

# Press release: Greater protection for rape victims and children at risk of grooming

- Victims of sex crimes will soon be able to have their cross-examination pre-recorded before trial
- Rollout of the scheme to be fast-tracked and will now begin in September
- New offence of sexual communication with a child will also be introduced
- Groomers face up to two years in prison and will be automatically placed on the sex offenders register

New measures that will spare rape victims the trauma and inconvenience of attending court hearings will be rolled out across the country from September.

Victims of rape and other sex crimes will have their cross examination evidence pre-recorded and played during the trial.

Originally the rollout was not due to begin until next year but will now start in September after Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss and senior judges agreed to accelerate the scheme.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Attitudes to sex crimes and victims have changed beyond all recognition in our lifetime, and rape prosecutions are now at record levels.

With more victims now finding the confidence to come forward, I am determined to make their path to justice swifter and less traumatic.

This will not reduce the right to a fair trial, but will make sure victims of these abhorrent crimes are protected and able provide their best possible evidence.

Work to rollout pre-recorded evidence for child victims of sexual offences has already begun. That followed a successful pilot that showed child victims felt less pressure giving pre-trial evidence and were better able to recall events.

This led to more early guilty pleas, fewer cracked trials and victims reporting a more positive experience of the court process.

The law already includes protections to ensure that questions – including previous sexual history – can be deemed inadmissible. The rollout of pre-recorded evidence offers further protection, as questions can be edited out

of the recording if barristers flout these rules.

The move comes ahead of the Second Reading of [the Prisons and Courts Bill](#) tomorrow (20 March 2017) which included additional measures to protect vulnerable witnesses.

In criminal courts the Bill paves the way for more virtual hearings which means more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the court room and without having to meet their attacker face to face.

While in family proceedings the government will give courts the power to ban the appalling practice of letting domestic violence abusers interrogate their victim in court. The Bill will bring family courts into line with criminal courts, which have had the power to stop this for some years.

The Justice Secretary also announced today that she is acting to bring in a new offence of sexual communication with a child, with adult groomers facing up to two years in prison and being automatically placed on the sex offenders register.

The new offence will come into effect on 3 April 2017, and will cover both online and offline communication, including through social media, e-mail, and letters.

Ms Truss said:

In a world of mobile phones and social media, our children are ever more vulnerable to those who prey on their innocence and exploit their trust.

This new offence will help to us tackle the early stages of grooming, and nip in the bud those targeting children online or through text messages. My message is clear – any sexual communication with a child could see you behind bars.

1. The three Section 28 pilot schemes for children and adults with a mental or physical disorder took place in Liverpool, Leeds and Kingston-upon-Thames crown courts.
2. Rape prosecutions are at record levels. Recent statistics show that:
  - Rape prosecutions rose to 3,900 in 2015 – up 9% since 2014, up 36% since 2005, and the highest number prosecuted in the last decade.
  - The number of rape convictions reached 1,300 in 2015 – up 11% since 2014, up 63% since 2005, and the highest number convicted in the last decade.
  - Average sentences for rape also rose by over three years since 2005, reaching 117.9 months in 2015.
3. On 3 April 2017 we are bringing into force section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. It will be a criminal offence for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response. The offence applies to online and offline

communication, including social media, e-mail, texts, letters, etc.

4. There are a range of offences already available to deal with sexual communication, depending on the circumstances, but many do not automatically attract sex offender registration. The Justice Secretary made enacting this clause a priority and has acted decisively to ensure children are protected from online grooming.