

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Crown Prosecution Service](#), HC 196

Tuesday 30 June 2026

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Members present: Andy Slaughter (Chair); Janet Daby; Sir Ashley Fox; Warinder Juss; Tessa Munt; Vikki Slade; Tony Vaughan.

Questions 1 - 70

Witnesses

I: Stephen Parkinson, Director of Public Prosecutions, Crown Prosecution Service.

Examination of witness

Witness: Stephen Parkinson, Director of Public Prosecutions, Crown Prosecution Service.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Justice Committee. We are delighted to be joined again, after a substantial absence, by Stephen Parkinson, the Director of Public Prosecutions. Members of the Committee will be asking about various aspects of his, and his Department's, work. We begin with declarations of interest, starting with Tony Vaughan KC.

Tony Vaughan: My name is Tony Vaughan. I am the MP for Folkestone and Hythe. I am a barrister with a practising certificate and an associate tenant at Doughty Street Chambers. I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial interests.

Chair: I am Andy Slaughter. I am the Chair of the Committee and the MP for Hammersmith and Chiswick. I am a non-practising barrister, a member of the GMB and Unite trade unions, and a patron of two justice-related charities, Hammersmith & Fulham Law Centre and the Upper Room, for ex-offenders.

Tessa Munt: Hello, Stephen. My name is Tessa Munt. I am the MP for Wells and Mendip Hills, which is in Somerset. Everything is on the register, but I will just highlight the fact that I am a director of WhistleblowersUK, which is a not-for-profit organisation, and the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on penal affairs.

Vikki Slade: Hello. I am Vikki Slade, the Member of Parliament for Mid Dorset and North Poole. My interests are as per the register, but none is relevant to this Committee.

Janet Daby: Hello. I am Janet Daby, the Member of Parliament for Lewisham East, and everything is on the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Warinder Juss: Good afternoon. I am Warinder Juss, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton West. I am a solicitor, but not practising at the moment. I am a member of the GMB trade union central executive council, and a member and officer of various APPGs. For the purposes of today's session, my wife is a senior Crown prosecutor in the RASSO unit.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you for attending, Mr Parkinson. I have one or two questions of general interest. If you want, in the course of answering them, to say anything specific by way of an opening statement, please do.

We note that the latest criminal court statistics have been published and that they show virtually no change in the backlog. Depending on how you look at that, it could be disappointing, or it could be that the system has stabilised compared with previous quarters. From your point of view—the CPS's point of view—what progress do you think is being made? What



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effect has the uncapping of sitting days had? How far in the future are you experiencing trials being listed?

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you. As you note, the backlog has stabilised—in the Crown court, I think, but not the magistrates court, where it is still an issue. In terms of our position, the backlog has grown substantially in recent years, well in excess of our own increase in resources, although—I can go into this if you would like me to—I think we are coping reasonably well. Trials are being delayed, and they are going into 2030 in some instances. Obviously, it varies across the country. In Wales, the position is much better than, for instance, in London.

My biggest concern around delay is the impact on victim attrition. We may return to this in the course of the session. We know that with the increase in delays there is a corresponding rise in victim attrition. That means that justice is not being served.

I can go into some detail about this. I think our organisation is coping well, notwithstanding an increase in workload. To put some flesh on that, the workload increased by 63% in the magistrates court in the three years up to the end of last year, and by 23% in the Crown court, and our capacity in terms of resources increased by 10%. The amount of work coming in far exceeded the resources available to us, but, notwithstanding that, there have been significant improvements in the timeliness with which we deal with cases. I think we in the Crown Prosecution Service are making a contribution, but we are of course only one part of the criminal justice system. Your question proceeds, obviously, from the point of view of the backlog and the delay in the courts.

Q2 Chair: You mention discrepancies in different parts of the country. Some members of the Committee were on a visit to Nottingham yesterday and were talking, there, about how well Nottingham Crown court and magistrates court are doing compared with, say, Birmingham and other areas. Do you notice substantial discrepancies, and what do you ascribe them to? What do you think the solution to that is?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, there are undoubtedly discrepancies. One great advantage of being a national service, actually, is that we have data from across the country available to us, and can track the position in every one of our CPS areas. Of course, our board then says to us, “Why isn’t the pattern of your performance consistent across every area?” The answer is because the context is different in different parts of the country.

It tends to be the case that backlogs are greater in larger urban areas, simply because the volume of casework is so much higher. Generally, the smaller police forces tend to be a bit more efficient. That is simply because there is much more capacity to control the context in which they work. Lots of different variable factors contribute to a difference in our own performance across the CPS.



Q3 Chair: Can I ask you about a different subject? Last year, the CPS changed its charging approach for assaults on emergency workers. This has become something of a cause célèbre. As you know, these are either-way offences that carry a maximum of two years' custody. The Sentencing Council is currently consulting on revising and updating its guidelines on assault PC. Effectively, lower-level offences will now be charged as assault PC, or possibly common assault, if they are on emergency workers, and assault on emergency workers will be reserved for more serious cases. Is that how you understand matters? How have you adapted to that? It appears to have been a dog's breakfast, to coin a legal phrase.

Stephen Parkinson: To some extent, I think we were at fault, actually, because, when the legislation came in, the driver for it was a campaign, particularly by the Police Federation, to create an offence specifically directed at emergency workers. I spoke to Chris Bryant, who introduced the provision, I think as a private Member's Bill, to ask him his intention. His intention was to give prosecutors an extra tool—a broader range of offences that we could prosecute. I am afraid that in our guidance we rather gold-plated it, and said that the offence had superseded the offence of assault PC. It did not; that was not the case. The consequence was that we almost stopped charging that offence.

We prosecuted common assault, which was not directed at emergency workers specifically. That meant we were left with that offence, which is an either-way offence. Lots of those offences were then sent to the Crown court, and, because they are in a category that is slightly lower level in terms of sentencing, and because of delays in the Crown court, they were being put to the back of the queue. We reached a situation in which victims were not achieving the justice that they deserved, because their cases were not being heard for many months—sometimes years. I heard this from judges who were frustrated by the volume of cases in the Crown court, but also from the police themselves.

The change that we have brought is to bring back, as you noted, Chair, the assault PC offence. With low-level offending, that will be the appropriate charge. I should say that the average sentence, from our research, for assault of an emergency worker was three months' imprisonment, even though it went to the Crown court—well within the powers of magistrates. Now I think the system is much more sensible. With a spitting or shoving type of offence, we will charge assault PC. If it is something more serious, involving physical injury of one kind or another, we might well charge assault occasioning actual bodily harm, which has a sentence of five years' imprisonment. We reserve assault on emergency workers for offences in between. We are still prosecuting a lot.

Q4 Chair: Is that, then, a vanishingly small number of offences?

Stephen Parkinson: You would have thought, but in fact on the latest figures there are still about 7,000 that we have prosecuted. There has



been a drop of 22% since we brought in these guidelines, which was about a year ago. It always takes time to change people's behaviour. I would expect the numbers to go down even more, but that is where we are. We are heading towards a quarter less than previously. The feedback that I am getting from the police and judges is that we have got it about right.

Chair: Thank you very much. There is a question from Janet Daby.

Q5 Janet Daby: Mr Parkinson, my question is about disproportionality. I refer to a report that was conducted in September 2025 by you, on the joint enterprise national monitoring scheme, which found continued over-representation of black and Asian defendants, and flagged that the term "gang" carried racially stereotyping connotations when applied without evidence, which is obviously a concern. I understand the CPS is consulting on revised guidance. With this in mind, it is now nearly two years since the CPS published its disproportionality action plan. I want some more information on how you are measuring its impact on bias in decision making.

