

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Director of Public Prosecutions, HC 449](#)

Tuesday 3 December 2024

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Members present: Andy Slaughter (Chair); Josh Babarinde; Mr Alex Barros-Curtis; Pam Cox; Linsey Farnsworth; Sir Ashley Fox; Warinder Juss; Tessa Munt; Mrs Sarah Russell; Mike Tapp.

Questions 1 - 75

Witness

[I](#): Stephen Parkinson, Director of Public Prosecutions.



Examination of witness

Witness: Stephen Parkinson.

Chair: Welcome to today's public session of the Justice Committee, where the single item of business is the evidence we are going to hear from Stephen Parkinson, the Director of Public Prosecutions, who has been in that role for just over a year. Welcome, Mr Parkinson. Thank you very much for attending today. Before I ask you to introduce yourself formally, we will, as we always do, go around the table asking for declarations of interest. I start by saying that I am a non-practising barrister, a member of the Unite and GMB trade unions and a patron of the Hammersmith & Fulham law centre and of the Upper Room charity.

Tessa Munt: I am Tessa Munt, the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills. I have a full declaration as required, but point out that I am the vice-chair of WhistleblowersUK.

Mr Barros-Curtis: Good afternoon. I am Alex Barros-Curtis. I hold a practising certificate from the SRA, and am a member of GMB and Unite and an ordinary member of the APPG on whistleblowing.

Mrs Russell: I am Sarah Russell. I hold a practising certificate with the SRA. I am a member of USDAW and Community trade unions. I am a member of the Industrial Law Society and the Employment Lawyers Association, and I am a member of the APPG on access to justice.

Josh Babarinde: I am Josh Babarinde, the MP for Eastbourne. I am a non-practising non-lawyer.

Pam Cox: I am Pam Cox, and my interests are as declared on the register, but there is nothing pertinent to this Committee.

Linsey Farnsworth: Good afternoon, Director. My name is Linsey Farnsworth. I am the Member for Amber Valley. My interests are registered, but of relevance to this Committee is that I was a solicitor with the Crown Prosecution Service from 2003 to March this year. I am a member of the FDA union, and of the APPGs on access to justice and on perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Warinder Juss: Good afternoon. I am Warinder Juss, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton West. I am a solicitor. I renewed my practising certificate but am not practising at the moment. I am a member of the central executive council of the GMB and a member of various APPGs. My wife is a senior Crown prosecutor working in the RASSO unit in Birmingham.

Mike Tapp: I am Mike Tapp, Dover and Deal. I was previously employed by the National Crime Agency.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you very much, everyone. As I said, Mr Parkinson, we are very much looking forward to this afternoon. We will go straight into the questions, but I will ask you a general question first, if I may, which will give you the opportunity perhaps to introduce yourself to us. Before your



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current appointment you spent 20 years as a criminal defence lawyer, and now you are head of the Crown Prosecution Service. How do you feel that your previous experience and career have prepared you for your current role, and what skills do you bring to this role as a result of that?

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you for that question, and for this opportunity to appear before the Committee. I spent 20 years as a defence solicitor and the previous 20 years in the public sector, starting off as a prosecutor. I spent a broadly equal balance of my career between prosecuting and defending. I think that having spent all that time as a defence solicitor gives me a more rounded perspective in a number of respects. It certainly helps with casework decisions. When I was a prosecutor, I always did my best to anticipate likely defences, but it was only when I started defending people, and when my primary responsibility, apart from my obligations as an officer of the court, was to focus on my client, that I saw things I would not have seen as a prosecutor. I think it has made me a better lawyer. Also, I have seen the criminal justice system from a different perspective. I am very much alive to the pressures in the criminal justice system, and I have seen it from both sides.

To take your question slightly more broadly, in my last job I was the senior partner of a fairly large law firm, 500 people, with 81 partners. The role meant I had overall responsibility for every aspect of the firm, including marketing, finance and IT—the broad range of things that you do not actually see as a lawyer in practice, particularly. You are aware of them, but when you are the head of the firm they are your responsibility. I think that has helped to prepare me for the step up to the leadership of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The other thing about my experience is that I started my career as a frontline prosecutor. I was a senior Crown prosecutor in the Crown Prosecution Service and undertook a number of frontline roles—the roles that are performed by roughly half the workforce in the Crown Prosecution Service. It has given me a deep understanding of the work that my colleagues now do. I have spent most of my career preparing cases, either as a prosecutor or as a defender. I think it gives me a deep understanding, and perhaps a little bit of added credibility when I go round the areas and talk to people.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. What would you say the year you have been in post has taught you about the wider criminal justice system, in particular from your interaction with the CPS areas?

Stephen Parkinson: I spent a lot of the first six months going round each of the 14 CPS areas. I spent, normally, two—sometimes a little more than two—days in each area, spending at least a day with colleagues but also taking the opportunity to meet chief constables and resident judges. I wanted to get a feel of the pulse of the organisation, and relationships between the various partners locally—the police, the courts and ourselves.



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I came in with some ideas, and maybe at some point in this session I can talk about some of the priorities I have come in with. I did a lot of listening as well, as you might expect, and would probably hope. I learned a lot about the everyday experience of frontline prosecutors. There are lots of frustrations with some of our systems and processes, but if I may say so—this was a really pleasant surprise—the level of commitment I have found across the Crown Prosecution Service has been quite extraordinary. We do an annual people survey, and these surveys show consistently that our people have a 91% sense of commitment and purpose in relation to the work that they do. The surveys contain plenty of moans and gripes, I assure you, but there is a very strong sense of the worthwhileness of the job that they do, and it not just the lawyers. Everyone in the Crown Prosecution Service has that strong sense of commitment. I have seen that.

I have also seen, and it is perhaps unusual for an organisation whose predominant purpose is the practice of law, a willingness to be innovative and embrace change. Those of you around the table who are lawyers know that we lawyers can be quite cautious, but my colleagues are quite open and flexible. I have seen changes from when I was last in the public sector. Obviously, the service is more digital. It was paper-based when I left. It is flexible, as I have indicated. The quality of the work is high, and there is a lot more monitoring. We have the capability to drill down quite deeply into the performance of each area, and to compare one area to another. These are all quite positive changes from the service that I left 20 years ago.

Q3 Chair: Given that analysis, what do you think are the key metrics at the moment in assessing CPS performance, and how is it measuring up to that?

Stephen Parkinson: Our metrics are based around a number of factors. Timeliness, which is how quickly we process cases, in particular from when we get a referral from the police. We divide that between what we call red charging and green charging. Red charging is where someone is in custody, when our target is three hours to make a decision. If they are on bail it is 28 days.

We look at our performance in court. I have been giving a lot of attention recently to our early guilty plea rate. Ideally, we achieve an early guilty plea, by which we mean a guilty plea at the first substantive hearing. We monitor that as well. We look at cracked and ineffective trials—particularly ineffective ones—and whether that is due to prosecution reasons. We look at how quickly we serve papers and at our timeliness in relation to communication with victims.

I want to flag up now—perhaps we will come back to it—that, when I arrived, I noticed, and I talked to colleagues about the fact, that a lot of our key performance indicators are based around process. Coming from business, where the focus is on outcomes, I am trying to do something around reorienting what we, and the police, do. Perhaps we can come back to that.



Q4 **Chair:** That is interesting. My final question for the time being—I have to ask you this—is that you said you had wanted to be DPP from the age of 25. Is that correct? What motivated you in that way?

Stephen Parkinson: It is true. My very first job was in the department of the Director of Public Prosecutions that preceded the CPS. I know many lawyers will disagree with what I am about to say, but I am going to say it anyway, because I believed it then and I believe it now: I think the job that I do is the most impactful, consequential and worthwhile job any lawyer can do. I have always thought that and it is why, throughout my career, it was a job I wanted to do. I gave up on it. In my mid-40s I applied to become director of the Serious Fraud Office, was shortlisted and was unsuccessful. I thought it would never happen, and went into private practice. Although I was actually offered the opportunity to apply, I never did so. It was to do with not wanting to let down my firm. Last year I retired and the opportunity came up and I applied, and I am absolutely delighted to have been successful.

Mike Tapp: Congratulations.

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you.

Q5 **Mike Tapp:** I would like to touch on the Crown court backlogs. In the absence of the official published data, what is the CPS estimate of the size of the Crown court backlogs?

Stephen Parkinson: I watched the session with the Lady Chief Justice, and she gave you the published figure and her own figures. I should say that we count cases differently from the Courts Service. We count defendants, whereas they count cases. You will appreciate that a case could involve more than one defendant. Our figure for the Crown court backlog—caseload—is 82,000. That is 85% above pre-covid, so a very significant rise in the last four years.

Q6 **Mike Tapp:** Thank you. How far into the future are the trials being listed?

Stephen Parkinson: We are hearing that some trials are being listed into 2027.

Q7 **Mike Tapp:** What is the impact on the CPS of the backlogs and delays?

Stephen Parkinson: There are two primary consequences of the backlog. One relates to defendants and one to victims. To deal with defendants first, some, I am afraid, are taking advantage of the delays. They know that the longer the case goes on without being tried, the greater the chance that something might go wrong and, in particular, that victims or witnesses will no longer be prepared to support the process.

The other thing about defendants I should say, as a former defence lawyer, is that there is a human cost for everyone, whether they are guilty or not. The fact is that a situation is unresolved. Some of the individuals will eventually be acquitted. Those who will be found guilty



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have none the less had uncertainty hanging over them. One sometimes forgets about that impact of the backlog.

To come to the second part—victims and witnesses—in private practice I spent 20 years acting primarily for individuals. There were a few companies, but it was mainly individuals. For those caught up in the criminal justice system the prospect of the criminal proceedings is like a dark shadow hanging over their lives. Time stops still for many people. They cannot get on with their lives. It can affect relationships and their health. There is increasing attrition of the support that victims and witnesses are prepared to offer. You have seen some of the figures, I am sure. It is difficult to keep victims with us. It often takes considerable courage to gear yourself up for a hearing, and if they get prepared for a trial and it has to be adjourned, the disappointment is obvious.

