

Response to rape overhauled

- Action Plan to increase the number of rape cases reaching court
- new approach to investigations places greater emphasis on suspect behaviour
- performance of entire criminal justice system to be rated regularly
- no victim to be left without a phone for more than 24 hours

The ambitious plans include clear actions for the police, prosecutors and courts – to roll out a new approach to investigations, reduce the number of victims withdrawing from the process, increase the volumes of trials being heard, protect the public and put more rapists behind bars.

Crucially, it aims to return the volumes of cases being referred by the police, charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and going to court, to at least 2016 levels – when the decline in prosecutions began to appear. Each part of the criminal justice system will also be held to better account, with performance scorecards – on key metrics such as timeliness and victim engagement – being published every 6 months for the first time.

The Action Plan follows an end-to-end review by the government into how the criminal justice system handles rape. It comes after charges, prosecutions and convictions for rape fell over the last 5 years. Sadly, one in 2 victims who report being raped also withdraw from the investigation.

Ministers have today promised to do everything possible to reverse these worrying trends and build back confidence in the system – pledging to go even further if improvements are not seen.

Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland QC MP said:

Too many victims of rape and sexual violence have been denied the justice they deserve as a result of systemic failings.

We are deeply sorry for this and will not rest until real improvements are made – from transforming the support given to victims, to ensuring cases are investigated fully and prosecuted robustly.

Alongside new laws we have introduced in Parliament to make sure rapists spend longer behind bars, our action plan will drive the wholesale change needed to tackle this horrific crime and restore faith in the criminal justice system.

The Action Plan has been shaped with the help of Emily Hunt who was appointed as an independent advisor by government to ensure that there was a strong advocate for victims at the centre of the rape review.

Emily Hunt, victim and independent advisor the End-to-End Rape Review said:

I am really proud to have made a difference by bringing my own experience to the Review.

We can and must do better for rape victims. We must investigate suspects rather than doubting victims and we need to support victims through every stage of the criminal justice system. Because everyone who reports this crime is not just doing so to secure justice for themselves but to protect all of us.

The review revealed wide-ranging reasons behind the fall in cases reaching court, including a strained relationship between different parts of the system, delays in the investigation process, a lack of specialist and consistent support for victims, and an increase in invasive requests for their personal data. The Action Plan seeks to directly address these issues and increase the number of cases getting to court, without compromising defendants' right to a fair trial.

It includes plans for better data extraction technology to reduce the time that victims are without their phones – with an aim to have devices returned by police within 24 hours. At present, this process can take months, causing distress for victims who are left phoneless at a time when they most need support from friends and family. The money will include funding for more 'cyber vans' that allow devices to be analysed without the need to send them to a laboratory which can add to delays – with 'swap-out' phones given to victims when it is not possible to return a phone within 24 hours. In addition, new guidance for the police will ensure any request for information is necessary and proportionate to the investigation, with victims often citing handing over their personal data as a reason why they may not pursue their case.

Additionally, a new approach to investigations will be rolled out to more police forces across the country – one that places greater emphasis on understanding a suspect's behaviour rather than placing undue focus on a victim's credibility. Pioneered by Avon and Somerset police, it also partners officers with academics to scrutinise decisions and ensure all reasonable lines of inquiry are explored. Understanding the victims' experience is also paramount, with investigators working closely with Independent Sexual Violence Advisers.

Meanwhile, more rape victims will be spared the trauma of needing to attend a trial by having their cross-examination video-recorded earlier in the process away from the courtroom. A pilot of this provision will be trialled at a further three Crown courts, with government working closely with the judiciary to consider a wider subsequent rollout. The measure is already available in all Crown courts for vulnerable victims and witnesses, including children.

Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse MP said:

We've taken a hard and honest look at how the entire criminal

justice system deals with rape and in too many instances it simply has not been good enough.

That is why today we are seeking robust action from the police, CPS and courts to better support victims and make sure more perpetrators answer for their crimes.

Criminal justice agencies will also be more accountable than ever with greater scrutiny of decisions and we will monitor progress closely.

The plan details specific actions for each part of the criminal justice system. Key measures include:

- Returning volumes of rape cases going through the courts to at least 2016 levels by the end of this Parliament – meaning over a thousand more victims will see their cases proceed.
- Publishing regular scorecards including metrics on timeliness, quality of cases and victim engagement to show how the whole criminal justice system is performing – providing transparency and accountability for the first time with an inaugural scorecard due to be published by December.
- Better data extraction technology – enabling up to 10,000 devices each year to be processed at the earliest stages of an investigation.
- Working with the mobile phone industry to support police efforts in providing ‘swap out’ phones for victims where it is not possible to return a phone within 24 hours.
- Launching new ‘Pathfinder Projects’ across four more police forces which allow external scrutiny of police decisions, a more active focus on perpetrators’ offending patterns and drive victim confidence in police and CPS.
- Establishing a culture of more effective joint working between police and CPS so that they can better support victims and build better cases – driving more guilty pleas as defendants realise that conviction is likely.
- The Law Commission will also begin a review into ‘rape myths’ to ensure courts are tackling them at every opportunity while also examining the use of a victims’ sexual history as evidence and whether expert evidence can be used in court to counter misconceptions about rape.
- Pre-recorded cross-examination – which allows victims to provide evidence on video prior to a trial – will be piloted in a further three crown courts with a wider national rollout considered following evaluation of the pilots.
- A ministerial-led criminal justice taskforce has been set up to drive forward these actions. The taskforce will be advised by a Ministerial chaired expert group including representatives from the criminal justice system who will be able to provide valued external scrutiny to, and support of, the implementation of our actions.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Rape and sexual violence are horrific crimes that devastate lives. Tragically, brave victims who have come forward to report are too often let down by the criminal justice system.

This must change immediately. While work is already underway to address these unacceptable issues, I am calling on the police to urgently consider what more they can do to strengthen their response.

The police must give victims the support and treatment they deserve whilst ensuring that the vile perpetrators face justice.

The Attorney General, the rt. Hon Michael Ellis QC MP said:

This landmark publication has made one thing clear – that we must all do better to improve the system's approach to securing justice for victims of rape and sexual offences.

At the heart of this is a collaborative approach, from the moment a complaint is made, through to the investigation and prosecution and post-trial. We must ensure that victims are supported every step of the way.

Director of Public Prosecutions, Max Hill QC said:

Rape is a truly devastating and life changing crime. Our prosecutors see the trauma and lasting impact on victims every day.

The stark drop in the number of cases that have gone before a jury in recent years means too few victims are seeing justice and reversing that is an absolute priority for the CPS.

This review presents an unprecedented opportunity across the whole criminal justice system, and I am determined to lead meaningful and lasting change in every aspect of how these cases are handled, in partnership with the police and the courts.

Today's announcement follows extensive government action in recent years to protect women and girls from violence. It comes as more than £176 million has been invested into victim services, funding more specialist help such as rape support centres. This includes £27 million to recruit more Independent Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse advisors who provide advice and support for victims, acting as the link between police, support services and criminal justice agencies. This investment means there is an ISVA support for every victim that wants one.

Meanwhile, a further £2 million has been made available for smaller specialist organisations helping ethnic minority, LGBT or disabled victims

with male-specific services benefiting from a 60 per cent funding increase this year.

In addition, the landmark Domestic Abuse Act (2021), introduced a swathe of measures to boost protections for survivors, while clamping down on perpetrators. The government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will also see rapists face longer jail terms.

Meanwhile, the courts continue to prioritise urgent cases where there is a risk to the public, such as sexual violence. This is alongside the hundreds of millions the government is investing to help courts recover from the pandemic, deliver swifter justice and support victims.

Notes to editors

- The government's [End-to-End Rape Review](#) can be found on GOV,UK
- Alongside this Review, the government is publishing a [Social Research report](#) which outlines the underlying primary research in more detail and can be found on GOV.UK.

What government will do:

- Ambition to return volumes of rape cases being referred by police, charged and going to court back to 2016 levels by the end of the Parliament.
- Publish regular scorecards including metrics on timeliness, quality of cases and victim engagement to show how the whole criminal justice system is performing – providing transparency and accountability for the first time with the first scorecard published by December.

What we will do for victims:

- Use the upcoming Victims' Bill to guarantee victims' rights in law and hold criminal justice agencies to account for delivering them.
- Give victims access to 24/7 support through a helpline and online service – ensuring no matter when someone needs support it is available.
- Consult on the provision of community-based support for victims of sexual violence and the role of the Independent Sexual Violence Advisors in the forthcoming Victims' Bill consultation.
- Consult on how to enhance support for rape victims to understand and challenge disclosure decisions.

What the police and Crown Prosecution Service will do:

- Better data extraction technology – enabling up to 10,000 devices each year to be processed at the earliest stages of an investigation
- Work with mobile phone industry to support police efforts to provide 'swap out' phones for victims.
- Move to a default investigative process that focusses on suspect's behaviour rather than victim credibility.
- Launch new 'Pathfinder Projects' across four more police forces which allow external scrutiny of police decisions, a more active focus on perpetrators offending patterns and drive victim confidence in police

and CPS.

- Establish a culture of effective joint working between police and CPS so that they can better support victims and build better cases.
- The CPS will relaunch pre-trial witness interviews which aid CPS decision making and can deal with inconsistencies earlier on in the process

What will happen at court:

- The Law Commission will begin a review into 'rape myths' to ensure courts are tackling them at every opportunity while also examining the use of a victims' sexual history as evidence and whether expert evidence can be used in court to counter misconceptions about rape.
- Pre-recorded cross-examination – which allows victims to provide evidence on video prior a trial – will be piloted in a further three crown courts with a wider national rollout considered following evaluation of the pilots.