Stephen Parkinson: Thank you for that. On joint enterprise, we published the report to which you refer, and we are continuing to monitor that.

We published the research, as you mentioned, two years ago. It was conducted by the University of Leeds, but we have now taken in-house the capability to monitor it ourselves. We are monitoring our data and have given a commitment to publish it from time to time. That is one part of our response.

Another part of our response has been training for our staff. We have put together case studies based on real-life examples. One of them concerned adultification in relation to black people. We have another set of case studies coming out at the moment. It is based on real-life cases. We have group sessions and talk to staff about how they would have reacted at various points in the case, and they get feedback. I think that is very valuable.

We are exploring the use of technology to help us identify where language differs in relation to people with an ethnic minority background. Part of our research a couple of years ago involved language analysis. We found that, in relation to people with an ethnic minority background, different types of language were sometimes used. We are exploring the use of technology to see if we can apply that to all our casework.

The other thing that we are doing—and we will be consulting on this later this autumn—is that I am revising the code for Crown prosecutors, which governs the key principles involved in decision making, and I am inserting a clause requiring prosecutors to be mindful of the potential for bias in decision making. I was particularly keen to do this because it is something of an article of faith for prosecutors that we weigh evidence



independently and objectively. We are lawyers. That is our job. When we were doing this research two years ago, many of our people got affronted at the idea that there was any sort of bias in their decision making. They said, "We follow the code." I thought, "Well, the answer to this is that there is bias. I am sure it is unconscious, but bias exists. Let's amend the code so we keep it in the forefront of people's minds."

We are doing a number of things. As I say, we have the capability to update our monitoring so that we can keep track of whether this is working. If it doesn't work, we will try something else.

Q6 Warinder Juss: Mr Parkinson, when you were last before the Committee in November 2024, you said that timeliness is a core CPS metric. You mentioned timeliness this afternoon as well. Can you confirm why custody time limits are such an important indicator of CPS performance?

Stephen Parkinson: They are an important indicator of our performance because, if we breach custody time limits and people are released, it is because the court has found that there has been a failure of due expedition on our part. It is something that we take very seriously indeed. I do not know if you will come on to the inspectorate report published recently, but, to anticipate that, it was critical of the way we manage our performance in this respect. If I may say so, I welcome that report.

The fact is that, compared with a number of years ago when custody time limits were breached only exceptionally, the growth of the remand population has been such that it is approaching 11,000 and, therefore, custody time limits in terms of the original deadlines are not met quite often. We are often in the position that we have to seek extensions on those time limits. Often, those are granted, but from time to time they are not and then someone has to be released, which is a matter of huge regret.

I should say that those releases amount to something like 0.5% of the remand population. One failure is more than there should be, but it is nevertheless a small proportion. I do not want to anticipate your next question, but I can say more about how we are dealing with that. So that is where we are in answer to your question.

Q7 Warinder Juss: When you were last here, you also mentioned that custody time limits were met in 67.3% of red cases, which I understand are the more serious cases, and in 61.6% of green cases.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Q8 Warinder Juss: Have those statistics improved since that time?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Q9 Warinder Juss: Furthermore, are there any other challenges that you think you face that have an influence on meeting custody time limits?



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Stephen Parkinson: In relation to your first question on custody time limits, you were talking about people post charge when they are on remand in prison. When I talked about this in the context you just mentioned, I suspect that was in relation to people who are in custody overnight having just been arrested. In relation to that, our figures have improved significantly from the figures you mentioned. We now make a charging decision within three hours, which is our target, in 75% of cases. Actually, in relation to charging decisions within areas, it is 87%, but the slightly lower figure encompasses CPS Direct, which is our out-of-hours services, and also our headquarters division.

Q10 **Warinder Juss:** Is that 87% in green cases?

Stephen Parkinson: No, that is in red cases.

Q11 **Warinder Juss:** Eighty-seven per cent in red cases.

Stephen Parkinson: Eighty-seven per cent in red cases, yes; that is right. Let me just find the figures for you for green cases in my sea of papers. Maybe I will have to come back to that, but the figures have improved over time.

Q12 **Warinder Juss:** It is a significant improvement from 67.3% to 87%. I also take it that in meeting custody time limits and dealing with backlogs in general there needs to be a good relationship between the CPS and the police. Have any initiatives been taken to foster and encourage better relationships between the CPS and the police?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, absolutely. It has been a personal priority for me, since I arrived, to improve the co-operation that we have with the police. When I go around the country—I visit every area at least once a year—I always try to make sure I meet chief constables. Of course, it is a key priority for our chief Crown prosecutors to get to know and build working relationships with the police.

We are doing a heck of a lot with them. We have a body called a joint operational improvement board, co-chaired by our director general legal, who is effectively my deputy on the casework side, and the NPCC head of the criminal justice committee for the police. They meet once a month and discuss areas of operational concern. There are various subcommittees below them as well. We agree all sorts of different ways in which we can improve performance. We committed ourselves to joint key performance indicator targets a while back. We have a number of pilots that we are undertaking with the police across the country. I can talk about those pilots in more detail, but in one way or another they are all designed to reduce pressure on the police. That, in turn, reduces pressure on us. It is to make their lives simpler.

To give one example to illustrate that, in Mersey-Cheshire we have been piloting for a while and have now extended to the south-east a change in approach. Before providing us with a file of evidence, the current situation is that the police have to provide us with a list of what is called



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rebuttable presumption material. That is certain types of material that the current law requires them always to send us. They are also required to send us an unused material schedule, which is basically all the evidence that is relevant but not probative of the case. In these pilots, we have dispensed with the requirement to serve that on us, pre-charge; they have to send it to us only post charge. The reason we are doing that is that one in every five cases that the police send to us we decide not to prosecute for one reason or another, so the police were doing unnecessary work putting together this material for us. It was never going to be used because we were never going to prosecute. We started that pilot in Mersey-Cheshire. In the south-east we extended it so that, in fact, even post charge the rebuttable presumption material list has been reduced. That is just one example.

More generally, there is a manual of guidance between ourselves and the police, the "Director's Guidance on Charging, sixth edition". We are undergoing a project working with the police to basically simplify that—to strip out from it the requirements of the police that we really do not need. I hope that that work will come to a head in the autumn.

In answer to your question, I think we have a good, effective, collaborative relationship with chief constables. I am really pleased to say that the feedback my colleagues and I get in the areas is uniformly excellent.

Q13 Chair: To change the subject, in March 2026 the prosecution of the Irish rap group Kneecap collapsed because of a failure to obtain the Attorney General's consent. What steps has the CPS taken since to prevent such a situation recurring?

Stephen Parkinson: In simple terms, we have introduced a flag on our system.

Q14 Chair: Should that not have been there all along?

Stephen Parkinson: That is a very fair question. The thing with flags—I hope automation will solve all these problems—is that there are so many things that our prosecutors have to flag for one reason or another. Often, these cases are dealt with in one of our central headquarters divisions. I think perhaps the feeling had been that, because a specialist unit deals with them anyway, the likelihood of this being missed was less. I will not defend the position because we recognised that there was a problem and we are flagging these cases for the future.

Q15 Chair: It was a high-profile case. You would think there would be some attention paid, if not undue attention, but it would, as you say, perhaps have gone to a special unit. It is embarrassing to the service when that happens.

