum 6-month sentence for adults, making it less likely that a court will depart from these minimum terms.
- Reforming criminal records disclosure to reduce the time period people have to declare previous non-violent, sexual or terrorist convictions to employers – covering both adult and youth offences.
- Introducing life sentences for killer drivers.
- Tougher community sentences which double the amount of time offenders can be subject to curfew restrictions to 2 years.
- Extended 'positions of trusts' laws to protect teenagers from abuse by making it illegal for sports coaches and religious leaders from engaging in sexual activity with 16 and 17-year-olds.
- New rules to end the need for participants to travel unnecessarily to court by allowing criminal courts to maximise the use of video and audio technology as it develops.
- Enshrining open justice principles by allowing for remote observers – using video and audio technology – across the vast majority of our courts and tribunals improving public access and transparency.
- For the first time enabling profoundly deaf people to sit on juries. Current laws ban the presence of a 'stranger' being in the jury deliberation room – this will be scrapped and instead allow a British Sign Language Interpreter into the room.
- Increasing the maximum penalty for criminal damage of a memorial from 3 months to 10 years.
- Stronger youth community sentencing options, including greater use of location monitoring and longer daily curfews, providing robust

alternatives to custody.

New protections and powers for the police include:

- Serious Violence Reduction Orders – new stop and search powers against convicted knife offensive weapons offenders designed to ensure offenders are steered away from crime and if they persist in carrying a knife or an offensive weapon, that they are more likely to be caught and put in prison.
- A legal duty on local authorities, the police, criminal justice agencies, health and fire and rescue services to tackle serious violence through sharing data and intelligence.
- Homicide reviews following deaths of adults involving offensive weapons to better understand the drivers of violent crime and stop it happening in the first place.
- Enshrining the police covenant in law.
- Doubling the maximum sentence for assaulting an emergency worker from 12 months to 2 years.
- A new law to allow police to obtain a search warrant for evidence related to the location of human remains where it is not possible to bring about a prosecution, for example where a suspect is dead, unfit to plead, or has already been convicted of the offence in the absence of a body
- Strengthen police powers to tackle non-violent protests that have a significant disruptive effect on the public or on access to Parliament;
- Reform pre-charge bail to better protect vulnerable victims and witnesses. Known as Kay's Law this will put victims of crime at the heart of police decision making and support the timely progression of investigations.
- Strengthen police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments that significantly interfere with a person's or community's ability to make use of the land

## Notes to editors

- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will be introduced to Parliament today ( 9 March 2021). The full list of measures will be available on the Parliament website on Tuesday 9 March 2021.
- The majority of the MOJ measures will apply to England and Wales only, with road traffic offences and driving disqualification measures applying to Great Britain and certain courts and tribunals measures relating to virtual hearings applying UK-wide.