

Press release: Life sentences for killer drivers

- life sentences will be introduced for those who cause death by dangerous driving, and for careless drivers who kill while under the influence of drink or drugs
- new offence of causing serious injury through careless driving to be created
- part of government action to make roads safer for all and stop devastation caused by dangerous drivers and cyclists

Killer drivers face life behind bars after plans to increase maximum sentences received resounding support from families and campaigners.

Ministers today confirmed that drivers who cause death by speeding, racing, or using a mobile phone could face sentences equivalent to manslaughter, with maximum penalties raised from 14 years to life.

Offenders who cause death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs will also face life sentences, and a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving will be created.

The move comes after an overwhelming response to a government consultation which revealed substantial backing for the plans from a wide range of people including victims, bereaved families and road safety experts.

Today Ministers are announcing the outcome and confirmed the introduction of much tougher penalties as part of wider action across government to clamp down on dangerous, criminal behaviour on our roads.

Justice Minister Dominic Raab said:

We've taken a long hard look at driving sentences, and we received 9,000 submissions to our consultation. Based on the seriousness of the worst cases, the anguish of the victims' families, and maximum penalties for other serious offences such as manslaughter, we intend to introduce life sentences of imprisonment for those who wreck lives by driving dangerously, drunk or high on drugs.

On the new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving, Dominic Raab said:

We will introduce a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving, punishable by imprisonment, to fill a gap in the law and reflect the seriousness of some of the injuries suffered by victims in this category of case.

The measures were confirmed in a government response to a consultation which will be published tomorrow (Monday 16 October 2017). The consultation sought views on whether current maximum penalties available to the courts should be increased, and received over 1,000 replies in just three days when launched in December 2016 – reaching more than 9,000 when it closed in February 2017.

The proposals confirmed today include:

- increasing the maximum penalty for causing death by dangerous driving from 14 years to life
- increasing the maximum penalty for causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence of drink or drugs from 14 years to life
- creating a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving

In 2016, 157 people were sentenced for causing death by dangerous driving, with a further 32 convicted of causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence.

Today's announcement delivers on the government's pledge to consider the sentencing powers available to the courts for the most serious driving offences – making sure that punishment reflects the harm caused to victims and their families.

The move forms part of government wide action to improve safety for all road users, following recent devastation caused by irresponsible motorists and dangerous cyclists.

Last month the Department for Transport (DFT) launched an urgent review to consider whether a new offence equivalent to causing death by careless or dangerous driving should be introduced for cyclists.

Notes to editors

- The consultation closed in February and sought views on the most serious road offences. It did not cover other driving or regulatory offences such as speeding, the setting of drink drive limits, the basic offences of careless or dangerous driving and driving whilst using a mobile phone.
- This follows further action in 2015, when the government increased the maximum custodial sentence for causing death whilst driving when disqualified from 2 to 10 years. A new offence of causing serious injury when driving whilst disqualified was also created, with a maximum penalty of four years imprisonment. It also brought into force the statutory requirement to extend a driving ban to take account of any time spent in custody.
- 90% of respondents to the consultation thought there should be a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving. They noted that without a specific offence which reflects the harm caused, offenders could only be convicted of a careless driving offence that has a maximum penalty of a fine.
- 70% of responses thought that the maximum penalty for the offence of causing death by dangerous driving should be increased to life

imprisonment. Vast majority of respondents also agreed that the maximum penalty for causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence of drink and drugs should also be life.

- The government will give further consideration to increasing minimum driving bans for those convicted of causing serious death.
- DfT is separately reviewing cycling safety and seeking views on whether a new offence of causing death by dangerous cycling is needed, further details are due shortly.
- Legislation required for the measures announced today is expected to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time allows and will take account of, and incorporate, the review of cycle safety.
- Sentencing remains a matter for independent judges, with decisions based on the full facts of each case.
- For more information call the MOJ press office on 020 3334 3529 or 020 3334 3503.