Stephen Parkinson: I agree. It is a while since I looked at that case but it was a summary-only matter, which is why the problem arose. It came to us for early advice only some three weeks before the expiry of



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the deadline. That was for early advice from the police. I think we actually got the file of evidence something like 48 hours before the expiry of the deadline, and we turned it around in 24 hours. We were not stroking our chins for six months, staring into the middle distance. It was one of those cases that arrived very much at the last minute and I am afraid an error was made.

It was an uncomfortable experience for us. You referred to the publicity, which of course was uncomfortable. We felt that there was scope for a challenge and we contested that but were unsuccessful. I had an uncomfortable conversation with the Attorney General, as you would expect me to have, but I feel we have learned our lessons from that.

Q16 Sir Ashley Fox: Do you think it was an accident or was it accidentally done on purpose by someone somewhere in the chain who did not want this prosecuted?

Stephen Parkinson: I have no reason to think that it was anything other than an accident.

Q17 Sir Ashley Fox: It seems a remarkable coincidence that, with this controversial case, someone forgot to ask the Attorney General in time.

Stephen Parkinson: As I explained, the case came to us only at a very late stage. I do not know what prompted the police to investigate so many months after the events, but that is the case. We heard about it only something like three weeks before the expiry of the limit. We then had to deal with it in very quick order. I am afraid that, just drawing on many years of experience in criminal law, it is invariably cock-up, not conspiracy.

Chair: You have another case.

Q18 Tessa Munt: Yes. This is at the other end of the time question. I am aware that you have recused yourself from all charging decisions relating to Grenfell Tower. I am not asking about that but I want to raise a particular situation. In May, the Met police said it would submit its remaining evidence to the CPS on the potential criminal charges over the Grenfell Tower fire by the end of September this year, so the charging decisions are likely to be made 10 years after the disaster. Do you think that is acceptable?

Stephen Parkinson: No. There are obvious reasons for the delay in this case, which I can deal with, but no, I do not.

Q19 Tessa Munt: Do you feel that in other situations other victims would have to endure exactly the same decade-long delay until somebody is able to prosecute?

Stephen Parkinson: I would hope not, but the particular factor in this case is the public inquiry. It is usually the case that prosecutions take place after a public inquiry, and that would be the case in this instance. It is only relatively recently that the inquiry published its report. The



existence of a public inquiry means that, generally, we cannot prosecute before it finishes, but it also adds to the amount of material the police have to consider. The police were monitoring what was going on in relation to the inquiry, absorbing the evidence and pursuing lines of inquiry that might have been prompted by the public inquiry. All of these are complicating factors which have added to the overall delay. That is not to say that the police and CPS have simply been monitoring. We have been working alongside the police from the outset, but I think that has been a factor adding to the delay.

It is, of course, an enormously complex case with a large number of potential defendants. As you know, I have had to recuse myself from decision making, but I can say that, if there are decisions in the case, it is likely that in order to manage it, the trial will be split into separate trials because there are different parties involved. To end where I began, of course 10 years is far too long.

Q20 Tessa Munt: Have you any observations about how things might be improved in future after a major disaster like that? Obviously, these things are complex; I understand that—we all would. But you have no observations that might manage to truncate that process before we get to the point where charging decisions are made.

Stephen Parkinson: It is always a matter for public inquiry chairs to decide how to manage their inquiries. I was involved in another Leveson inquiry involving phone-hacking many years ago. You may recall that he divided his inquiry into two parts. Part one was done amazingly quickly; it was done in a year. The Hutton inquiry in respect of the death of David Kelly took a year; the Scott inquiry involving Bloody Sunday took 12 years. A lot depends on the way inquiry chairs manage their own process, but once you recognise that, generally, public interest requires a public inquiry to go first—because often there are important lessons to be learned around health and safety, and the public need to understand what has happened—it must be the case that the prosecution follows. If public inquiries can be managed in a way which enables the prosecution to proceed in parallel at a point at which there is no danger of cross-contamination, obviously I would welcome that.

Q21 Tessa Munt: Can I move to support for victims? Could you set out the interactions that a victim might expect to have with the CPS during the route through the criminal justice system?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, absolutely. The victims code has various requirements that we always endeavour to meet. That is, we must inform them if we make a decision to stop or substantially alter the charges involved in the case. They are entitled to ask for special measures and have their questions answered when they come to court to give evidence. As a minimum, that is what we try to do. We have published various service standards as our own commitment to the way we engage with victims. In particular, the expectation is that we are consistent and that we deal with them with empathy and clarity. We have done a huge



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amount of training in the past 18 months or so. We have about 2,000 people in our organisation with a frontline role in relation to victims. They have all received training in victim communication. I can go on to talk about our enhanced service for certain categories, if you would like me to do so.

Q22 Tessa Munt: How have the services for victims been transformed as a result of the victim transformation programme?

Stephen Parkinson: The overall training has been one part of it. We have also produced new templates for correspondence, which are always adaptable to every situation, as a starting point for people who are writing to victims. I think they are much better; they are much more empathetic.

Q23 Tessa Munt: Does every victim have a victim liaison officer?

Stephen Parkinson: No. There are certain categories of victim or types of cases where they have an enhanced service. Victims of rape and serious sexual offences are entitled to an enhanced service. This is where the victim liaison officer comes in. In each of those cases they are contacted at the point of charge; they have a named point of contact and can receive information and ask questions of the victim liaison officer at any point from then onwards in relation to the case. They are also offered the chance of a pre-trial meeting, which ideally will involve the prosecutor in the case, sometimes counsel or a paralegal. I believe that since May 2024 we have offered 10,000 meetings and have had 2,200 meetings with victims in that category of case. We expect that number to grow. Because the delays are, unfortunately, so great in that type of case, often victims do not want to take up the opportunity of a meeting soon after charge, but we expect that increasingly they will take up that offer as we get nearer to trial.

Q24 Tessa Munt: They get a much nicer letter.

Stephen Parkinson: They get more contact.

Q25 Tessa Munt: You have just said you have improved your letter templates, so that is kinder, nicer or something, and they get a meeting after an extended wait for charge.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Q26 Tessa Munt: How else do you think you might help?

Stephen Parkinson: It is more than a meeting. In relation to RASSO victims, they get their own dedicated point of contact. They can contact them at any point after charge. It is just that we offer a meeting on top. In relation to victims of domestic abuse, we are piloting the same idea of having a dedicated point of contact from the point of charge. In relation to those domestic abuse cases that go to the Crown court, we are also piloting the idea of a pre-trial meeting, so they will get the same level of service as for RASSO victims. I should say that the volume of domestic



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abuse cases is much greater than rape and serious sexual offences, so our ability to offer that enhanced service makes much greater demands on us.

Q27 **Tessa Munt:** That is what you are here for, is it not? That is part of the service, is it not?

Stephen Parkinson: I would love to—

Q28 **Tessa Munt:** What you are saying to me is that there are victims who do not get that because they are not RASSO, they are not rape and serious sexual offences, and they are not domestic abuse victims, who might still be in a pool that does not quite get the service yet but might one day. There is a whole raft of other people.

Stephen Parkinson: I would love to be able to offer the same service to everyone.

Q29 **Tessa Munt:** Where do you think your threshold should be?

Stephen Parkinson: I think it is about right. The reason I say that is that when we look at the figures for victim attrition it is highest with victims of domestic abuse and rape cases. Those are the areas on which we have concentrated particularly. I would obviously like to be able to offer that same level of service to everyone, but we are dealing with a limited budget and how best to spend it.