Of course there is a financial cost to the backlog, and the impact is not just on victims, witnesses and defendants; it affects my own staff and the Bar. There is a human cost. I want at some stage to talk about my priorities, but my highest priority is to reduce delay, and do what we can to reduce delay and influence both the police and the courts in that respect as well.

Q8 Mike Tapp: Your targets are three hours in custody and, I think you said, 28 days on bail. Are you meeting those?

Stephen Parkinson: No. We are getting better, but we are not. For bail it is around 83%, in respect of the areas, and it is something similar for custody. If those figures are wrong, I'll get back to you on that. Rolling out red and green charging was part of an overall project to improve the way we and the police co-operate on charging. It has been rolled out for about a year and we are seeing an improvement in those figures. The targets we set are aspirational, rather than being easily met, but we are putting a lot of effort into it, and we are moving the dial in the right direction.

Q9 Mike Tapp: On the Crown court backlogs, from your perspective what factors are causing those delays in the system?

Stephen Parkinson: There are a number of factors. The overall position in relation to trials is that on any one day, on average, only 40% of trials are effective. That is on the day listed for trial: four out of 10 cases. The remainder is split broadly between cracked trials and ineffective trials.

Cracked trials, for those who don't know, are those that end up as a guilty plea having begun as a not guilty plea. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Mr Parkinson, I am very sorry, but I have to interrupt you because we have a Division, so I will suspend the Committee for 15 minutes and then we will resume.

The Committee suspended for a Division in the House—

On resuming—

Chair: I am sorry about the interruption for voting, Mr Parkinson. It's an



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occupational hazard here. I'll let you continue your answer.

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you. We were talking about the reasons for backlogs and I was explaining that only 40% of trials in the Crown court take place on the day they were listed for. The 60% that don't happen are pretty much evenly split—I can give you the detailed figures if you would like them—between cracked trials, which is the expression for trials that end up as a guilty plea but began as a not guilty plea, and ineffective trials, where, for one reason or another, the trial cannot take place, such as if more cases have been listed in a court than it can accommodate, a victim or witness does not appear, or there hasn't been advocacy cover. Those are factors that cause the backlog.

Historically, there has always been a backlog, but in the last four years it has grown considerably, to go back to the question you asked. There has been a combination of factors, including the overhang from covid and the overhang from the Bar strike. More recently, there have been many more receipts—cases coming in from the police and the Crown Prosecution Service—than the court can accommodate by way of finalisations. The workload is growing, but the capacity of the court to deal with it has remained the same, so that adds to the backlog.

While I have the floor, can I correct a figure I gave you earlier? I have now looked up the figures on charging timeliness. I gave you 83% as the figure we are meeting in red cases, when dealt with in the area. If you include the area and our out-of-hours service, it is 67.3%. For bail cases, the green cases, it is 61.6%. There is a lot of work to be done to improve those figures, if I am absolutely honest, but it is partly a consequence of the pressures that we are under with the receipts coming in. That comes back to what I was saying about the backlog as well.

Q10 **Mike Tapp:** What would you say is the reason for the increase in the number of receipts coming in?

Stephen Parkinson: Primarily it is a consequence of the fact that the last Government increased the number of police officers by some 20,000. It was a commitment of the last Government and it is feeding through into casework. We expect that to continue. We expect workload to grow by around 10% next year.

The other thing to say about that is that something like 38% of the police force have less than five years' service, so they are quite inexperienced. Something like a third of our own people have less than five years. There is a lot of inexperience in the criminal justice system, and that means it takes longer to deal with cases. The police do not have the experience to look for the right things. There are often gaps in what they send us and, sometimes, our own people are a bit too cautious about their decisions. They could prosecute, but it is tempting to ask for a bit more information. It is something that I have discussed with the police and that we are all alive to. If we can keep our workforces, it is a problem that, hopefully, will reduce over time as they become more experienced.



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I sometimes compare the performance of our colleagues in the CPS areas with CPS Direct, our out-of-hours service. They are on duty from 5 o'clock in the evening until 9 o'clock the following day. They are quite experienced people, generally. For one reason or another they have chosen to work from home. They make decisions for which the target is a decision in three hours. Their overall performance matches the national conviction rate. That is partly to do with the quality of the decisions that they make, quite rapidly. I must add that obviously there is lots of further work to be done within the CPS areas, but it is an indication to me that experienced prosecutors can make decisions quickly. Of course, that is just a matter of common sense, isn't it?

Q11 Mike Tapp: Retention is important as well, isn't it? Do you have an issue with retention in staffing?

Stephen Parkinson: To some extent, but not as much as one might fear. In terms of our workforce, our core prosecutor is a senior Crown prosecutor—an SCP—and our turnover rate is 6.7% a year. That is below the civil service average. In fact, our average length of service in the Crown Prosecution Service is 15 years. I came back after 20 years and I recognised a number of people. I think that is because we continue to be a good employer, if I may say so. We invest in our people. We believe in job development. We want to give people a varied career and there are lots of opportunities for people. As I indicated, both as to why I wanted to do the job I am doing, and when I mentioned the figures of 90% or 91% for a strong sense of commitment and purpose, people want to do this job. We lose people, but we have quite good rates of retention.

Q12 Mike Tapp: Good to hear. Zooming out a bit again, you said in the past that "to deliver swift justice, our whole criminal justice system must adapt and change". Can you elaborate on that, please, and what reforms would you recommend?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, it needs to. I said that, and I meant it. Perhaps I can begin by saying why we did so well, if I can put it that way, in the summer. By "we" I mean the criminal justice system. Every part of the criminal justice system stepped up. That was a consequence of a shared recognition that we were in the middle of a national emergency. It required an extraordinary level of commitment by the police, ourselves and the courts. People worked three weeks at a stretch—very long hours. That is something you cannot do as business as usual, unfortunately. You cannot work at that pace. I am often asked, "Why can't we just carry on doing this?" We would love to, but you can't carry on at that pace.

We want to learn lessons from that. My personal view is that the level of co-operation and co-ordination across the criminal justice system has never been better than it is. That was shown over the summer, but we all know that the problems across the criminal justice system continue to be endemic, and we cannot just keep doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result. We need fresh thinking.



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Some systemic changes are needed. The new Government have extended magistrates court sentencing powers to 12 months, which will make a difference. The feeling is that it will save 2,000 sitting days. Some thought needs to be given to reclassification of offences, potentially. From time to time there is discussion about having intermediate courts. They would involve, perhaps, a district judge sitting with two lay magistrates, with capacity to sentence up to three years. That would all take work out of the Crown court. Those ideas have been canvassed and are certainly worth exploring.

One thing you may have seen, because I have been talking about it recently, and that I think has a huge amount of potential, is in relation to guilty pleas; 70% of cases going through the Crown court end up as a guilty plea, but only 36% of cases are a guilty plea at the PTPH—the first substantive hearing. I was talking to the recorder of Manchester a couple of weeks ago about the workload in his area, which I think is quite typical. He said that there is an average of 8.7 hearings per case, but even for a case that ends up guilty, it is between five and six hearings. If we can squeeze out the guilty pleas at a much earlier stage, we will save four hearings. One thing we are doing is serving our full case for the first substantive hearing, the PTPH, but it is not having the effect that we would like to see. It is nudging up the early guilty plea rate, which is one of the key performance indicators that we were talking about earlier. It is nudging it up a bit, but there are a couple of things I am thinking about which could be transformative.

The first is to take something that is already present in the Attorney General's guidelines dealing with serious and complex fraud cases, which enables prosecutors proactively to have a conversation with the defence. Generally, the rule at present is that you wait for the defence to come and approach you. Under these not very well-known guidelines—frankly, I had never come across them when I was in private practice, even though I was a white collar crime lawyer—prosecutors are able proactively to have that conversation and, where it is possible, agree a common basis of plea, both in terms of the facts and in a common understanding as to where in the sentencing guidelines, if there are any, the case should land for the judge. To take the example of the violent disorder over the summer, there are sentencing guidelines on violent disorder. Most cases came into category B1. It was quite easy. I looked it up over the summer. I thought, "Oh, that's a B1 case." Most of the cases were B1 cases, and they ended up as a two to three-year sentence. It is quite possible, for both the prosecution and the defence, to look up guidelines and reach a common understanding as to the appropriate sentencing range.

My first thought is that if we can have, in appropriate cases—obviously with due consultation with victims—a conversation with the defence that enables us to go to court with a common understanding, it might give defence lawyers and their clients the confidence to put forward a guilty plea, with all the discounts that are available as a result of an early guilty plea. The other thing that requires attention is around payment for the



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defence. I have been talking to Richard Atkinson, who is the new chair of the Law Society, about this issue. It is not new; it is commonly understood, but let me explain it.

If, as a defence solicitor, my client pleads guilty at the PTPH, I get a guilty plea fixed rate. If my client pleads not guilty, but at a later date pleads guilty, I get a cracked trial rate. The cracked trial rate is substantially more than the guilty plea rate. It is even more notable with barristers. To give an example, for class A drug supply the guilty plea fee is £639. The cracked trial fee is £815. That is a 27% uplift. With burglary it is £212, and the cracked trial is £267. For barristers the difference can be 100%, so for a class A drugs it is £3,370 for a guilty plea, but it is £6,739 for a cracked trial fee. Burglary is £460 and £920 for a cracked trial. The conclusion I draw from that is that we are not incentivising the defence to give early attention to papers. What I would like to do, but obviously it is not within my power, is to talk to those responsible—

Q13 **Mike Tapp:** Who sets those rates?

