

Sentencing Council



Sentencing Council Annual report

2024/25

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Annual report

2024/25

The Sentencing Council is an independent,
non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice

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Addendum to the Foreword

by the Vice Chairman



This annual report covers the year to 31 March 2025. In his Foreword below, our Chairman Lord Justice William Davis – Bill Davis – reflected on the Council's work during that period. Very sadly, Bill died on the morning of 7 June 2025. It feels appropriate therefore for this report to mark his passing and the huge contribution he made to the work of the Council.

Bill Davis served originally as a judicial member of the Council between 2012 – 2015. One of the Council's biggest achievements during this period was the production of the Children and young people guideline, in which he played a leading role. The question of how the courts deal with children who find themselves within the criminal justice system – and in particular how they are sentenced – was an area of particular interest to Bill, and he later served as the judicial lead for youth justice. Soon after his appointment to the Court of Appeal,

he returned to the Sentencing Council as Chairman from August 2022. Between then and his untimely death, his expert leadership of the Council displayed his characteristic hard work, principled approach and good humour.

The Council delivered a huge amount under Bill's leadership. It published 12 public consultations, issued 13 new or revised definitive sentencing guidelines, hosted two academic conferences, issued three evaluations, and published a number of research reports including two on the effectiveness of sentencing and one on public confidence. The Council made submissions to the inquiry into Public Confidence in Sentencing undertaken by the Justice Committee of the House of Commons and to the Gauke independent review into sentencing. The Council also launched its 'You be the Judge' tool to enable members of the public better to understand how judges reach the sentences that they pass and to shed light on how the process operates.

In recent months, as Bill discusses in his Foreword, the Council found itself the centre of much debate about its revised Imposition guideline. Bill navigated this difficult period for the Council with calmness, clarity and courage. It was not an easy time, not least because a number of Council members, including Bill, were subjected to some criticism which was personal in nature. It was a

source of particular regret to all of us on the Council that Bill and other colleagues were singled out in that way, when all of the decisions taken in respect of that guideline – as with all of our discussions – were taken jointly and by agreement of all of the Council’s members. Bill showed particular fortitude during this period, and never once wavered in his desire to ensure that the Council considered all the evidence and arguments carefully and dispassionately in reaching its decision. I and all of my fellow Council members have the utmost admiration and gratitude to Bill for the way he led us, not just through the last few months but for the entire period for which he was our Chairman. He will be greatly missed as both a friend and colleague.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Holroyde', with a stylized, cursive script.

Lord Justice Timothy Holroyde
Vice Chairman

June 2025

Foreword

by the Chairman



I am pleased to introduce the Sentencing Council's annual report for 2024/25. It is the Council's 15th report and my third as Chairman.

Developing and revising guidelines

The core work of the Council continues to be the production of sentencing guidelines. Whether the Council is developing an entirely new guideline or revising an existing guideline, the process is the same. Based on the work of our analysis and research team, policy officials present proposals to meetings of the full Council for discussion and amendment. Any proposed guideline will be discussed at several meetings before it is ready to be published as a draft guideline. The draft guideline will be road tested along the way with the assistance of our pool of volunteer magistrates and judges. Once a draft guideline has been published, it will be subject to public consultation in accordance with the statutory provisions which govern the work

of the Council. Each consultation runs for 12 weeks and is open to all. We are obliged by statute to consult with the Lord Chancellor and the Justice Committee of the House of Commons. That obligation ensures that both the executive and Parliament have a full opportunity to comment on our draft guidelines.

The Council takes the consultation process extremely seriously. For guidelines to succeed they must be informed by the knowledge and expertise of those people who have legal or practical experience in the area we are examining, and by the views of those with an interest in our work or in the operation of the wider criminal justice system. This year we have again been assisted greatly by those who have responded to our consultations; the evidence and insight they have given us has helped to shape the definitive new and revised guidelines we have produced. The consultation process not infrequently leads to significant revision of the draft guideline published as part of the consultation process. When any definitive guideline is issued the Council also publishes a response to consultation setting out in some detail the comments made by consultees and the Council's response to them.

The way in which the Council prepares and publishes guidelines has not changed substantively since the Council was established in 2010. Over that time

we have published guidelines relating to hundreds of specific offences together with overarching guidelines dealing with subjects such as sentencing children, sentencing offenders with a mental disorder and sentencing cases in which domestic abuse is a relevant factor.