Q30 **Tessa Munt:** Okay, thank you. Can I talk a little bit about the delays and backlogs that are happening? There are repeated adjournments, which clearly compound victims' trauma and distress. How do prosecutors support victims in those circumstances? You have talked about your letters. I do not want to go over the things you have already said. Is there anything else?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, there is more I can add to what I have said. An important component in relation to victim support is the third sector, whether it be dedicated volunteers specialising particularly in sexual offences and domestic violence offences. Where possible, we have a good relationship with local volunteers, who are called ISVAs and IDVAs. In addition to the contacts we have with victims, they often get alongside them and keep up with them. We can hear from a victim, ISVA or IDVA, or from feedback in court. Often, what happens is that victims and witnesses go to court expecting a trial and they find it is not going to take place because there isn't time. If through one of those routes we find a potential vulnerability over someone being prepared to stay with us, we will make representations to the judge via the list office to try to keep that case on track. Generally, courts are very receptive to that kind of representation.

Q31 **Tessa Munt:** How well do you feel criminal justice bodies collaborate in sharing information to support victims?



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Stephen Parkinson: I think there is more we can do. The problem in relation to victim support is that it is so fragmented. Witness care units run by the police have the responsibility for liaising with victims and witnesses around things like court dates. We have our own schemes. The police also have points of contact with victims and witnesses. It seems to me to be very fragmented. If we were starting again, we would probably design a different system. I will not be able to achieve this in my tenure, unfortunately, but one day I would like the CPS to be able to take responsibility for all victims and witnesses post the point of charge. It is our case; it is our responsibility, if we can, to nurture the support they need and keep them with us.

Q32 **Tessa Munt:** Do you mean from the point of incident through to the end of the court hearing? Is that what you are saying?

Stephen Parkinson: No, from the point of charge. We become formally engaged at the point of charge.

Q33 **Tessa Munt:** How much sharing of information is there with the police? Obviously, that will be down to what the victim wants to share, but how much information is shared between the police liaison officers and people who help to support victims from the CPS point of view?

Stephen Parkinson: There is sharing of information, but things get lost in translation.

Q34 **Tessa Munt:** That is not really acceptable, is it, because the repetition of one's story is the most damaging thing—that you keep having to tell people?

Stephen Parkinson: Absolutely, but I thought you were talking about the process rather than the evidence itself.

Q35 **Tessa Munt:** I quite like to deal with real people. You can write all the processes you like, but if people do not follow them, it is absolutely no good at all, is it?

Stephen Parkinson: I do not disagree. A lot can be done to improve victim and witness care. As I said, it is too fragmented. There is one thing the Home Office and MOJ are doing with our support. We are in the early stages of building a system which will in effect be a victim portal so that victims can access all the information they need about their case. That could help considerably to deal in particular with the fact that responsibility is divided between so many different parts of the criminal justice system at the moment. I think technology has great potential.

In my earlier answers I probably alluded to the fact that gradually we are building up our own capability in the CPS in supporting victims. When I go round the areas, I always try to talk to the victim liaison officers to hear about their experience. It is undoubtedly the case that face-to-face contact—sometimes it is on the phone, sometimes it is in a meeting, sometimes it is on Teams—or that direct communication is enormously



beneficial. Technology has a part to play. My own view is that it needs to be a combination somehow of human intervention, interaction and technology to improve victim experience.

- Q36 **Tessa Munt:** Do you feel that you have responsibility to do that? You say you are working with the Ministry of Justice and you are working with these people or those people. Do you feel you have a part to play? It feels a little bit at arm's length. I do not wish to be too rude, but it feels as though everybody else is doing it and you are saying, "Yes, yes, a great idea." What part are you playing in doing this?

Stephen Parkinson: We are engaging with them.

- Q37 **Tessa Munt:** I engage with people all day. I do not know whether that means it is very active.

Stephen Parkinson: Sorry, that is my choice of language and it is not correct. In budgetary terms, we are much smaller than those two bodies. My choice of language probably reflects the fact that they have the budgets to enable this to happen. I am sure they would say they have many competing priorities. We cannot contribute a great deal financially. That probably explains my choice of language, but we have a great deal of experience of working with victims and very much want to be part of that and play the part we can.

- Q38 **Tessa Munt:** Can I take you to another case? The HMCPSP's inspection of the CPS's actions in the Valdo Calocane case found that, although the CPS had generally met its obligations with regard to bereaved families in that case, the families were really clear that they felt unsupported and secondary to the whole process. I suspect that what I am trying to express when I say it all feels a bit at arm's length. I wonder what your response to that is, what lessons that case has brought to the CPS and whether there needs to be much greater clarity for victims on the role of the CPS and how it will interact with them.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, understood. On a point of detail, we spent a number of hours with the victims in two significant meetings, but the report drew attention to one failure on our part and made one recommendation, which we have followed. That is, collectively the criminal justice system—we being part of it—created a misunderstanding as to the level of engagement they might have in relation to the decision we had to make, which was whether or not to accept a plea of diminished responsibility. The word "consult" was used on a number of occasions. That was an inappropriate use of that word because it gave victims' families the impression that they had some agency over the decision. That was wrong. It was an evidential decision we had to make and it was our responsibility to inform them of that decision and explain it, but in a sense not to seek their views with a view to changing it because it was an evidential matter.

If it had been in relation to the public interest, you will be familiar with the fact that there are two parts to our decision-making process. Is the



evidence there? If so, is it in the public interest to prosecute? There are circumstances in which we will consult victims on the public interest dimension, but it was inappropriate to use the word “consult”. The recommendation made to us was to change our guidance and we did so. I think we have changed seven parts of our guidance. Obviously, we are enormously sorry to have contributed to their distress by the use of our language.

- Q39 Vikki Slade:** I want to cover the specific issue of violence against women and girls. The incidence of women experiencing violent crime is quite terrifying, and in many cases it is obviously a different type of crime from those inflicted on men. Although I recognise that men can be victims of things like domestic abuse, the vast majority are women. I know that the CPS brought out its own strategy for violence against women and girls very close to the Government’s strategy. Can you give me a flavour of what difference your strategy has made to the experience of women and girls who have been victims of crime since you brought that out?

Stephen Parkinson: It is a little bit soon to evaluate it because it came out at the end of last year.

- Q40 Vikki Slade:** Can you tell me what led you to make those your priorities? It will have come from experiences that led you to make certain things priorities. Can you talk to me about the changes over time in terms of violence against women and girls?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, of course, absolutely. I can begin by saying two things. First, a strategy around violence against women and girls has been something we have been doing for many years. When I became DPP two and a half years ago, I identified five key priorities, some of which we have touched on today: first, reducing delay; secondly, improving the experience of victims; thirdly, improving our performance in relation to rape and domestic abuse; and, fourthly, improving case quality. There is a fifth one around efficiency, but those first four are absolutely relevant to the way we approach cases involving violence against women and girls.

Probably the most important thing to say—there are a number of them—is that the number of prosecutions in relation to rape and domestic abuse cases has increased significantly as a result of the emphasis we give to those particular crimes. In 2025, we charged 3,754 suspects in adult rape-flagged cases. That is the highest number since records began in 2006-07, and it is an increase of 46% compared with the year before we implemented our national operating model to deal with rape cases. Rape is one aspect of VAWG that has received an enormous amount of attention, working together with the police.