Stephen Parkinson: They are set in criminal legal aid regulations. Obviously, they are the primary responsibility of the Legal Aid Agency. It is an issue I am raising. Ideally, I would like to have some pilots, where we can just look at it and see what the effect is—maybe three pilots. One would involve my early conversations, plus an additional fee; another pilot would be with just my conversations; and then another one with just the fee. Let's look at it. You can see the potential when you come back to what I was saying about five hearings for a guilty plea.

It is a long answer, but I am coming back to your question around doing things differently. If we don't start doing things differently, the problem is just going to get worse.

Mike Tapp: That is really interesting; thank you for that. Unless there are any other questions on that point, I will move on—

Tessa Munt: Can I volunteer Bristol for one of your pilots?

Chair: Linsey has been indicating for a long time.

Q14 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Thank you. Director, I want to take you back to the red charging and green charging cases and look at the red cases. I think you said that the target is three hours for a decision, and that it was an 83% success rate overall, but when out of hours was taken into consideration it dropped down to 67.3%.

Stephen Parkinson: That's right; 83% if it is the area only.

Q15 **Linsey Farnsworth:** You talked about the attrition rate being good for the CPS Direct lawyers, essentially. The results are good, but the timeliness is going down when out of hours charging is taken into account. As a disclosure, I worked for CPS Direct for five years. Why is it that the timeliness goes down when out of hours is taken into account?



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Stephen Parkinson: I cannot give you an accurate answer now because it is something I am looking into. I only became aware of that drop compared to areas relatively recently, so I am asking questions around it.

If it is a question of staffing, we need to adjust the staffing. With CPS Direct we allocate staff according to peaks and flows. You may well recall this from your own experience in CPS Direct. There are a few hours towards the end of the day, probably between 8 pm and 11 pm or 12.00 pm, when the pressures are greatest, so we deploy more staff at that point. I need to look at the whole issue around whether we are resourcing it adequately.

There are other factors that affect the efficiency of CPS Direct that concern police behaviour. Ideally, CPS Direct would get reasonable notice that a case was coming in, and they would get the full three hours that they needed. Some police forces, for one reason or another, actually approach them when the clock is ticking well within those three hours. They might just get one hour to deal with the case, or slightly more than that. The problem with that is that it then pushes other cases further back because it becomes a very urgent case as the PACE clock is ticking away.

Q16 **Linsey Farnsworth:** The three hours isn't the PACE clock, is it? The three hours is your target. When does the clock start to run for the three-hour target?

Stephen Parkinson: I am confusing you by the way I am explaining it. Forgive me. There are two targets. There is our target, which is the three-hour target. There is the PACE clock. When I say that there may just be an hour or an hour and a half left, I am talking about the PACE clock. The impact of receiving a case late from the police is that we have to deal with it as a matter of urgency, and that pushes back our ability to deal with other cases in the system that we could have accommodated within our own internal target of three hours, and we miss it. That is one explanation that I have been given quite often, and it is a consequence of the pressures that the system is under. It is something that I have asked questions about, and I am looking into.

To contextualise all of this, I should explain that red charging—charging of people who are in custody—happens out of hours, but also happens during the day now within the areas, and the area performance is better. Our different areas across the country are subject to different pressures. What we have done relatively recently to address that fact is that, two years ago, we created a central prosecution team. Recently, we doubled the size of that team. There are now 17 people, and we are heading towards 24. They are able to deal with areas under particular pressure. In the last two years they have done 9,500 charging decisions. Because we are a national service, have uniform practices and work online, we can deploy people across the country to do that.

A question I actually asked when I looked at the figures very recently was, "So, we can manage that in the areas, but we need to be looking at



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whether we need to do more with CPS Direct in order to address those figures." I am looking at it. I am sorry that I cannot give you a better answer.

Q17 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Do the three hours start from the moment the police phone CPS Direct? Is it still a phone-line system?

Stephen Parkinson: I think it is from the point at which it gets to triage. It is when it is accepted by us.

Q18 **Linsey Farnsworth:** I remember long queues of officers waiting on the phone for it to be answered. I don't know whether that is still the case.

Stephen Parkinson: It shouldn't be. We have now rolled out a charging model that you may recall from when you were in the CPS. Part of it is to improve the transfer of files between the police and the CPS, so they should no longer be hanging on the phone. London came onstream over the summer. It turned out to be quite a smooth transition, I am glad to say. I am sorry, I can't remember which area of the CPS you worked in, but that certainly was a feature and hopefully will no longer be a feature that is with us going forward.

Q19 **Mrs Russell:** Apologies, this may demonstrate that I don't fully understand the criminal justice system. You mentioned five to eight hearings to get something to a full trial. Obviously, reducing cracked hearings would reduce that. Apart from that, is there nothing that could be done to consolidate it? I know it is more complicated than an employment tribunal, but an employment tribunal as standard, even for quite a complex discrimination claim, would have one preliminary hearing to establish the pathway to a full hearing. You might have one more hearing to deal with a specific issue, and then you would have your full hearing. What is the scope? Instead of it being five to eight, could it become three?

Stephen Parkinson: It's a very fair question. There is a body called the Crown court improvement group, which consists of the police, us, judges and so forth. The senior presiding judge, Lord Justice Edis, who was the SPJ until recently, put out some listing guidance in January 2023 as to the ideal number of hearings that might take place. There is an extra hearing that you would not get in the employment tribunal, which is sentencing. Including sentencing, the guidance he gave was that, ideally, it should be five. I know that is more than your three, but there are some essential stages. There is the first hearing, which is number one; there is the trial, number four, with number five being sentencing. The recommendation is for at least one hearing prior to trial to make sure that everything is in place. There is recognition that you might want another to deal with disclosure. Between first hearing and trial, there are four hearings. What tends to happen is that you have a hearing such as a PTPH, and everyone is almost ready, but something needs to be done. The judge might then list it for an ad hoc hearing. You have one of those hearings when something is meant to be done, and it has not quite been done, so judges then put in an extra hearing. That is what tends to happen.



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Obviously, the courts want to reduce the number of those ad hoc, unplanned for, hearings. Last week, the Lady Chief Justice referred to a review of listing by his honour Judge Edmunds. He is looking at the whole thing. There is that plan. Any member of the public can look at it. It is on the internet. It provides listing guidance. Lord Justice Edis spent a lot of time going round the country, trying to ensure that those guidelines were adhered to but, for one reason or another, it is not always possible.

Q20 Tessa Munt: My point was marginally flippant. When you are running your pilot, could I offer a conversation with Bristol first, please? I think they are feeling the pinch. If there was a way of easing some of their troubles, it would be good.

Stephen Parkinson: I have met the resident judge of Bristol. He is a hugely impressive judge, if I may say so. I am sure he will be very open to a pilot of that kind.

Q21 Chair: You have offered us a number of ways to reduce backlogs and delays. When the Lady Chief Justice gave evidence last week, she particularly focused on sitting days and the effective cap on sitting days. Is that an issue for you at the CPS? How far do you feel that it has determined the rate of progress, this year in particular?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, it is an issue for us. Our estimate is that between now and April there will be 33,000 sitting days remaining. That is about 3,000 less than we expected, about 10% fewer sitting days than we were expecting, so it affects us.

The Lady Chief Justice gave you some specific examples of cases that have had to be adjourned as a result. I adopt those. They are good examples of the actual impact on courts. The pressures on us are going to be felt most acutely in London, the north-west, the south-east, Wales and the south-west. There are 14 CPS areas, and I have called out five where we are going to feel the pressures particularly.

Chair: I am keen to move on to a new topic.

Q22 Pam Cox: Thank you for joining us, Director. You mentioned that your highest priority is to reduce delay. We have been talking about mechanisms that might help with that. We know that outdated or lack of technology contributes to delay, so, if I may, I will focus my questions on that area. The CPS had a Budget allocation of £49 million this year. Can you give an indication of how that will be spent on improving technology data?

Stephen Parkinson: We haven't yet sat down to work out the detail in relation to how we will use that extra money, but I am certain that part of it will be used to improve technology. There are two aspects to that. One is improving our existing systems. Our case management system is 20 years old and over time we are gradually replacing it. In fact, we have a seven-year project to do that. When I go round the country, I come across a lot of frustration in relation to our technology. That is one part of it.



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We are using part of our resource to make improvements. There are a number of things that we have been doing. We have had money from the Treasury, which we hope will continue, and that means that we will be able to have digital jury bundles. We will be able to give members of the jury an iPad. That will be transformative, not only for their experience but in saving our time. Having to rework a paper bundle because counsel wants to take something out, or add something, is unrewarding work and very time-consuming.

We have introduced email automation. Our staff were having to move emails coming in from members of the public, and manually slot them in the appropriate place in our systems. That is happening through technology now. Witness expenses have been automated. We are making improvements as we go along, but the frustration is very real. We will spend some of the money on continuing to do that. The other area where there is huge potential is around AI, not only in terms of the existing money that we have been given but we have phase two of the spending review bid coming up. One part of that is that we will be making a bid for more technology to make us more productive and efficient.

I do not want to give a very long answer, but there is more I could say on that if you have a follow-up question.

Q23 Pam Cox: Thank you very much for that. My colleague will be relieved to hear about the jury bundles, which we were talking about earlier. In terms of the common platform, is that the seven-year programme that you referred to, or were you referring to something else?

Stephen Parkinson: No. I was referring to our case management system. It is our internal system. The common platform was meant to be a system to be used by all parts of the criminal justice system.

Q24 Pam Cox: Do you think that is ever going to happen?

Stephen Parkinson: It has been implemented in the magistrates court. There are some aspects of it which are being used in the Crown court, but the main use is probably not going to happen now in the Crown court. It is being used in other parts of the court system.

We fully engaged with that project, but we realised two or three years ago that there were some operational risks in the interplay between our system and the design of the common platform. We adjusted the way we would operate, so we are integrated with the court system, but we are not part of it in the sense of being one whole system.

