

New Problem-Solving Courts to combat drug and alcohol-fuelled crime

- Courts to make offenders face their addictions, in boost to public protection
- Sentences to include intense supervision and testing to support rehabilitation
- Strong sanctions, including jail time, if offenders transgress

The first three 'Problem-Solving Courts' (PSCs) are being piloted as part of the Government's £900-million Drug Strategy, based on evidence that this approach will most effectively turn such offenders away from crime and protect the public.

They will trial a tougher approach to community sentences for low-level criminals who would otherwise face short jail terms.

Under unique orders which can be issued by the PSCs, offenders will see the same judge at least once a month, have intense support and supervision from the Probation Service, and get wraparound services tailored to their individual needs – such as from substance misuse and recovery agencies, housing support and educational services.

They will also get treatment and undertake frequent, random drug testing where appropriate. Offenders will be offered the full range of treatment interventions to help them achieve abstinence.

The £8.25-million pilot will see two such courts launched at Liverpool and Teesside Crown Courts, while a further one at Birmingham Magistrates' Court will focus on female offenders with complex needs, including substance misuse.

Deputy Prime Minister, Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor, Dominic Raab MP said:

Getting criminal offenders sustainably off drugs is the gateway to getting them into work and a law-abiding future.

Only once offenders are drug-free can they grasp the opportunities of skills training and employment and turn their backs on crime for good.

So these innovative courts will help us grasp the nettle of drug addiction, and make our streets safer.

Judges and magistrates sitting in the PSCs will use incentives such as relaxing conditions to recognise good progress, as well as sanctions, such as increased drug testing and court reviews, when behaviour fails to meet agreed standards. They can also jail offenders for failure to stick to their sentence by imprisoning them for up to 28 days, up to a maximum of three times.

Maria (not her real name) was sentenced to an 18-month Suspended Sentence Order and requirement to attend the Greater Manchester Women's PSC, a precursor to the new pilot for women who offend. She said:

At first, I was worried about being judged, but it's not like that – sentencers are supportive and want to keep you on the right path.

You have to want to change. But after you've made that decision it's incredibly hard to do it on your own and that's why things like probation and the PSC are so important, to keep you from slipping back.

Notes to editors

- The Government committed in the Sentencing White Paper to pilot up to five PSCs and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act Bill contained the necessary legislative provisions. Two courts are still under consideration.
- More people die every year as a result of drug misuse than from all knife crime and road traffic accidents combined. The total cost to society and taxpayers in today's prices is nearly £22 billion.
- The Government is committed to increasing treatment and reducing crime in its 10-year Drugs Strategy – [From harm to hope](#) – which is backed by an additional £900 million of funding for enforcement, treatment and recovery, taking the total investment on combating drugs over the next three years to £3 billion. The Strategy focuses on three key priorities – reducing demand for drugs, delivering a world-class treatment and recovery system and breaking drug supply chains. The strategy is contributing to the prevention of three-quarters of a million crimes including 140,000 'neighbourhood' crimes like theft robbery and burglary.
- A PSC has been trialled in Greater Manchester focussed on female offenders and 14 Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs), alternative family court for care proceedings, have achieved success at reducing substance misuse. A [Lancaster University](#) study found:

- 46% of FDAC mothers were no longer misusing substances by the end of proceedings, compared to 30% of comparison mothers, and
- 37% of FDAC families were reunited or continued to live together compared to 25% of comparison families
- Teesside and Merseyside have high levels of need. In 2020, the North East had the highest rate of deaths relating to drug misuse across England and Wales (104.6 deaths per million people) compared to the national rate of 52.3 deaths per million people, while the rate of deaths relating to drug misuse in the North West is 74.2 per million. A 2019 study by the Prison Reform Trust showed that rates of immediate custody per 100,000 women in the West Midlands (36 per 100,000) were higher than the overall rate for England and Wales.
- Previous [impact evaluations](#) have found that community sentences are effective in addressing [offending behaviour](#).