We also published this year an action plan on stalking and increased the training of our staff on that. We refreshed our guidance on honour-based abuse and forced marriage. We have released a public statement concerning male victims. I realise that is not VAWG, but it is part of our



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sex-based strategy. We are also developing a target plan involving female suspects and defendants who are victims of VAWG and sometimes get caught up in the criminal justice system. Essentially, a lot of training and refreshed guidance has been going on in response to the publication of the strategy last year.

- Q41 **Vikki Slade:** I wrote down the figure for the number of people charged with rape and have done a quick search. According to the Office for National Statistics, there are approximately 900,000 victims of sexual assault each year, 1.9 million people having experienced rape, or attempted rape, since the age of 16. I suspect that, although 3,754 is a big increase, it is a mere drop in the ocean compared with the number of women who have been victims of rape. In particular, the HMCPSP's most recent rape inspection found that the roll-out of the national operating model was "generally disappointing". What is next to make sure that, first, victims are willing to come forward, and, secondly, that your part of the system—because I recognise it has to get to you in the first place—treats people in a way that does make them feel they can progress? Obviously, you cannot control how many of those go on to be convicted, but I assume that the number who actually get convicted will have a massive impact on the willingness of people to come forward in the first place. What else can you do to make sure that the implementation of the operating model for rape is improved to improve the performance of that?

Stephen Parkinson: It is a very fair question. Perhaps I may deal with the point on the stats.

- Q42 **Vikki Slade:** I realise that they go beyond rape.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, absolutely. The number of cases prosecuted by the courts is a small fraction of the offences committed. I should say that, of the matters referred to us by the police, in 78% of those cases we make a positive charging decision. That is the latest stat. Therefore, in four out of five cases they go ahead.

As you note, the inspectorate published a report some months ago dealing with the earlier stages when we are advising. Generally, the inspectorate is happy with the decision we make to prosecute or not. The focus here was on the quality of the work we were doing. It was critical of the fact that the suspect-centric approach, which is at the heart of the national operating model, was not being uniformly followed by our people.

We have done two main things in response. One is that we developed fresh guidance for our prosecutors—we published it last week—drawing attention to a number of things that have changed since the national operating model was published. We published some research on misconceptions and assumptions, for instance. That features there. We developed casework priority guidelines to improve the quality of what we do. That is now directly translated into our rape guidance. As part of the



suspect-centric approach, we have given guidance about utilising a defendant's bad character and instances of past conduct which can be put before the court to help prove they committed the offence in this instance. That is our guidance.

The other thing we did almost immediately once that report was published was to put together with a handful of our most senior and experienced rape prosecutors what is, I think, a year-long programme whereby they would go to each of our 14 areas and spend a number of weeks sitting alongside rape prosecutors—every area has a specialist rape team—mentoring and coaching them, and getting feedback on the work they were doing. They have been to 10 areas so far; there are four left. They have sat next to 250 senior Crown prosecutors. Out of that work, 66 local actions have developed. I think that is quite innovative and a very positive thing. I am sure it will help to improve the quality of the work being done. We obviously take that sort of feedback from the inspectorate very seriously.

- Q43 **Vikki Slade:** It is interesting that you talked about these being senior prosecutors. I understand that inspectors conducting the recent rape inspection reported being told by prosecutors in RASSO units that they are “stretched” and many of them have no more than two years’ experience. So, while you may have a group of very experienced prosecutors, from that it sounds as if there is also a group of very inexperienced people dealing with some really traumatic situations. How are you supporting those less experienced prosecutors to be able to maintain that level of high caseload in a successful way?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, absolutely. Part of this programme is to equip the managers in those units to manage better. The feedback is to senior Crown prosecutors but also to the district Crown prosecutor, which is the next level above. Essentially, it is the supervision that makes all the difference. It is true that, while generally the prosecutors in our RASSO units are experienced, because of the significant increase in workload, we have had to introduce more junior people into those teams. They have a lower caseload than normal prosecutors. They are heavily supervised. We do not allow prosecutors to undertake work without proper support. There is scrutiny.

It is a fair point that you make. When I go around the areas, I always visit a RASSO unit, if I can, and one thing that always hits home with me is the collegiality within those units. I do not know, Mr Juss, if your wife would be able to confirm that, but it is certainly something that strikes me. There is a great deal of support. You are not on your own in the CPS. That is not to say we do not make mistakes; we do, and that is always regrettable. I have talked about the 46% increase in rape cases. Earlier in the session, I said that although we have had an increase in our resources in the CPS it has been 10% over three years, so we are an organisation under pressure, and that does have those consequences.

- Q44 **Vikki Slade:** How is the CPS adapting to the technology that is used in



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cases? I spent about nine months supporting one of my constituents who was being subjected to stalking and harassment by her father through her children, through Facebook, through intimidation and through multiple means, mainly around technology, that were semi-detached from her as the central victim. We all struggle with the pace of technological change, don't we? If you look at how people are reacting online, what additional training is in place for prosecutors to help them understand how that technology is changing crime?

Stephen Parkinson: We do have training, and, if I may say so, you are absolutely right to identify that. Online VAWG is a real issue. Technology is facilitating and reshaping the way offences are committed against women and girls. You will all be familiar with the fact that legislation is adapting to this. The Crime and Policing Act introduced a number of new offences, most of which are not yet in force but will be coming into force. We are training our prosecutors, and we have brought already a number of offences that are technology based, for instance around cyber-flashing. We are a relatively young service. We have many hundreds of prosecutors who are of a different generation from me and very adaptable to new forms of offending and more than capable of prosecuting these cases.

Q45 **Vikki Slade:** It is reassuring that there is part of the justice system that is a much younger demographic. It is not what we heard this morning. I want to turn to the West Midlands' pilot of the enhanced right to review for RASSO victims. When do you expect this scheme to be rolled out across all areas, if indeed it is likely to be rolled out?

Stephen Parkinson: It has gone to three other areas. It is now in four areas of the country. They are basically large urban areas where you would expect the majority of this offending to take place. I do not want to pre-empt anything that the Solicitor General might wish to say quite soon.

Q46 **Vikki Slade:** Okay, all right. That is absolutely fine. Can I challenge your presumption, though, that urban areas are where these offences take place? As representatives of rural areas, this sort of thing, particularly where it goes online, is just as vile in rural areas. It always feels like everything happens in urban areas first.

Stephen Parkinson: I am justly rebuked. I did not mean to say that rape only takes place in towns. I was trying to convey that in terms of that particular project, which concerns reviewing rape cases—I think you were referring to that—

Vikki Slade: Yes.

Stephen Parkinson: —which we may feel we have to stop, the volumes are particularly highest in our largest CPS areas. That is what I wanted to say. We are exploring rolling this out across the country.



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I would like to make one other point on that, if I may. I know you talked to the Solicitor General—

Vikki Slade: Yes, last week.

Stephen Parkinson: —last week about this. I would very much like to have in place a scheme that enables us to do something similar across all casework in the Crown court. It would need legislation. The position in the magistrates court is that we can discontinue a case if for one reason or another we feel that at the time we do not have enough evidence, but that might change. We can discontinue it and then start it again. In the Crown court, once an indictment has been lodged, we do not have the legislative capabilities—sorry, the powers—to discontinue a case. Our only choice is to offer no evidence, and if we offer no evidence that results in a verdict of not guilty. I would like very much to have the power to discontinue for Crown court cases which we already have for magistrates court cases, and that would mean that we could extend to all casework, not just rape cases, the scheme that you and I have just been discussing.

Q47 **Vikki Slade:** Has the response of the Solicitor General to that suggestion been positive so far?