Q25 Pam Cox: On the question of integration of criminal justice data and systems, are there things that you think the CPS could be doing to assist? In many ways, you seem to be ahead of the curve.

Stephen Parkinson: In terms of data, definitely. In answer to an earlier question, I said that, for instance, we count defendants and the Courts Service counts cases. There is a lack of consistency across the criminal justice system in the way that we deal with figures. A lot of work is going on—we are closely involved in that; we are a core part of it—to actually



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evolve a common way of managing data across the system. It is obviously very good for transparency; it will also help us to frame policy. For those of you who have not yet come across it, I commend the criminal justice dashboard. It is something that I look at often. Even there, you can see that there are inconsistencies between the way the different agencies deal with figures.

Q26 Chair: I have a short follow-up. We have heard that the CPS is ahead of the curve in some respects in relation to digitisation and data. What the public will care about is that the whole system joins up. Most people, whether they work in the public or private sector, will expect the different systems that they use through an organisational process to always be compatible with each other. Why doesn't that happen in the criminal justice system?

Stephen Parkinson: It is because we are not one organisation. There are 43 different police forces. They are empires unto themselves. We are quite fortunate that we are a national prosecuting service, that we are independent from the police and the courts. The Courts Service sits under the Ministry of Justice. All these systems have grown up over time. We are working really hard with the police on something called the digital case file. It is a project that has been going on for some while. In the police service there are three different companies working on producing a digital case file, so it is really quite difficult.

Q27 Chair: Who do you blame for this?

Stephen Parkinson: I am not blaming anyone. We have 43 different police forces, and they have their own governance arrangements. We have a fair amount of joint governance. Having moaned a little bit about the fact that we are where we are, I need to say that the criminal justice system is becoming more and more joined up. On police-CPS data projects there is joint governance. We do our best between us to manage that. There are all sorts of bodies across the criminal justice system. There is a Criminal Justice Board, which oversees the whole of the criminal justice system. Beneath that there is a group of senior officials, of whom I am one, which is the Criminal Justice Action Group. We do our best. What we are doing is managing the fact that there is obviously a strong desire for co-ordination, but there is a level of independence as well. It is easier for us in the CPS because we are a national organisation, but while we continue to have 43 police forces, each with their own police and crime commissioner, notwithstanding the best efforts of the NPCC, which is the co-ordinating body for police forces, they can guide but they cannot command.

Chair: I am sorry to have interrupted. We are going to go to staffing matters.

Q28 Linsey Farnsworth: I would like to talk about staffing, if I may. At the very start you talked about the commitment of the staff and how impressed you were when you became DPP. You also talked about backlogs of cases and the negative impacts that that has on defendants, victims and witnesses. What would you say the impact of significant court



backlogs has on the staff in the CPS?

Stephen Parkinson: It means that they are under considerable pressure. Our sickness rates are a worry. We have wellbeing support available for individuals. I paid a visit recently to the north-west area, which is Manchester. I think I said in answer to an earlier question that in my first six months I went round every area. I am halfway through my second round of visits. I went back to Manchester. In the eight months or so since my last visit, their workload had gone up between 30% and 40%. The average caseload for a prosecutor there is 200 cases.

I spoke to the chief constable and the deputy mayor who is responsible for crime. I said, "This is just unsustainable." A lot of those cases will be in the backlog. You might say there is nothing to do with them, but of course there is. The fact is that you have a case that is not coming to trial for two years. There continues to be a need to maintain that case. Queries will come in. There is the constant concern that victims might withdraw. You have your current caseload cases, where you need to be making decisions, but there is an element of managing the cases in the backlog as well. It is something that concerns me a great deal.

I haven't talked about all the things I want to do to address that, but can I take this opportunity to mention a couple? One of them is a big efficiency project that I launched on the back of my experience in private practice. It is a continuous improvement project. It addresses your point about pressure, because I think the outcome will reduce pressure on staff. It is an end-to-end review that looks at every part of the process from the point when we receive a case from the police all the way through to sentencing. It is a project that engages the people who are doing the job on the ground. Basically, we ask ourselves three questions. Do we need to be doing this? Can we do it better? Can we do it faster? The first part, in the jargon, is mapping the process. On the back of the feedback we are getting, we will redesign the process and bring in the IT to support it. To come back to your question, IT will be a large part of the answer.

Can I give you an example of the clear thinking that has arisen as a result of that, and of the way that large organisations accumulate jobs they don't need to be doing? We want to advise the police early in an investigation. We encourage them to come to us and ask for early advice. They come to us and ask for advice and we give our advice. We then chase them. We chase them after one month, two months and three months as to what they are doing as a consequence of our advice. If we have not heard from them, we archive it on our system. It all involves spreadsheets, monitoring and so forth. As a result of the project, we will run a pilot—you can see I like pilots—that will involve, "We've given you advice. The case is closed, and we'll see if the world falls in." I don't think it will, but it is quite a good example of how organisations grow tasks they do not need.

Q29 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Didn't those chaser tasks come off the back of a target that you had—we had, when I was there—for finalisation of cases



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in a timely way? The chasing had to be done; otherwise, you could not finalise the case within the targeted time limit. I may be misremembering and I apologise if I am.

Stephen Parkinson: I am talking about early advice. We take the view now that we are not formally engaged at that point. Once the police send a case to us for a decision we take formal responsibility for our part of the process and we follow up, but with early advice it continues to be their investigation. If they decide to do nothing further with it, it is not our responsibility. We can argue about whether that is a good thing or a bad thing, but I am just giving it as an example of something where we have asked ourselves whether we need to be doing it. The answer at the moment is no, but we will test it.

Going back to your wellbeing question, there are too many things that we are doing, and organisations as a whole do. That requires fresh thinking about whether we need to be doing them at all, and whether we can do them better. I hope that the project will increase our efficiency but also reduce pressure on our people and increase morale. Certainly, when I did it in private practice, that was the outcome.

Q30 **Linsey Farnsworth:** I'm not sure we would have been arguing on that point, but it is useful to know that it is being looked at. The CPS annual report talks about the vacancy rate in the CPS as 6.3% among senior Crown prosecutors in 2023-24. What steps are you taking to encourage more experienced prosecutors to progress their career at the CPS? For example, are you increasing the number of specialist prosecutor roles that are available in the CPS?

Stephen Parkinson: I don't know that we are increasing them, but there are a good number. One thing I found when making my area visits is that often they lose their senior Crown prosecutors to a headquarters or specialist prosecutor role. As to whether or not we have the balance right, that is something on my agenda to look at. Generally, can I contextualise the recruitment of experienced prosecutors? There is a real issue around attracting lawyers to practise criminal law. You have heard me say already that I think it is one of the most worthwhile and impactful things anyone can do, but to attract qualified lawyers into the practice of criminal law is quite hard. I am glad to say that we are very open-minded about this. When I go round the country and hear about new recruits, often we have recruited people who have not practised criminal law. They might have been doing commercial work of one kind or another, conveyancing or whatever, but we have recruited them and that obviously involves a cost in terms of training. I celebrate that because we have brought someone from another area of practice into a relatively unpopular area of practice, which is criminal law.

The really interesting thing about criminal law is that it is hugely attractive to people who are not already qualified. We get between 2,000 to 3,000 applications every year for the 80 places we can offer for legal trainees or pupil barristers. I want to increase that to 200. If I were successful in getting the funding to enable me to do that, it would still



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mean that it was one out of every 10 applicants, so I would manage to keep the quality of people coming in.

As part of our strategy to make a big difference in terms of numbers, the answer has to be growing our own and keeping them. Of our workforce, 43% are over 50, and about a third of our workforce are in the first five years of qualification. The middle bit, typically in their 30s or 40s, is around 20%. We have a bit of a gap in the middle and it is a consequence of austerity, but over time, if we can keep those people, we will smooth out that issue. I said that 43% of our workforce are over 50. Richard Atkinson, chair of the Law Society, wrote to me recently to tell me that 58% of duty solicitors are aged 50 or over. I am 43%; he is 58%. We have a problem generally that the legal profession practising criminal law tends to be at the upper end, so we have to address the problem of attracting people.

Q31 Linsey Farnsworth: Going back to the specialist prosecutor role, you said you are looking at whether there need to be more of them. Senior Crown prosecutors can be at the senior Crown prosecutor grade for years, even decades, without getting a specialist prosecutor role. You said that a lot of them go to the central casework division because that is where the specialist prosecutor roles are. Looking at the figures, 25% of legal staff in the east midlands have less than two years' experience. The east midlands was my area originally before I moved to a central casework division as a specialist prosecutor. One of the problems in the east midlands was that there were no specialist prosecutor roles, so everybody moved to the central casework division. Do you have a strategy in mind for that? For example, there might be specialist prosecutors now in the east midlands—one, maybe two—but is that something you would look at to keep staff in regional areas?

Stephen Parkinson: It is a very fair point. There are a few specialist prosecutors dotted round the country, but you are absolutely right. The majority are based in headquarters. By the way, that does not necessarily mean London. Our headquarters are dispersed around the country. It is something I would like to look at. I am concerned about a different perspective—the balance between specialist prosecutors and SCPs—but I am wholly committed to the idea of giving people a career-long experience in the Crown Prosecution Service. There are a number of different roles you can perform, but people want to progress. There are additional costs to creating extra roles, so it is something we have to be mindful of. I am very keen on improving our efficiency. One of the reasons I need to do so is that resources are very tight. Whenever you create new roles that have a cost attached to them you have to look at that very carefully.

Linsey Farnsworth: May I ask one more question?

Chair: Yes.

Q32 Linsey Farnsworth: It is on resourcing but is slightly different. It relates to the advocacy strategy. I think a large proportion of money is spent on outside counsel, but I know that you have legal traineeships in place now



in the CPS. What is your current advocacy strategy going forward?

