

Rape Crisis England and Wales statement – Leveson Review

8 July 2025

Sir Brian Leveson has today published Part 1 of the landmark Independent Review of the Criminal Courts¹, commissioned by the Lord Chancellor in December 2024, in response to the backlogs in our Crown Courts in particular.

Rape Crisis England & Wales have been drawing attention to the devastating impact of Crown Court delays on survivors of rape and other serious sexual offences for years, most notably in our 2023 Breaking Point² report.

In 2023, the Crown Courts received approximately 105,000³ cases. In March 2025, the Ministry of Justice released its quarterly criminal court statistics for October-December 2025⁴, revealing that the number of sexual offences waiting to go to the Crown Court was at that point 11,981 – a figure which has increased by 41% in two years. As of March 2025 there were 3,489 adult rape cases and 1,646 child rape cases waiting to go to trial.

Sir Brian has made a total of 45 recommendations for radical reform of our Criminal Courts system (including both Magistrates' and Crown Courts) which he urges the Government to implement in full, rather than piecemeal. These include:

- The creation of a new Division of the Crown Court - the Crown Court Bench Division, where certain cases previously heard in front of a jury would be heard by a Judge and two Magistrates instead.
- Serious and complex fraud cases being heard by a judge alone, with no jury.
- Defendants being given the right to choose a judge-only trial, with no jury.
- The removal of the right to select a Crown Court trial for certain 'low level' offences which carry a maximum 2-year sentence, retaining these cases in the Magistrates Court.
- Crown Court sitting days being increased from the current 110,000 funded by the Government, to 130,000.
- An end to the practice of releasing suspects under investigation (RUI) without bail conditions being in place, meaning that suspects could only be released from a police station while under investigation for rape, if such conditions are in force.
- An increase in the maximum possible sentence reduction for entering a guilty plea to 40% if the plea is made at the first available opportunity.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-criminal-courts-part-1>

² <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/breaking-point/>

³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8372/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2024/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2024>

- The implementation by the Ministry of Justice of a match-funding scheme for Criminal Barrister pupillages to start immediately, to address the shortage of criminal advocates.

If *fully* implemented, Sir Leveson estimates that 9,000 Crown court sitting days will be saved per year, freeing up much-needed capacity to hear cases currently stuck in the backlog – including the 12,532 sexual offence cases⁵ currently awaiting trial.

Our Chief Executive, Ciara Bergman commented:

“We’re encouraged to see, at long last, some radical and wide-reaching recommendations to address the appalling and ever-escalating crisis in the Crown Court system. This said, it remains unclear whether the Government will accept them in full or what the timescales will be for their implementation (likely many years).

In the meantime, thousands of adult and child survivors of sexual violence who’ve already endured the trauma of rape and abuse are currently being retraumatised by the systems that are supposed to protect and help them to seek a criminal justice outcome, if that’s what they want.

We’ve heard from numerous survivors who were made to wait 5+ years for their trial to go ahead, after up to 6 trial dates had been postponed – often due to there being no barrister, courtroom or judge available. Survivors are often let down on the day of the trial, having spent months preparing themselves for it mentally and emotionally, and asked to come back in a year’s time, or longer.

We also have Rape Crisis centres under incredible strain, facing hugely increased demand for the specialist support they provide, alongside underfunding so severe that three centres have had to close in the last 12 months alone. The increased demand for Rape Crisis services is in no small part due to the length of time cases are taking to progress through the system, meaning that survivors require support for longer - not just to recover from the crimes committed against them, but also the impact of their engagement with the criminal justice system. However, these life-changing and sometimes life-saving specialist services are facing a severe funding crisis⁶.

So whilst we welcome radical long-term reform, we ask the Government to urgently engage with us to find solutions to the issues facing survivors of sexual violence right now. We need immediate and urgent prioritisation of sexual violence cases within the Crown Court with

⁵ <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/rape-crisis-ceo-comments-on-the-latest-crown-court-data/>

⁶ <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/urgent-funding-needed-for-rape-crisis-centres-as-thousands-wait-for-services/>

guaranteed fixed trial dates, substantial investment in specialist support services, and the implementation of the specialist sexual violence courts that were promised in the Labour Manifesto. None of this is addressed by the Leveson Review and the situation for survivors is increasingly urgent”.

[Read Part 1 of the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts](#)

[Read more about the Crown Court backlog and the impact on survivors of sexual violence and abuse](#)