

New courtroom protections for victims of rape piloted in London and North East

- pilot to spare victims of rape and sexual violence the stress of being cross-examined extended to Crown Courts in the capital and Durham
- this can reduce trauma for victims and witnesses, meaning they can give better evidence
- ministers deliver on Rape Review pledge to roll out scheme further

The measure allows intimidated victims and witnesses of crimes such as rape and modern slavery to have their cross-examination video recorded and played during the trial.

The move delivers on a key pledge in the Government's Rape Review to extend this provision further and bolster support for victims. It will be made available immediately from today in three Crown Courts in London (Harrow, Isleworth, and Wood Green), as well as Durham Crown Court.

The recording takes place as close to the time of the offence as possible in order to help memory recall and reduce the stress of giving evidence in a courtroom setting, which many find traumatic. It is already in place in Liverpool, Leeds and Kingston-Upon-Thames Crown Courts, and could be introduced at others across the country subject to further evaluation.

Today's extension follows the successful rollout of the provision for vulnerable victims, such as children or those who suffer from a debilitating condition, to all Crown Courts in England and Wales last year – with more than 1,500 witnesses having already benefitted from the technology.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab said:

Boosting support for victims is one of my top priorities so I'm keen that we use this technology to minimise stress for victims and ensure they can provide their best evidence.

This is part of our plans to transform the response to crimes against women, better support victims and make sure cases are investigated fully and prosecuted robustly.

Rachel Nicholas, Victim Support's Head of Service in London, said:

We welcome the measures announced by the government to improve the court process for victims of abuse in London, especially at a time when the number of survivors of domestic abuse accessing Victim

Support's specialist, community-based services has reached peak levels.

For a lot of victims, survivors and witnesses, giving evidence in court is a traumatic experience. It's crucial that they know their rights under the Victims' Code to apply for special measures to help further reduce the stress of attending court and move on with their lives. Rolling out this scheme more widely is a welcome step in the right direction.

The measure is also designed to maintain a defendant's right to a fair trial and any decision to pre-record evidence is made by a judge on a case-by case basis.

The expansion of the pilot is a key part of the Government's Rape Review which sets out clear actions for the police, prosecutors and courts. These include a new approach to investigations, reducing the number of victims withdrawing from the process, increasing the volume of trials being heard, protecting the public and putting more rapists behind bars.

It follows wider efforts to improve the support on offer to victims at every stage of the criminal justice system. In the past year alone, £300 million has been invested in vital support services, alongside £27million to fund hundreds more independent domestic violence and sexual violence advisors.

Meanwhile, new legislation will put in statute the support that victims should receive from criminal justice agencies for the first time, and will be consulted on in due course.

Notes to editors

- Both the defence and prosecution lawyers will be present in court during the pre-recording as will the judge and the defendant.
- Pre-recording cross-examination preserves a defendant's right to a fair trial.
- Between September 2020 and August 2021 there were more than 1,500 witnesses who have used the S.28 provision.
- Vulnerable witnesses and victims are defined as all child witnesses under 18 and any witness whose quality of evidence is likely to be diminished because they are suffering from a mental disorder or physical disability or has significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning.
- Intimidated witnesses and victims for the purposes of this pilot are defined as complainants or witnesses of sexual offences and modern slavery offences.