Stephen Parkinson: I am glad you asked that question because I was hoping to find an opportunity to talk about it. We have developed an advocacy strategy that involves a career path from pupillage all the way through to QC. I introduced one particular innovation this year. Until September this year, if you did a pupillage in the Crown Prosecution Service—we had 47 pupils and we are the largest pupillage provider in the country by a very considerable margin—and you wanted to undertake a role as Crown advocate, which is our in-house advocacy service, you could not qualify into that; you had to do a period as a Crown prosecutor reviewing cases and then you had to make an application to be a Crown advocate. The consequence was that we were losing about a third of our pupil barristers on qualification, because there is so much work out there.

I introduced a change, which took place from September this year and means that pupil barristers can immediately qualify as Crown advocates. It has meant we retained 90% of our pupil barristers, as against 66% or so in previous years. It is strongly supported by the Bar. The chair of the Criminal Bar Association is a former Crown advocate. They recognise the need for this. That is phase one, which will continue.

Phase two is to give our existing experienced colleagues the opportunity to transfer and become Crown advocates, and we hope to roll that out next year. By doing that we will significantly increase the number of Crown advocates and address the shortage of advocacy generally in covering our cases. We will close that gap, which means that there will be fewer ineffective hearings because there isn't an advocate available.

The other advantage of deploying Crown advocates is that they are decision makers. I would like them to be doing the PTPH lists. The PTPH is the first substantive hearing. We hope very much that courts will brigade lists so that you have a whole load of those. If we can deploy a Crown advocate, as we often do, they are in a position to make decisions on the day. Remember, the self-employed Bar has to get instructions, but they can make decisions, so there are huge advantages.

I have already referred to the violent disorder over the summer. The majority of those cases were covered by our own Crown advocates. Obviously, they were able to make decisions; it also enhanced the communication between the CPS and the person in court because they were one of our own and that speeded up justice. This is something new. It is important and is backed by the Bar, and it is a consequence of the fact that there are not enough members of the self-employed Bar who can service our cases. As I say, it is something that has their support.

Chair: We have to speed up questions and answers if we are going to get through everything.

Stephen Parkinson: Sorry.

Chair: No. It's all fascinating stuff so I was reluctant to interrupt.

Q33 **Mrs Russell:** You mentioned that at the moment in Manchester the



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caseloads are 200 per person. How does that compare with the rest of the country? I know that in Manchester there have been specific historical case reviews; there have been lots of problems in Greater Manchester police that I suspect may be a factor. To what extent is it a CPS staff shortage or to what extent is it a localised, specific police issue that obviously is now having CPS impacts?

Stephen Parkinson: It is a combination of both. I think the average caseload is about 250. If I am wrong I will write to you. Two hundred is obviously considerably in excess of that. On receipts, obviously we welcome the fact that the police are being so active and they are arresting people and sending cases our way. The issue for us is having enough people to be able to service them; 200 is unsustainable. There has been a big turnaround in Greater Manchester police as a result of the excellent chief constable, Steve Watson, re-motivating his colleagues. They have come out of special measures and are being much more effective, but there are issues around the quality of investigations which we are addressing with them. We have talked about this. The quality needs to improve because we have to do a lot of reworking of cases that come in. It is a combination of local factors like that, but the national picture is a growing number of receipts.

Q34 **Mrs Russell:** How many cases do you think a prosecutor can effectively manage?

Stephen Parkinson: When I began my job, 120 was quite typical as a number that was given to me. People felt quite under pressure there. It is a question that I am sometimes asked. I am a little reluctant to put a number on it because I am really focusing on doing cases and investigations better. I have talked about our efficiency project, so I won't go on about that any more. One thing worth mentioning is that there is too much churn between us and the police; too much back and forth. We talked earlier about KPIs and I said there was too much process. We put in a 28-day limit to respond to a pre-charge decision. We meet that target if we send back an action plan: "We're not ready to charge, but here's 15 points you need to address." We have now put a cap of two on those action plans. You cannot send out another one without the permission of a senior colleague because, if you get to that stage, it probably means there is a fundamental misunderstanding between you and the police officer that can be resolved only through a conversation. That has been well received and it is implemented across the Crown Prosecution Service, and is promoting better dialogue.

Coming back to your question on pressure, it is just an example that, if we can be more efficient in the way we manage investigations and deal with our casework, we can reduce the pressure on our colleagues and solve the issue of delay. That is what I am focusing on. I am often asked about the ideal target. The trouble is that if I say the target is 120, the reality is that we have more cases than 120, so what am I to do if the Treasury doesn't give me money? What I can do is help to make us more efficient.



Q35 Mrs Russell: Is the flip side of it that, if we have trials collapsing all over the place and a third of them are because the CPS is not ready, we are in a chicken-and-egg situation? Until we establish what people can actually do, we will keep having things falling to pieces and that creates a backlog and we just go round in a circle. I appreciate that if you were doing financial crime you would have a smaller caseload, but on average in a criminal private practice what would you expect the caseload to look like?

Stephen Parkinson: I can only answer from my own experience. I was in a firm where we were privately paid and I don't think that would be a relevant figure, because we were paid to put the time into those cases. I suspect that in a legal aid firm it is very similar to the situation in the Crown Prosecution Service. Of course, you are right, but the way I am trying to address the problem of going round and round and doing the same thing over and over is to stop doing the same thing over and over. I have already talked about a number of initiatives that we are taking to deal with those problems.

Obviously, I want more money and that means I can get more people. I will continue to ask for more money. I should say at this point that we had a reasonably good settlement in phase one, in recognition of the particular pressures to which we are subject, because we cannot control the number of cases coming in and the backlog; we are right in the middle. The other side is that we need to do better to be more efficient. When I say "we", I mean us in the CPS, but I also mean the police and the Courts Service.

Q36 Warinder Juss: Thank you, Director. I hope I will be able to deal with these questions quickly in light of the information you have already given me, so I won't ask all the questions I intended to ask. Looking specifically at RASSO cases, those have increased quite considerably over the last few years. I know that you have recruited 194 specialist staff into RASSO, which I think was an increase of 44% since April 2021. You mentioned that you now have a scheme of having Crown advocates working on RASSO cases. I understand that part of the problem faced by the CPS was not having enough prosecuting counsel and defence counsel. With Crown advocates, hopefully you will be able to solve the problem of not having enough prosecuting counsel. Is the idea that, if remuneration is a reason why you have not had counsel dealing with these cases, there will be a plan to pay those Crown advocates a higher figure because they are specialist lawyers specialising in very serious cases? How will you deal with the issue of cases being ineffective because you do not have defence counsel available to deal with them?

Stephen Parkinson: Crown advocates do all types of work, not just rape cases, so it will make a difference but it won't be the answer. On remuneration, we have increased fees for the self-employed Bar in RASSO cases by 41% over the last four years. There has been an issue about the number of advocates from the self-employed Bar able to do these cases. There has been a certain amount of publicity about that, to which you are obviously alive.



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We have taken another initiative in the last year which has made a considerable difference. At the start of the decade, there were 650 people on our RASSO panel. As a result of an initiative that we took this year we have increased that by 37%, so we now have 912 people on the RASSO panel. That is a huge difference, as you will appreciate from the numbers. It was not because we increased fees; it is because we have, at least temporarily, reduced the requirements. You no longer have to make a written application; you no longer have to provide a referee, but you do have to do the training. Just taking away that bureaucracy has encouraged people to join the panel. I am extremely pleased about that, and it has been particularly noticed in the south-east. I'm not saying that it solves the problem, but it will go a long way towards dealing with it.

In relation to the defence, I am afraid it is not really my area of responsibility. I absolutely recognise the pressures on criminal barristers in terms of pay awards and so forth. I would always be one of the people advocating more money, but money is not in my gift.

Q37 **Warinder Juss:** With the steps you are taking, will your efforts be in vain because of defence counsel not being available, or do you think you will still be able to make a significant impact by having sufficient prosecutors?

Stephen Parkinson: I absolutely take the point. What I am doing is addressing what is within my power. Some cases could not take place because we could not find an advocate. Every time you go round the areas—obviously, I am still doing that—you find that people are making 40, 50 or 60 calls to chambers to find someone to cover a case. What I have not been able to do, however, is increase the overall pool of criminal advocates. I have increased the number who are willing to do rape and serious sexual offence cases, but the overall number has not grown. I can't say I have solved the problem generally; I have just made some change.

On the question of parity, as a result of the Bar strike the defence Bar got an increase of 15%, I think. Of course, that disadvantaged the prosecution, so some months later we got an increase of 15%. Going forward, obviously it makes sense that we and the Legal Aid Agency—the powers that determine who gets paid what—work in tandem so that we can increase rates simultaneously and we don't get out of kilter, and that is something I intend to do.

Q38 **Warinder Juss:** We have been talking about caseloads. You mentioned that a typical caseload for a RASSO prosecutor was 200 and obviously—

Stephen Parkinson: That is a typical caseload generally; for a RASSO prosecutor it is 37. Sorry to interrupt.

Q39 **Warinder Juss:** I beg your pardon. Yes, that's right. Is 37 what you would recommend, or do you think it should be less than that?

Stephen Parkinson: It should be less than that for the same reason I gave you. I am very wary about settling on a number, but it is a



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considerable increase on where we were before. That is a consequence of the fact that we have considerably more cases coming into the system. To give you the figures, there has been a 152% increase in police referrals since 2020; suspects charged have gone up by 168%. The volume has increased significantly. What I want—sorry to come back to this—is for us to be more efficient. We have done a huge amount of work on rape and that has generated an increased number of referrals. Another thing I have instituted since I arrived is a prosecutor-led end-to-end review of the way we deal with rape cases, looking at every stage to see if we can do it better. I hope that a consequence of that is that we will improve the way we do these cases and that will reduce pressure.

Q40 Warinder Juss: RASSO cases by their very nature, for want of a better description, can be horrible cases, can't they, because you are dealing with serious offences? I worked as a personal injury lawyer. For our own wellbeing, we had training on how to deal with such cases. What kind of support do you provide to RASSO lawyers as far as their wellbeing is concerned, managing stress and so forth?