Stephen Parkinson: She is very supportive of it, but policy is not a matter for her Department, unfortunately.

Vikki Slade: No, of course. Okay.

Q48 **Tony Vaughan:** I want to ask a question arising from Vikki Slade's questioning. It relates to how many rape and serious sexual offence cases where the victim essentially disengages results in the dropping of the prosecution. That is often something that has been cited in relation to the debates about jury reform. What are the statistics? What are you doing to minimise those numbers?

Stephen Parkinson: Currently, the victim withdraws in about 10.8% of cases post charge. Over the last five years, it has ranged between 8.3% and 11.5%, so it is about the midpoint. Of course, at that point it is post charge. Attrition takes place at all stages of the journey of a rape victim. That is too high as far as I am concerned.

Q49 **Tony Vaughan:** Is the CPS taking any steps to address that?

Stephen Parkinson: My answer is twofold on that. First—I do not want to repeat myself—we provide an enhanced service for rape victims, which means that we are more closely engaged with them than with others. The main thing is to do what we can to reduce delay. Just so you are aware, there is delay in relation to rape cases at every stage in the system. I looked at the criminal justice system dashboard before my appearance today. I think it takes something like 330 days from the point of a complaint to get to charge. It is almost a year on average for a rape case. On our contribution to that, the median—that is the typical



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experience—is two days for the CPS. Typically, within two days of a case being referred to us, we would charge, but the average is much longer than that; it is about 134 days.

I do not want to flood you with statistics, but I draw from that that it takes on average about 200 days before we ever see a case from the police, and then from the point at which we see the case there is often a bit of toing and froing because we do not have all the information we need and we have further inquiries to make. That may happen two or three times. From the point at which we get it, it is on average about 134 days. The two-day median point is often because people are arrested, they are in custody and we can make an immediate decision.

The point that I wanted to make is that there is as much delay pre charge in rape cases as there is post charge. There is a lot of focus, rightly, on delays in the courts, but you can double that in relation to rape cases. Whenever I am asked about my priorities, I always say reducing delay is my No. 1 priority, because it is the answer to so many of our problems. It is why I give such focus to improving our own efficiency.

Q50 Warinder Juss: On the West Midlands' pilot of right to review, during the 12-month period up to December 2025, 19% of original prosecutors' decisions were overturned. Does that figure surprise you? Do you have any comments to make about that?

Stephen Parkinson: The West Midlands one?

Warinder Juss: Yes, the RASSO.

Stephen Parkinson: I think there were 14 cases and only one was overturned. That is my understanding.

Warinder Juss: Right.

Stephen Parkinson: We are looking at different figures. I do not think I am wrong about that, but I would certainly be glad to correct it. If I may take your point at a slightly higher level, because I think that is the position, the reason this pilot came about was that we have a victims' right to review scheme, and we found that there were too many rape cases where the decisions were overturned. A victims' right to review scheme enables someone who is unhappy with their decision to ask for a review. It is an independent review. We found that there were too many cases that were overturned, which is obviously deeply worrying to us. This particular pilot came about as a result of that.

The pilot produced better figures, but almost certainly it is because there is much greater scrutiny of the cases in that particular area, which would explain that. I am not going to suggest to you that we have a perfect record around this. These are difficult cases to weigh up because they often involve two individuals. They are difficult judgments to make and we get it wrong from time to time.



Can I add one other thing about this? It goes to the difference between rape prosecutions and other types of prosecution. We know from our research and experts who advise us that going through the horrific experience of rape or a serious sexual offence involves considerable trauma and can affect memory. One issue that affected our not so good record in years past was that there was too much concentration on the victim's account. Because those accounts were affected by trauma, affected memory and so forth, prosecutors were picking up on inconsistencies and putting too much weight on them. The new approach takes us away from that wrong focus, that failure to acknowledge the impact of trauma, and diverts it back to the suspect-centric approach that I described earlier. That perhaps explains why errors have been made in the past. I hope very much, particularly if we roll out this new scheme, that we can improve our record. If I am wrong that there is only one case that has been overturned, I will write to the Committee and let you know.

Q51 Warinder Juss: Can I ask you about Palestine Action? You will be aware that earlier this month the Court of Appeal ruled that the proscription of Palestine Action was lawful. As of December 2025, there were a huge number of arrests made—2,779 under the Terrorism Act—that were linked to Palestine Action, and there were 412 charging decisions made. How is the CPS now going to approach these prosecutions following the Court of Appeal's decision?

Stephen Parkinson: The position is as follows. First, the numbers have grown since you were last given that information. Prosecutions have been authorised in over 2,400 cases. They have all been stayed, and it will be a matter for the court to decide whether to continue the stay until the Supreme Court has decided whether it will hear an appeal. My understanding is that an application has been made to the Supreme Court but no decision has been made yet as to whether an appeal will be heard. The current position is that those prosecutions are lawful and they have been stayed. If the Supreme Court upholds the decision of the Court of Appeal, those cases will come to trial. It will be a matter for the courts as to how to handle that.

What is likely to happen is that a sample number of cases will be heard, perhaps by the Chief Magistrate, perhaps selected to highlight the sorts of issues that might arise in terms of a defence, and the outcome of that will shape, I suspect, what happens to the rest. If guilty verdicts are pronounced by him, I would expect, although I cannot guarantee it, that a significant number of people who have been charged will then choose to plead guilty, but they may not. That is the way typically cases are handled. You take a small number, you identify the issues in dispute, a judgment is given, and then hopefully that impacts the remainder of the caseload.

Q52 Warinder Juss: Do you have a figure as to the number or percentage of cases that you proceed with to prosecution in relation to the referrals that you have?



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Stephen Parkinson: I have a sheet of paper somewhere that has all that. From memory, it is by far the great majority. Something like 75 were turned down for one reason or another.

Q53 **Warinder Juss:** Seventy-five per cent?

Stephen Parkinson: No, 75 out of 2,400. It is very small numbers. Here we are. I have the sheet here. It is 2,450 positive charging decisions, and—I was right—with 75 no further action. Six have also been disposed of without going any further. A total of 82 have been finalised with no further action, but 2,450 are awaiting determination—so large numbers.

Q54 **Warinder Juss:** At the moment, most of the referrals are going to proceed to prosecution.

Stephen Parkinson: Yes.

Q55 **Warinder Juss:** There is a possibility that Palestine Action will appeal to the Supreme Court. What are you doing in the meantime?

Stephen Parkinson: Any more cases that come through from the police, we will consider, as we are allowed to do, because the proscription has been held to be lawful. We are getting towards the end because these are cases that are subject to a statutory time limit. Apart from that, we will await the outcome of the appeal if there is one.

Q56 **Warinder Juss:** Thank you. Back in 2024, you described the CPS's response to the riots in Southport as swift and unambiguous. Sadly, we had riots in Southampton as well, where 13 individuals were sentenced 10 days after the disorder. How did the Southport experience influence your subsequent decisions? How were you able to do so well in getting 13 individuals sentenced so soon after the disorder in Southampton?

Stephen Parkinson: The scale was different but the pattern really was the same. There was very close liaison with the police and very close working internally. All those cases in Southampton, or at least the majority, were dealt with by our own in-house Crown advocates working closely with the reviewing lawyers. We had the capability to work very swiftly. These cases are not enormously complex. Police are able to put forward witness statements based on their own experience of criminal conduct. There is often bodycam footage. It is possible to get together, where needed—and this was the case with the riots two years ago—impact statements on local businesses. I am not sure that was an issue in Southampton.

