

Vulnerable victims in London and Kent to be given new courtroom protections

- vulnerable victims and witnesses will have the option to pre-record their evidence, removing the need to attend the trial
- all Crown courts in London and Kent to offer this new protection from today
- new service to be available in every Crown Court by the end of the year

Available immediately in these regions, the new technology allows vulnerable witnesses and victims to have their cross-examination video-recorded earlier in the process and played during the trial. This is to ensure they can provide their best evidence, away from the courtroom which many can often find intimidating.

The recording is carried out as close to the time of the offence as possible in order to help memory recall, and reduce the stress of giving evidence to a full courtroom at trial.

The move follows successful pilots in Liverpool, Leeds, and Kingston-upon-Thames, where victims felt less pressure than attending court.

In November last year, a Primark security guard from Kingston-upon-Thames was jailed after the four girls he sexually assaulted gave their evidence in a pre-recorded session prior to the trial taking place. The victims were spared having to tell the story of their horrific abuse in front of the perpetrator, who showed no remorse for his actions.

Justice Minister, Alex Chalk MP, said:

Vulnerable victims show great courage by coming forward, and it's vital they can do so in the least traumatic way possible.

This technology ensures they are protected and are able to give their best possible evidence, without reducing a defendant's right to a fair trial.

But this is just one part of our efforts to boost the support on offer for victims at every stage of the justice system, which includes consulting on a Victims' Law.

Victims' Commissioner, Dame Vera Baird, says:

I very much welcome this further rollout ensuring that more vulnerable victims and witnesses have the option to pre-record their evidence. I have long been concerned that children who complained of victimisation should not spend a long part of their

childhood beset with the worry of ultimately giving an account of what happened. If they can give their evidence at an early stage, they will then be free to get on with their lives. There is also a further point that therapy is often delayed whilst a complainant is a witness.

I congratulate HMCTS and the Ministry of Justice in driving this forward and being so responsive. The sooner these arrangements are in place the better. This has the potential to transform the criminal justice experience for so many vulnerable victims.

The decision to pre-record evidence is made by judges on a case-by-case basis.

Crown Courts in Basildon and Chelmsford, Essex, Lewes in East Sussex and Stafford in the West Midlands will also be included in today's rollout.

Notes to editors

- 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.
- Both the defence and prosecution lawyers will be present in court during the pre-recording as will the judge and the defendant.
- Feedback from the courts already operating the system shows that victims felt less pressure and that witnesses were better able to recall events.
- The full list of crown courts who have commenced pre-recording evidence sessions today are:
 - Basildon Crown Court
 - Canterbury Crown Court
 - Central Criminal Court
 - Chelmsford Crown Court
 - Croydon Crown Court
 - Guildford Crown Court
 - Harrow Crown Court
 - Inner London Crown Court
 - Isleworth Crown Court
 - Lewes Crown Court
 - Maidstone Crown Court
 - Snaresbrook Crown Court
 - Southwark Crown Court
 - Stafford Crown Court
 - Wood Green Crown Court
 - Woolwich Crown Court
- Pre-recorded video evidence is already available at Crown Courts in Aylesbury, Bradford, Bristol, Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Kingston-upon-Thames, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Mold, Northampton, Oxford, Portsmouth, Reading, Sheffield, Swansea, Wolverhampton.
- Last year we commenced a pilot of the technology for intimidated

witnesses (victims of sexual offences and modern slavery offences) in three Early Adopter Courts (Liverpool, Leeds and Kingston upon Thames). There may be wider rollouts to intimidated witnesses pending the evaluation of this pilot.