Stephen Parkinson: First of all, I recognise exactly the point you make. Doing these cases day in, day out is enormously stressful for individuals, as of course it is for everyone caught up in them. We have a national operating model for dealing with rape cases, and part of that, a strand of that, is looking after our own people. We offer therapy, counselling, one-to-one support, peer support, team discussions, and what we call professional reflective sessions, which are quite similar to clinical supervision. I have a figure here. In the first year of the refreshed programme, because we rolled it out in the last year, 192 of our colleagues dealing with this work went through reflective sessions that involve supervision. It is something we are very mindful of. Of all those things, the ability to talk to a colleague and having good supervision from the people immediately above you seems to be highly effective.

Chair: Thanks very much. Tessa or Sarah, do you want to come in on RASSO?

Q41 Tessa Munt: Yes, if I may. I understand that it takes an average of 125 days from police referral of a rape case to a CPS charging decision. Would you agree with that?

Stephen Parkinson: No.

Q42 Tessa Munt: Thank you. Would you like to correct me?

Stephen Parkinson: The latest figures are that it takes, contextualising this, 317 days from a complaint through to a charging decision. That is when a victim comes forward and makes a complaint. You said the point at which it comes to us is 125. It has actually gone up, I'm afraid. It is now 130 days. I wanted to mention the police figure because you will see from that that it is almost 200 days before it gets to us for a decision. I know I have given very long answers, so I won't rabbit on, but I can give more information on that.



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Q43 **Tessa Munt:** Thank you. That would be helpful, perhaps in writing to the Committee generally. Can I just focus on your bit of it?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, of course.

Q44 **Tessa Munt:** Shall we talk about that a bit?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, certainly. That is the average. The average is a consequence of the outliers, so very long cases increase the average. The median for rape cases, the typical experience, is actually two days. If you look at a table with the quickest decision through to the longest, you get an average overall, but the median is two days. When I last looked at CPS Direct figures, they were making decisions in 35% of rape cases. That probably goes some way to explaining that median figure. There are a lot of cases going through the system where we make rapid decisions, but obviously the average is the one I gave you, which is 130 days.

Q45 **Tessa Munt:** Very good, thank you. What is causing it to take so long? Accepting that there is a two-day median, what is happening with the others?

Stephen Parkinson: A lot of it is to do with the increasing complexity around these cases. Rape cases in particular involve often a considerable amount of digital material that needs to be looked at.

Q46 **Tessa Munt:** Forgive me, but is that not the stuff that the police do? Am I wrong?

Stephen Parkinson: They do, yes. Part of the reason police investigations take longer is that they need to gather mobile phone data, other digital material, forensics and so forth, but then that needs to be reviewed by us. These cases have become much more complex in recent years as a result of that. A lot of it is around the fact that cases do not always arrive in the best order. Regarding police file quality, I say to the police, "Can we start talking about investigation quality?", because that is what we are really talking about. It is better with rape cases, but there is still considerable room for improvement. I am afraid that too often cases do not arrive where we are ready to make a decision, so there has to be some back and forth between us and the police. That is probably the primary reason. We want to get cases in a state such that when we authorise a charge we are in a position to serve a full file on the defence. I have talked about that already. That incorporates extra delay at the pre-charge decision time period. Obviously, it has advantages further down the line if we can get guilty pleas.

Q47 **Tessa Munt:** It might be quite useful to see your graph of where your median is.

Stephen Parkinson: I am very happy to write to you with that.

Q48 **Tessa Munt:** That would be handy. The latest data published by the CPS notes that receipts for adult rape outnumber finalisations by a rate of over two to one. How worried are you by those figures? Does that suggest that success in police referrals is outpacing the CPS and the



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courts' capacity to resolve those cases?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, it does. It is the issue we have talked about already: receipts against finalisations. You will know that in the Labour party manifesto there were a couple of things in relation to that. One is ensuring that every police force has its own specialist squad of rape specialists. In terms of the courts, they are talking about having specialist rape courts. That is something that is under consideration. It does not involve me. I make one observation without saying whether or not it will happen. I have talked about guilty pleas and the fact that 70% of cases end up as a guilty plea. In rape cases, it is 22%, which is a much lower figure. That has relevance in relation to listing. The Lady Chief Justice talked about the balance that judges have to strike with listing. Because there are so many cracked trials, they have to over-list, otherwise judges will not be able to fill their courts. With rape cases, you have much greater certainty that what was put down as a trial will actually happen as a trial because the number of guilty pleas is so low. My contribution is that I think it should be possible in rape cases, whether or not we have specialist rape courts, perhaps to go down the route of more fixed trial dates, which give victims, witnesses and defendants greater certainty that the trial will take place. If we can do that, maybe we can give them more priority.

I have just one other thing to say on rape cases. Although everyone wants to give them priority, the greater priority has to be given to the remand population. There are 17,000 people on remand in custody, and that is one of the reasons why there will always be a considerable delay, I am afraid.

Q49 **Chair:** We are due to finish this session at 4.30. I don't know whether you have to rush off or whether you can give us a little more time to compensate for our voting behaviour.

Stephen Parkinson: Of course.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Stephen Parkinson: I am sorry, I did not realise that time had flown.

Chair: Tessa, are you finished?

Tessa Munt: I give way to Josh.

Chair: Sarah, do you want to come in?

Q50 **Mrs Russell:** You said it takes 133 days in RASSO cases for a charging decision, but the median is two. That must mean that some decisions are taking a very long time. Do you know what the longest outstanding is?

Stephen Parkinson: I don't, but I have already said that I will write to the Committee, so we will be able to provide you with that information. You mustn't think I am minimising the problem, because I am not. One of my priorities is rape—RASSO—cases, and one of the reasons I launched



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the end-to-end review of the way prosecutors deal with these cases was to try to address that issue. It definitely is an issue.

Q51 Mrs Russell: Please can we have breakdowns of the numbers within, first, six months, 12 months, 18 months, two years—six-month increments to however long the end number is?

Stephen Parkinson: I will do my best. If we have that capability, we will provide that.

Mrs Russell: Thanks.

Q52 Josh Babarinde: My questions are on domestic abuse. Domestic abuse consistently represents a third of all the crime that you handle. We can see from the data that the number of suspects of domestic abuse-related crimes referred by the police to the CPS fell from over 110,000 in 2017-18 to about 69,000 in 2022-23. Are you able to shed a bit of light on why you think that is the case?

Stephen Parkinson: Unfortunately, I am not. We only receive a much smaller percentage of cases that the police investigate. It is something I am really interested in. I have been looking at data from MOPAC—the mayor's office in London dealing with crime cases. They have done a study on victim attrition in DA cases, and it shows that there is a 67% attrition rate within the first week. We need much greater understanding of why so few investigations that begin end up in the criminal justice system. That study showed that we received 18% of those investigations.

This is an issue that we and the police have been working on really hard. We have just launched what we call a joint justice panel on domestic abuse, and we are trying to learn from the experience on rape. We have already discussed the fact that in rape cases we have significantly increased the number of cases, and that is as the result of what we call a suspect-focused and victim-centred approach, by which we mean focusing on the activities of the suspect. That may seem obvious, but in rape cases we were spending far too much time in the past looking at the victim's account and worrying about what might undermine the victim's account and not focusing on the suspect themselves. We did a lot of learning from that, including early advice. We are applying some of those lessons to domestic abuse. We have two or three pilots under way to trial a different approach. One involves early advice. One involves telescoping down the timescales for investigations and us making a decision. We have just started that one in Merseyside and Cheshire. We are looking at another whereby we give the police the charging responsibility.

I am afraid I cannot explain the drop, although I am sure it is something to do with attrition—I would love to see a national study of that—but we are seeking to address the problem. As a result of the work we have done already, we have seen a 6.9% increase as a rolling average in the number of cases we are dealing with. The trend is going upward.

Q53 Josh Babarinde: What work are you doing to loop in and communicate with victims and survivors of domestic abuse in the pilots that you are



doing? There is clearly an issue of confidence in our system, and that includes confidence in the Crown Prosecution Service's ability to play its part in dispensing justice on their behalf. I am sure that there will be many victims and survivors who will find some degree of hope—"heartened" would be the wrong word—in the fact that you are working on some of these issues. How are you communicating that and engaging with them?

Stephen Parkinson: The straightforward answer is that we are not in relation to these pilots, because they are pilots around the police-CPS interface. That is the primary driver, but I will certainly take back that observation and ask whether we can engage victims.

To address your point and put it in a wider context if I may, victim confidence is hugely important. At the moment, there is a division of charging between ourselves and the police. On domestic abuse, we have retained the charging decision unless there is going to be a conditional caution or some other out-of-court disposal. It is an area of constant debate between us and the police as to whether we should keep that responsibility. The police say, "If you give us the charging authorisation, we can deal with these cases more quickly and we can deal with attrition."

Going back to the point about victim confidence, the reason why at the moment we retain the charging decision is that we want to look at the whole picture around domestic abuse. It may come in as a common assault, but is there evidence of controlling and coercive behaviour? Are there patterns of behaviour that we need to be aware of that might result in more serious charges and might also mean that a court needs to be approached to give a protective order of one kind or another? We are piloting domestic abuse protective orders at the moment to protect the victim. The concern is that if a case comes in from the police and it is not in a good state and we have to discontinue the case, we may never see the victim survivor ever again. There are different studies around all this. Generally, I have read that it takes between 20 and 50 instances of domestic abuse before someone picks up the phone and contacts the police. If they have had the courage to do that and we then let them down and they never come back, that is a matter of real concern, because we know that domestic violence cases often involve an escalation of violence. That is the debate we are having. I am not minimising your question about victim confidence. It is at the heart of what we have to do in the future: to carry victims with us and give them the confidence to come forward knowing that their case will be dealt with well.