I have mentioned close liaison internally within the CPS with the police, but the other dimension to that is with the courts. I know that the judge in Southampton reserved all those cases to himself. The same judge becomes very familiar with the pattern of conduct.

Two years ago, there was a very close working relationship with the police, with daily calls between us and them and daily calls with the courts so that everyone could keep track of where the cases were.



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Usually, our in-house advocates were able to present the cases, and that helped. We also had a national command structure. I headed a gold group that made key strategic decisions at the centre, and then we had a silver group comprised of the chief Crown prosecutors so that nationally we could co-ordinate activities, and again we co-ordinated nationally with the police.

In summary, we are very well geared up to deal with disorder of this kind. When it happens, we know what to do. Obviously, it is hugely regrettable when that happens, but the criminal justice system is flexible enough to react swiftly.

- Q57 **Warinder Juss:** Speaking on the subject of violent disorder, during recent months the CPS counter-terrorism lawyers have been placing themselves in police control rooms related to disorder in London. Can you explain why that has been done? Secondly, do you consider that there might be a problem with that because of the CPS being an independent body and police having a role of investigating crimes? Do you think that having CPS lawyers based in police stations, as it were, is going to affect how the police behave when they assess the behaviour at protests?

Stephen Parkinson: It is a fair question to ask. Both we and the police are very conscious indeed of our independence, but the fact that both organisations are independent does not mean that they are not a partnership as well and that we are working together to deliver justice for the public. One thing that we have been trying to do, particularly in recent years, is to encourage greater contact between ourselves and the police and, in particular, provide early advice to help shape police investigations. It is a matter for them whether to accept advice. We only become formally engaged when we get a file.

It is in that context that we have been sending prosecutors to the Lambeth control centre when there have been large-scale marches. The particular context is that, often, the police have to make instant decisions as to whether particular conduct reaches the level of criminality. With straightforward crime, if I may use that expression, such as assaults, there is no difficulty around that, but there are a number of public order offences, particularly involving words spoken, chants and slogans, where assessments have to be made as to whether they are, for instance, inciting racial hatred, so having a prosecutor on the spot to get an instant view is something that the police find helpful. I do not think it impinges on our independence at all. We are there to provide an expert view. Whether that then becomes the case that we consider is a matter for the police.

Warinder Juss: You mentioned racial hatred. Chair, shall I move on to hate crime law?

- Q58 **Chair:** Please do. Before you do, could I pick up the last points that you made, Mr Parkinson? We talked about Southampton, we talked about Palestine Action, and indeed about counter-terrorism lawyers. These all



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appear to be new developments or extreme examples of what may have happened before. Do disagree with me if that is not what you think. Have there been any cases where the numbers of arrests and charges have been what they have been with Palestine Action? Is that unprecedented in terms of numbers?

Stephen Parkinson: I cannot be absolutely confident because I have only been in post for two and a half years, but I have been a practising criminal lawyer for many years. It is pretty unprecedented in terms of numbers. Certainly, I have not come across it before in relation to terrorism offences. In a rather wider context, from time to time we have had large-scale disorder going back over many years. In 2011, there was large-scale disorder, and that produced hundreds of arrests. In relation to this particular offence, no, I have not come across that.

Q59 **Chair:** You mentioned the London riots in 2011. It was quite speedy. Would you call it summary justice in that sense? Has that has been replicated in Southport and Southampton recently?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes. The system reacted very swiftly in 2011 and dealt with it in a slightly different way. They had night courts and weekend sittings. My illustrious predecessor, who was DPP at the time, might disagree, but we were quicker this time in getting cases to court. In response to a national emergency, it is important that the criminal justice system is flexible enough to react swiftly, and that was what we did. The cases that we have just been talking about are similar in terms of volume, but the process has been a little bit slower. We have been working within a six-month time limit in every case because they are all summary offences and progressing at a stately pace, but getting them all in within those six months.

Q60 **Chair:** Do you see this as a developing and more common trend, a bit like the hot weather, in that what used to be exceptional now recurs and becomes commonplace?

Stephen Parkinson: In terms of public disorder?

Q61 **Chair:** In terms of having this enhanced response and perhaps a greater degree of co-operation with the police, which is good in itself, and large-scale arrests and very speedy processes to charge, do you think that shows a change in the way the criminal justice system is working?

Stephen Parkinson: Unfortunately, it cannot ever be the typical experience until something significant happens in terms of structural change, because we do not have the capability. What we saw two years ago, in 2011 and in Southampton was the criminal justice system rising rapidly to the challenge because of the need to meet what seemed to be an emergency, but unfortunately that has to be at the cost of other types of casework that then cannot be dealt with quite so swiftly. We have a limited number of resources. It is how you deal with it.



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If, having said that, I can strike a slightly more positive note, I referred at the outset to the fact that in terms of our key performance indicators we have improved timeliness within the CPS, notwithstanding the fact that the amount of casework that we are dealing with far exceeds the increase in resources given to us. If I may say so, that is because of our emphasis on rigorous case management and efficiency. We have a number of projects that we are working on both internally and with the police this year, which I hope to deliver, that will reduce pressure on the organisations and reduce delay. Between ourselves and the police, through our co-operation, we are improving our performance significantly.

In relation to domestic abuse, there is a very interesting pilot going on where we have been giving them the charging responsibility where a guilty plea is anticipated, and early results show that that has dramatically reduced investigation times in those cases. It is particularly important because attrition is so high in domestic abuse cases. If I may take slight advantage of your question, I think you were asking about trends. The trend is improved performance between us and the police, which will help to reduce delay, but we will not be able to deal with all types of casework in the way that we did with the riots, unfortunately.

Q62 Chair: One very final point from me about co-operation with the police. It has been put to me—I do not know if this has come to your attention—that, in some cases where the police are arresting prolific or repeat offenders and expecting the CPS to oppose bail, that does not happen because the sentence under the new legislation is likely to be a non-custodial sentence and therefore that way. That causes some consternation perhaps to local populations who are affected and perhaps to the police who think that their hands are rather tied in that manner. Is that something that you have come across or that concerns you?

Stephen Parkinson: It is an accurate reflection of the changes to the Bail Act and as a result of the reforms to sentencing. With some exceptions, including in relation to domestic abuse, if there is no realistic prospect of a custodial sentence, magistrates are not able to keep people in custody. I know the police are concerned about that, but the CPS is not at fault in those circumstances. We have to apply the law, unfortunately, and the law now is that in those cases remand will not be possible. One exception to that rule is if there are repeated breaches of bail. We are beginning to see a pattern developing where that is happening. It may be that, as it all settles down, more of those exceptions will come into play and there will be more remands.

Chair: Thank you. Apologies, Warinder, for interrupting.

Q63 Warinder Juss: That is absolutely fine. We have had recently quite a significant increase in hate crimes, particularly in the West Midlands where I am from. In a way, it is pleasing to see that the CPS produced updated hate crime prosecution guidance, but this guidance is an effort to speed up charging decisions even though you do not have the supporting



evidence. Why has this been done? Is it because there was at least a perception that hate crimes were not being charged quickly enough?

Stephen Parkinson: Definitely a factor in wanting to bring out new guidance was a concern about public confidence in our communities. There has been a particular spate, as we are all aware, of truly horrific antisemitic crimes. Generally, there has been an increase in hate crime. I am certainly aware of a lack of confidence in communities around the ability of the criminal justice system to deal with this. I should say that part of this is about communication. We charge 87% of cases referred to us by the police for hate crime, with a conviction rate of 85%, whereas, with all crime, we prosecute about 80%, and our conviction rate nationally is about 82%. So it is not a lack of willingness on our part, but I think there is a problem with cases not being brought to us.

