

New protections for rape victims available at more Crown Courts

- pre-recorded evidence now available in North-East and South of England
- measure aims to reduce trauma for victims and witnesses to help them give better evidence
- 24/7 Rape Support Helpline moves step closer as operator selected

The scheme, which has already been successful in 12 Crown Courts, allows victims and witnesses of crimes such as rape and modern slavery to have their cross-examination video-recorded and played later during trial.

The recording takes place as close to the time of the offence as possible, while memories remain fresh, and helps victims avoid the stress of giving evidence in a courtroom setting, which many find traumatic.

From today (12 May 2022), the measure will be available immediately at Crown Courts in:

- Sheffield
- Doncaster
- Newcastle
- Portsmouth
- Southampton
- Isle of Wight
- Winchester
- Bournemouth
- Bristol
- Exeter
- Gloucester
- Plymouth
- Salisbury
- Truro

This extension means it is now available for victims of rape at 26 Crown Courts, with the government committed to rolling it out nationwide by September.

The move follows the successful implementation for vulnerable victims, such as children or those who have limited mental capacity, to all Crown Courts in England and Wales – with more than 2,500 witnesses having already benefitted from the technology since August 2020.

Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Tackling Violence against Women and Girls, said:

This measure is a key part of our plan to overhaul the justice system's response to rape – minimising stress for victims and

helping them to provide the best possible evidence.

Alongside this, we're recruiting more independent sexual violence advisers, launching a new 24/7 helpline and improving collaboration between police and prosecutors to ensure victims get the support and justice they deserve.

While there is still much more to do, convictions have increased by 15 percent over the last quarter and these measures will drive improvements further.

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.

Today's update comes as the government announces that Rape Crisis England and Wales (RCEW) will operate a new 24/7 helpline service – providing free telephone and online support to victims of rape and sexual violence at any time of the day. The service will be launched in June and will ensure help is available to victims whenever they need it.

Jayne Butler, CEO of Rape Crisis England & Wales, said:

This service will be a vital support provision for victims and survivors of sexual violence and abuse.

We are pleased to be delivering a specialist, trauma-informed support service: one that puts survivor needs at its heart.

The funding of this service is a welcome contribution to the government's commitment of increasing support for victims and survivors of rape and sexual assault.

Both the helpline and the extension of pre-recorded evidence are key pledges within the Government's Rape Review Action Plan. The plan 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.

On the extension of pre-recorded evidence to Newcastle Crown Court, Elaine Langshaw, Chief Executive Officer of Newcastle Women's Aid, said:

We welcome this move and strongly believe it should be available in every Crown Court as soon as possible, to ensure every survivor or witness can expect the same service.

Survivors and witness should be made to feel safe, protected and supported. In our experience survivors of sexual crimes are often

reluctant to progress prosecutions as they cannot face further trauma in the courtroom.

We feel if this barrier is removed it will encourage survivors to report to the police and to seek justice.

The government has also announced it will fund victim support services on a multi-year basis – with at least £147 million per year up to 2025. This investment will enable charities and service providers to plan for the future, build capacity and help even more victims.

Today's announcement builds on recent government action to increase confidence in the justice system including bringing forward a new Victims' Bill, ensuring violent and sexual offenders spend longer in prison and investing nearly half a billion pounds to deliver swifter justice through the courts.

Guidance:

- Both the defence and prosecution lawyers will be present in court during the pre-recording as will the judge and the defendant.
- The independent judiciary will be responsible for overseeing the use of pre-recorded evidence and will have discretion to ensure that the interests of justice are served.
- Pre-recording cross-examination preserves a defendant's right to a fair trial.
- 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.
- The courts already operating pre-recorded evidence for intimidated victims are: Liverpool, Leeds, Kingston-Upon-Thames, Harrow, Isleworth, Wood Green, Durham, York, Grimsby, Hull, Bradford and Teesside Crown Courts.
- Rape convictions are increasing – there has been a 15 percent increase in the number of people convicted for rape offences in the last three months. There were 467 convictions last quarter (October to December 2021), compared to 407, 398 and 376 in the quarters before.
- Total completed prosecutions for rape cases have increased by 10 percent from 600 (July – September 2021) to 661 (October-December 2021).
- The average number of days for adult rape from CPS charge to the case being completed continued to fall, down by 38 days (8.3 percent) since the peak in June 2021 – down from 457 days to 419 in October – December 2021.