Q54 **Josh Babarinde:** When you say that some cases come to you in a bad state, what does a bad state of a case look like?

Stephen Parkinson: I'm sorry, I am perhaps using loose language. I mean that there is not enough evidence to enable us to make a charging decision, so you either discontinue the case or the police need to get their skates on very quickly in order to get the case back on track, bearing in



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mind that once you charge a case you are in the court system and you are subject to all the timescales that the court system involves. There is one other thing that I should say about that MOPAC study. It is a really interesting study. It showed that of the cases we took forward a third of them were evidence-led, by which we mean without the support of the victim. Attrition in domestic abuse cases is very high for understandable reasons, and not often to do with, I am afraid, the abuser. We do not always need the victim to provide their support. We were taken to the High Court in a case called Barton recently in which the complaint was that we were not using the evidence of the victim, but we had body-worn footage from the police officer that showed the injuries and showed the recent complaint. That was enough to enable us to prosecute. We are working with the police as part of the joint justice plan on encouraging them to switch on their body-worn cameras as a matter of routine to capture that vital evidence.

Q55 Pam Cox: I have a clarifying question. You mentioned the pilots, which sound very encouraging. How are they evaluated? Are they evaluated internally? Are they evaluated by consultants or academics? What is the relationship more generally between the CPS and academic research? I know that there have been national level studies on attrition over the last 20 years. How does the CPS engage with those?

Stephen Parkinson: I am not aware of those national studies on attrition. I am glad to hear that there are, and I will try to find them, or perhaps you would be kind enough to write to me. In terms of the pilots, I am sorry, I do not have that level of detail in my head. We have lots of data that enable us to measure their effectiveness. We already have data on the timeliness of investigations and decision making. We are telescoping down the timescales around that. We will be able to look at the impact on overall effectiveness in terms of convictions, early guilty pleas and so forth. Equally, if we provide more early evidence, which is one of the other pilots, will that mean that there are fewer action plans, as we are able to make decisions because we get a product of the investigation that is in a good state? I will take back the question about whether we are using external evaluators, but we have lots of data that enable us to evaluate already.

Chair: Thank you. Next, we are going to Alex Barros-Curtis.

Q56 Josh Babarinde: I haven't finished on mine yet, Chair. Director, you spoke about common assault as an offence that is often very closely associated with domestic abuse and domestic violence. Sitting in the very place you are a couple of weeks ago we had Lord Timpson and two officials to speak a little bit about this. I asked about the loophole that existed, in my view, around the SDS40 scheme and some abusers being let out early because they had convictions for common assault that masked their abuse. When pressing them about how we might close that loophole, one of the responses was that primary legislation might be required to help address it, whether a new offence of domestic abuse or domestic violence or whatever it might be. Should such a proposal be advanced, what might you see as potential unintended or unforeseen



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consequences? Do you think that a new offence would be helpful when it comes to delivering justice?

Stephen Parkinson: In domestic abuse cases?

Josh Babarinde: Yes.

Stephen Parkinson: I am not aware of a gap. If I can come back to your example around common assault, it goes back to what I said about the reason why we retain charging: we want to see the complete context. If something comes in as a common assault, there are various questions that we will ask, or the police are supposed to answer when they send a file, to enable us to understand whether it is a one-off incident or whether there is a pattern of behaviour that needs to be addressed, in terms not only of the criminal investigation but, as I said earlier, of protective orders for the court. My answer to you about the individual who is freed because they were in jail for common assault but actually they were a domestic abuser would be that the system failed there, because we really should have caught that. That is the whole point about giving us that responsibility.

I don't think we lack tools. A number of offences have been introduced over the last few years. Controlling and coercive behaviour is one. Non-fatal strangulation is another. We have been given the tools. We are piloting domestic abuse and protection orders. They are quite wide-ranging orders and can be imposed on conviction or acquittal. The courts have quite wide powers even if someone leaves the court without a conviction. I am more than happy to look at this issue. That is my top-of-the-head response to a question that I had not prepared for, if I may say so.

Q57 **Josh Babarinde:** It would be good to follow up with you another time on that.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, certainly.

Josh Babarinde: I have certainly spoken with campaigners and organisations in the sector that believe there is a gap and a loophole, and that a common assault conviction is not appropriate for a number of the folks who have it now. The SDS40 scheme is an example of that problem.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, I see that.

Q58 **Mr Barros-Curtis:** Director, I want to ask a couple of questions about the treatment of victims, which has infused a number of your answers to the Committee and that probably goes to your point about outcomes versus process. One thing you started to touch on in response to one of the previous questions about the impact of delays in the criminal courts on victims is confidence to come forward and the attrition that can come from that. Is there anything you would like to add on that, and on the impact on defendants and their approach in these cases?

Stephen Parkinson: The impact of delay?



Mr Barros-Curtis: Delays, yes.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, I briefly alluded to that right at the beginning. The National Audit Office published its findings earlier this year on the remand population. It found that 35% of people held on remand ended up not in custody, either because they were acquitted or because they were convicted but given a non-custodial sentence. I appreciate that one of the reasons they might have been given a non-custodial sentence is the time they spent in custody, but that is not the reason in every case. The reasons why someone would be remanded in custody are to do with the Bail Act, and the reasons for withholding bail, and not to do with the appropriate sentence at the end. Defendants suffer from delay. I have also alluded to the fact that they take advantage of delay. It is a very mixed picture.

Q59 **Mr Barros-Curtis:** Further to the outcomes and process point that you talked about earlier, in December last year there was a report from the criminal justice joint inspection about the competing high workloads and demands on CPS staff, which meant that the appropriate time and attention was not being brought forward at every stage of a case in respect of interaction and support for victims. There was a focus perhaps on complying with the letter of the victims code rather than responding to individual needs. What, if any, comments do you have on that? How confident are you that it has altered and that the CPS is in a position to provide an improved service going forward in that regard?

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you. There are a number of respects in which we are dealing with that. First of all, on correspondence, our correspondence was defective and insufficiently empathetic. We have done a lot of work on revising our templates and, more importantly, training our staff to produce a much better standard in our correspondence. Our correspondence at present is sent out when we are altering or dropping charges. We are piloting making contact with victims—it could be through correspondence or their preferred method of contact—when we make a charging decision so that we can explain about that decision and about the process going forward. It is a pilot in a couple of areas. We will obviously get feedback to see if that improves confidence.

More generally, in relation to rape and serious sexual offences, we are doing quite a lot of work in that space. We have recruited over 40 victim liaison officers across the country to be a single point of contact for victim survivors of rape, and they make contact from the point of charge. From that moment onwards, the individual can contact us at any time to ask questions about the process, where we are on the timetable and so forth, and we will set up a pre-trial meeting, if that is desired, which will involve members of the prosecution team. We are putting a lot of resource into that. There is an average of three victim liaison officers per area, but in fact we distribute those individuals according to the size of the area and the volume of the work. I am fairly sure it will improve victim confidence. If we can show that and if we can show that it reduces attrition, I shall be



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making a bid to the Treasury for more money to enable us to do more of it.

We work hand in hand with witness care units so that the police have a responsibility for being in contact with all victims and witnesses. This programme of interaction is being worked out very carefully with the police to make sure that we are not duplicating and that we are not confusing people. As I hope you see from what I have said, we are doing a lot of work. We have a central team that is co-ordinating all this and providing guidance.

Q60 Mr Barros-Curtis: In terms of showing that, how are you going to scrutinise it? What are your metrics or measurements going to be?

Stephen Parkinson: We are getting direct feedback from victims through questionnaires, surveys and focus groups. We have instructed some outside consultants to evaluate the project for us. We have victim reference groups. One focuses on rape and serious sexual offences and another on all other types of crime. There are past victims on the groups and they are enormously helpful. They have helped us with the drafting of the letters that I talked about. They have given us quotes about their experience, which then feeds into the training that we give our staff. It is enormously helpful and an example of improving the sense of communication with victims.

Chair: Thank you very much. Sadly, I am going to have to postpone some of the matters that we wanted to discuss to a future meeting or possibly to put in writing. I am going to move on to the end of the session. There are a couple of areas that I want to touch on in the last few minutes on disproportionality and international work. Before I do that, Mike, do you have anything else you want to say in relation to the riots and disorders of the summer?

Q61 Mike Tapp: I have one question if that is okay. As we know, the criminal justice system's response to the violence was well resourced. You spoke about that earlier. Could you give an indication of the level of resources required to achieve that, please?

Stephen Parkinson: There is a figure somewhere. We asked the Treasury for extra money to provide for overtime and so forth. I am afraid I don't have it to hand. During the period of the disorder, we had an additional 100 prosecutors on standby to make charging decisions, working out of hours and at weekends, so we pumped in extra resource. There will be a figure attached to that, but I am afraid I am not in a position to give it to you. I am very happy to write to you, catching some of the other things we have been talking about, and I will add that to the list.

Q62 Mike Tapp: Thank you. If I could touch on a similar but not the same issue, since the Hamas attacks in October, we have seen antisemitism in the country rising. The Met police recorded a 1,350% rise the week after the attack. Across the Jewish community, confidence in the CPS to prosecute and ensure proper sentencing for perpetrators is low. Why do



you think that is?

Stephen Parkinson: I don't know why it is, because our conviction rate overall is relatively high. Our overall conviction rate is about 82%. In connection with hate crimes, it is 85%. We prosecuted in the year to June this year 13,307 cases.

Going back to last autumn, we saw a 10% increase in the number of charges in hate crime driven by increases in racially and religiously aggravated hate crime. We saw more cases coming into the system, almost certainly as a direct result of the disorder arising from the very sad events last autumn. We engage closely with forums for both Muslims and Jewish people. We have good relationships with them. Both nationally and locally, we have staff who are dedicated to community engagement. We have good dialogue.