One reason I wanted to issue guidance around hate crime was to provide assurance to communities that we do want to tackle this and we will move swiftly, including in relation to what you might call low-level crime. Low-level hate crime is pernicious in communities. I have heard from victims who have been abused while taking their children to school and spat at in the street. We absolutely must not tolerate that. I am absolutely determined that whenever cases of hate crime at whatever level are brought to us we are rigorous and swift in dealing with them.

If I may slightly correct the way you put it, we always prosecute where there is sufficient evidence. We do not prosecute where there isn't sufficient evidence. You may be referring to one part of our guidance where what we have said is, if you speak to a police officer and the police officer assures you that the evidence is available, they have spoken to the witness—maybe it is a doctor—and the evidence is not in formal admissible form so that it is ready to be put before the court but it is there, press "go" and prosecute anyway as long as all the other elements of the offence are met. Make a record of the conversation you had with the police officer and give them a deadline to provide that formal admissible evidence, but do not hold back. We have not diminished our thresholds, but we have said, "Don't wait for perfection when good is good enough," and basically that is the approach.

- Q64 **Warinder Juss:** This guidance also means that you are charging quicker even though you may not have the evidence. Obviously, you will only proceed with the prosecution if you have the evidence. The guidance means that, in terms of achieving public confidence, where there is a hate crime, if charging takes place quickly, that is going to help to increase public confidence, but are there any risks in doing that? What is the percentage of cases where you may have charged, got the evidence later on, and then you decide that you cannot prosecute this? Is it that generally when you proceed to charge without getting the supporting evidence and you get the supporting evidence afterwards it does not make any difference to your original charging decision? Is that normally what happens?



Stephen Parkinson: I issued the guidance in May, so we have to see how it works out. In one sense, I need to apologise to you, because of course you are absolutely right that, in that situation that I talked about, formally we did not have the evidence to put before the court, but we know it is there. The point about making a record and giving a deadline is that we get that evidence very quickly so that if the evidence is not going to transpire then we will drop the case. I cannot say, because it is too soon to have the information available to me, if that has worked against us. I would be surprised.

What most people perhaps do not always realise is that the vast majority of cases in the criminal justice system end up as a guilty plea. In the magistrates courts, where most of these cases will stay, 76% of cases, by and large—that figure moves fractionally month by month—plead guilty at the first appearance. The individual knows they have done it. They know they get credit for a plea of guilty, so they plead guilty. In most of the cases that we are talking about, where maybe we are waiting for a doctor's statement and the officer has spoken to the doctor and he knows that they will be able to say there was bruising or whatever, that will be enough to elicit a guilty plea. If there is a not guilty plea, by the time the trial comes along, we should have the evidence. That is the way I see it working.

Generally, we do not take that approach because there is a concern that once you have made a decision to prosecute, the police will move on to other matters and they will lose interest in the case. Whether that is fair I do not know, but that is why it is not our usual approach. I will be interested to see how this works out and whether it might be a model for more swift action across a broader range of cases. As I have said more than once this afternoon, I am absolutely determined to reduce delay in the criminal justice system, and that might be a prototype for the way we move forward.

Q65 **Warinder Juss:** I have had constituents where there has been a hate crime and they have been chasing me because no charge has been brought and there has been a delay, so I feel that is a step in the right direction.

I have one final question. You mentioned that your illustrious predecessor, Lord Macdonald KC, delivered his independent review of public disorder and hate crime legislation to the Home Secretary. Is there anything that you would particularly like to see in the Government's response to that?

Stephen Parkinson: Yes, absolutely. I was not referring to him, by the way—

Chair: He is even more illustrious.

Stephen Parkinson: Although he is, of course, illustrious.

Chair: Stop digging at that point.



Stephen Parkinson: Yes, stop digging. He has been kind enough to meet us several times. We have had six or seven meetings with him. He had a difficult task to combine the need for freedom of expression and to give as much power to that as possible while also ensuring that our criminal law is able to deal with criminality. His report, as you say, has not been published, so we will see what it has to say. What I will say, because we have said this to him in our meetings, is that it is important that we continue to have the tools that we and the police need to maintain public order on the streets and to bring cases to the courts. There may be a case for modernisation in terms of language and so forth, but I would be very sorry indeed if we were less equipped than we are now to be able to deal with public disorder, including hate crime. We have already discussed the fact that there is a lack of confidence in our communities around the ability of law enforcement to deal with hate crime, so we must not narrow the tools available to us, in my view.

Q66 **Sir Ashley Fox:** Mr Parkinson, there have been many thousands of arrests linked to Palestine Action, but a much smaller proportion resulting in charges. What explains that gap? How confident are you that similar standards are being applied across all offence types? I am talking in particular of antisemitic hatred.

Stephen Parkinson: I have already referred to the fact that we prosecute the vast majority of cases that are referred to us of hate crime, which of course includes antisemitic hate crime.

Q67 **Sir Ashley Fox:** Can I stop you there? I would suggest that there have been a great many arrests, and not many of those are being referred to you. You might prosecute the ones that are referred to you but, clearly, if for whatever reason those arrests are not referred, that gives cause for concern that an even-handed approach is not being taken.

Stephen Parkinson: It is right that there is attrition between the number of complaints and those that actually reach us. I am not in a position to say why that is. The way we divide responsibility for law enforcement in this country is that the police have absolute discretion about whether to arrest someone and whether to progress that case. I am afraid I cannot comment on the supposition—

Q68 **Sir Ashley Fox:** You spoke earlier about prosecutors being with the police at the time that they policed certain demonstrations. Are your prosecutors present when there are Palestine Action demonstrations and when there are chants of antisemitic hate? Do you take a similar approach to those demonstrations? Do your prosecutors involve themselves in the same way?

Stephen Parkinson: Prosecutors tend to go to the Lambeth control centre whenever there is a large march of one kind or another. I cannot recall, I am afraid, whether they were there during the large-scale demonstrations around the Palestine Action group, but I am pretty sure they would have been. There are not vast numbers of them, by the way.



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There might be two or three prosecutors in the control room. We also have a service called CPS Direct, which is prosecutors who work outside normal hours. They work at weekends and after 5 o'clock. They are available to give advice and make charging decisions as well.

Q69 Sir Ashley Fox: As far as you are concerned, there is no difference between the availability of CPS prosecutors to be in a police control room for a Palestine Action demonstration, as they would be for a different demonstration about another subject.

Stephen Parkinson: It is more to do with volume rather than the type of protest that it is. If the protest or the march is of a sufficiently large scale that there will be a requirement for instant advice and the police would like us to be there, we will provide—

Q70 Sir Ashley Fox: Some of the Palestine Action demonstrations have been very large indeed and resulted in thousands of arrests, but apparently very few of those arrests have been referred to the CPS. Would you comment on that? Do you have any explanation for that?

Stephen Parkinson: I am not entirely sure of the cases you are talking about, but I have already referred to the fact that 2,400-odd cases have been prosecuted around the proscription offences, so that is quite large-scale.

Sir Ashley Fox: Okay.

Chair: I cannot see anybody else indicating that they wish to speak, so on that basis I am going to bring this afternoon's session to a close. Can I thank you again, Mr Parkinson? You gave us two hours of your time and answered every question we asked. Thank you very much, and we will see you next time.