I absolutely understand the sense of fear and insecurity for Jewish people and people from ethnic minorities last autumn and during the disorder this summer. We have to show that, because we deal swiftly and effectively with such cases, we will improve their confidence. Your question was in relation to the events of last autumn, but in relation to the violent disorder this summer we did our annual survey of public confidence, and we increased confidence by five percentage points. It so happened that the period of the disorder coincided with our survey. It shows that if you can demonstrate that you will deal swiftly, effectively and robustly with cases it will improve public confidence. As I said, I believe that we responded last autumn in terms of the numbers of cases that we dealt with.

Mike Tapp: Thank you.

Q63 **Warinder Juss:** Director, can I please ask you a couple of questions about your research into disproportionality in your charging decisions? I have read the letter that you sent to the Chair of the Select Committee on 28 November, and I have to say that it was disturbing to read that the research published in February 2023 told you that ethnic minority defendants were more likely to be charged for a comparable crime than white British suspects. Your letter also confirmed that you could not say anything about why the disparities were there, but you carried out further research and even then you suggested that "the underlying causes are complex" and it did "not point to any one clear driver for disproportionality".

There are a couple of questions I want to ask you, Director. Is it a clear case of unconscious bias? If it is not, what further action are you going to take in response to the findings that you have so far? How are you going to assess that in the future that disproportionality will not take place?

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you for that question. I have spent many hours on this because it is a matter of very considerable concern to me. We did the initial Leeds research, and then the further research we did was trying to understand why the disproportionality was arising. We looked at all sorts of issues around age, bad character and previous



convictions and discounted all of them. It came up with a nil return to explain where we got to.

There were two things, however, that stood out from the research. One was in relation to the use of language. We used external consultants to look at the language used by the police and ourselves in reviewing cases, and there was a noticeable difference in terms of the language. It was more direct in relation to people with an ethnic minority background and, in some senses, more violent. Another thing we noticed was that, although the disproportionality affected every area of the Crown Prosecution Service, it was most noticeable in areas that were least diverse. In London, which is very diverse, there was disproportionality but at a much lower level.

Another thing that we uncovered was when we did a survey of our prosecutors. Understandably, I think, there was some resistance to the idea that there was disproportionality. The only explanation that makes any sense, if I may say so, is unconscious bias. I have never come across it, but I am sure there must be overt racism in the criminal justice system. If it happens in the Crown Prosecution Service, it is a sackable offence as far as I am concerned. But there must be unconscious bias. That is what we are working on in the way we respond to all this. We hope to use AI on the question of spotting trigger words to alert prosecutors to the existence of the impact of language. I am going to put something into the code for Crown prosecutors that specifically alerts Crown prosecutors to the existence of disproportionality in the system and to be on alert for it. I want to do that because the code for Crown prosecutors is part of the DNA of a prosecutor. It is a code that is really important to us. When we did our survey, our prosecutors said, "No, we follow the code." My answer is that we will change the code.

In terms of looking at whether we are doing anything about this, we are going to monitor it constantly. The dataset that Leeds University used is now part of our system, and we will be able to carry on the analysis. We will be able to monitor the impact of our action plan to see if we are making a difference. If we are not making a difference, we will try something else in order to make sure that we crack down on this. It is not a one-off project. It is now part of all the performance issues that we look at going forward, if that provides you with some reassurance.

Q64 Chair: Can I ask a specific question on that? One area where there have been concerns about racial disparities on charging is joint enterprise offences. What have you been doing specifically in relation to that? What have you been doing on joint enterprise in relation to charging in cases where there seems to be no significant contribution?

Stephen Parkinson: We undertook a study around joint enterprise, and we found that there were some disparities, but that the sample was not large enough to be able to draw any conclusions from that. We are putting in place extra mechanisms to supervise those cases. We have identified joint enterprise as a specific category. Following the pilot that we did, which has now concluded, but with the continuance of the work of



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extra attention being given to these cases, we are going to produce a report in May next year. It is on our radar, and when I next come to see you I hope we will have published and I will be able to talk in more detail about it. The issue of people on the edges of these cases is something that we are alert to.

Q65 **Chair:** What does that mean in practice? Is it that that is within guidance or within the plans that prosecutors look at and is one of the factors they need to look at?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes. The reason we had the pilot and the reason we continue to give attention to this is to make absolutely sure that we are making the correct decisions around the evidential test and the public interest, particularly in connection with people more on the periphery of these cases as to whether they should actually be in the system at all. I cannot, I'm afraid, give you any conclusions because we are in the middle of it.

Chair: I understand.

Q66 **Warinder Juss:** Director, having accepted that it must be unconscious bias that accounts for it, will you be providing extra training to your prosecutors on unconscious bias?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, we will. I want to do more than simply unconscious bias training. I have done unconscious bias training. We are going to do some further work to understand what works best. It is an area that is very unsettling for lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service. There are many lawyers around this table, so I am sure you will understand when I say that we like to think we are making objective and dispassionate decisions, so if we are told that we're not, it is something that goes almost to our integrity. The way I have started to explain it to colleagues is this.

We did some research earlier in the year on myths and assumptions around rape cases. We published the research, so you can look at it online. There are a lot of misconceptions around rape, in particular around the issue of consent, and particularly in the age group of 18 to 24. It is not unusual for a youngster to think that because they have "swiped right" on Tinder, they have given consent to sexual intercourse and there is no going back. I mentioned that to my colleagues because as a result of that research on rape we have introduced training around myths and assumptions so that our prosecutors make the correct decisions. It is another example of where perhaps stereotypes are in play that we are not even aware of, but that we need to be conscious of so that we can address them. I am trying to normalise it in talking to my colleagues to say, "We are doing it in rape, and we are going to do it in relation to disproportionality as well." I am really determined that the work we do is not simply ticking a box—you have done unconscious bias training, sorted. I do not think that will be enough. It will help, but I do not think it will be enough.

Q67 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Thank you. That is really important work, so thank



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you for that. I lastly want to pivot a little bit to a different topic, which is your international strategy. How many international liaison prosecutors do you have deployed in the country at the moment?

Stephen Parkinson: We have 15.

Q68 **Linsey Farnsworth:** That is a reduction. It was 27 in 2019. Is there a reason for that?

Stephen Parkinson: There is, yes. The total number of liaison prosecutors is 18. We have three roving prosecutors. It is based on an assessment of the amount of work in some countries. We look at the level of casework and we have to look at whether we can justify the costs of having someone in-country as opposed to alternative ways of having effective liaison with our counterparts in other countries. I am afraid that as a result of looking at the costs, bearing in mind that we are severely financially constrained in the CPS, we made those decisions to reduce numbers.

Q69 **Linsey Farnsworth:** The roving prosecutors are based in the UK.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Q70 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Is it important for them to travel to countries overseas?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, it is. The idea is that they will get on a plane, and if there is a need for a face-to-face conversation, they will be able to have it.

Q71 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Is that to build up relationships with overseas contemporaries? What would the strategy be there? What would be the need to go over?

Stephen Parkinson: I know it was one of your previous roles, so I know you are very expert in this area. The whole point is to build relationships with our counterparts overseas. That can make an enormous difference in giving priority to cases that really need that attention. Obviously, we build up expertise and knowledge about the way those countries work.

It just so happens that one of my earliest jobs in the CPS was to set up the international co-operation unit. It was called that quite deliberately because there was one person, and that was me. We have considerably expanded since that time. We recognise the importance of relationships. I recognise that. There are a number of international bodies. There is the International Association of Prosecutors. Brazil headed the G20 this year, and brought together all the procurator-generals from the G20. This year I have been to Azerbaijan and Rio de Janeiro to meet my counterparts. At national level, I am building up relations. Colleagues more junior to me but still quite senior are building relations with their counterparts as well. It is not just down to the liaison prosecutors in-country. We have relationships with our counterparts at every level overseas.

Q72 **Linsey Farnsworth:** But the operational relationships are important.



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Stephen Parkinson: Absolutely, they are. The roving prosecutors are our answer to the situation in which you have a really important case but you cannot justify the costs, which can be £200,000 quite easily, of having someone in-country.

Q73 **Linsey Farnsworth:** The Government have emphasised the importance of international co-operation to tackle irregular migration as a core plank of the strategy for dealing with that situation. As a result, the NCA is recruiting about 100 new officers to be deployed in-country. I hear what you say about the costs involved, but would you say that you are adequately resourced, or are you resource-based on the budgetary constraints that you have? What would be the ideal scenario?

Stephen Parkinson: We have been given extra money as a result of that initiative. We are, first of all, keeping this under constant advisement. We can use that money to deploy people overseas. At the moment, we are going to use it in connection with domestic prosecutions. We have a specialist in France, as you probably know, who focuses on illegal migration.

Q74 **Linsey Farnsworth:** That is now a roving post.

Stephen Parkinson: Sorry?

Linsey Farnsworth: There used to be two in Paris, didn't there?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Linsey Farnsworth: I thought the Operation Invigor post was now a roving post.

Stephen Parkinson: You may be right. I thought they were in-country, but in any event they are dedicated to France. We have prosecutors deployed in various European countries, including Turkey as well, which is one of the key countries involved, we think, in illegal migration.

Q75 **Linsey Farnsworth:** The upstream suppliers.

Stephen Parkinson: The upstream supplier, yes. There is no lack of willingness to deploy liaison prosecutors, particularly in relation to that issue. It is simply a question of whether we think that additional prosecutors will make a difference or whether our existing prosecutors have already built those relationships and that is sufficient. It is not a question of money, though.

Chair: Thank you very much. It only remains for me to thank Mr Parkinson for all his answers and particularly for staying so late. I apologise that we kept you. There were areas we did not reach about relationships with the police, disclosure and economic crime. We may write to you about some of those. I hope you have enjoyed your time before the Committee. I apologise again for being over time, over the two hours that we said. Thank you very much for your evidence today. With that, I close proceedings.