The Council undertook several consultations on draft sentencing guidelines during the year. We consulted on draft guidelines for blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment; immigration; non-fatal strangulation and suffocation; hare coursing activities; and aggravated vehicle taking. We also consulted on amendments to the guidance on ancillary orders and held the fourth annual consultation on miscellaneous amendments to sentencing guidelines. Miscellaneous amendments are changes and updates to guidelines, often technical in nature, which the Council proposes based on feedback received from guideline users and others, or to take account of changes to legislation.

The process in relation to guidelines for offences of blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment, strangulation and suffocation and aggravated vehicle taking (including a variety of miscellaneous driving offences) was completed during the year ending 31 March 2025. The guidelines in relation to blackmail, kidnapping and false imprisonment are entirely new. Neither the Council nor our predecessor body previously had published guidelines in relation to these offences. The guidelines for offences of strangulation and suffocation also were new, the offences only having come into being in 2021.

The aggravated vehicle taking guidelines included a new guideline for vehicle

registration fraud offences, no guideline previously having been in existence. They also included overarching guidance on disqualification from driving, which consolidated guidance previously contained in different guidelines. These new guidelines are significant in that they replace a guideline published by our predecessor body. There are now no Sentencing Guidelines Council guidelines still in force.

Understanding the Council's impact

In addition to publishing guidelines, the Council has a statutory duty to monitor and evaluate their operation and effect. Our dedicated analysis and research team uses a range of different approaches and types of analysis, including bespoke, targeted data collections in courts, qualitative interviews with sentencers, transcript analysis and analysis of administrative data. Where possible, we collect data both before and after a new guideline has come into effect. Analysis of data from these collections helps us explore what might be influencing outcomes and understand how the guideline has been implemented in practice.

In August 2024, the Council published an evaluation of the impact and implementation of the Bladed articles and offensive weapons definitive guidelines that came into effect on 1 June 2018. Overall, the evidence reviewed suggests that the group of guidelines is generally working as intended, although conclusions about the guidelines' impact are likely to be affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020 onwards.

There is more information on this evaluation on pages 19-20.

On 10 December 2024, we published the Council's response to a research review conducted independently by Nottingham Trent University. The review looked at the guideline for sentencing offences committed within a context of domestic abuse. The research review found that there was generally a high level of satisfaction among sentencers with how the guideline was used in practice, but we have identified some areas where minor changes should improve the clarity and accessibility of the guideline and help the courts better to reflect the seriousness of domestic abuse when it is present in other offences.

The Council has a statutory duty to produce a resource assessment for every sentencing guideline we develop. Each of the definitive guidelines we published and offence specific guideline consultations we launched during the reporting year was accompanied by a resource assessment. In these assessments we estimate the effects of the guidelines on the resource requirements of the prison, probation and youth justice services. They allow us and others in the criminal justice system to understand better the potential consequences of the Council's proposed or definitive guidelines.

The Council also undertakes research and analysis to support some of our wider statutory duties, ie to provide further information in specific areas or to fill gaps in existing data. On 24 September 2024 we published a report of a research review we had commissioned looking at the effectiveness of sentencing. Commissioned from an independent

academic, the review considers previously published research to look at the ways in which sentencing may or may not be effective in relation to sentencers, offenders, victims and the public. The work allows the Council to consider the most up-to-date evidence of the effectiveness of sentencing options when developing and revising sentencing guidelines.

Informing and responding to decision-makers

In January of this year, we submitted the Sentencing Council's response to the call for evidence from the Independent Sentencing Review 2024–25 led by David Gauke. The review was set up to make a comprehensive re-evaluation of the sentencing framework of England and Wales. Our submission, which explored potential influential factors in sentencing, focused on seven themes: key drivers: structures and processes; use of technology; alternatives to custody; custodial sentences: reform; custodial sentences: progression; and individual needs.

In exploring what factors might have led to an increase in sentence lengths in the past decade, our response concludes that sentencing guidelines might have played some part in the increase, although the available evidence suggests their influence appears to be limited.

The report of the Independent Sentencing Review was published on 22 May 2025. At the time of writing, the Council was considering the implications of its recommendations.

Promoting public confidence in sentencing

When people are aware of sentencing guidelines and understand how sentencing works, they tend to have more confidence in sentencing and the criminal justice system. As part of our five-year strategy, published in November 2021, the Council committed to an objective of strengthening confidence in sentencing by improving public knowledge and understanding of sentencing, including among victims, witnesses and offenders, and the wider public.

In July 2024 we launched **You be the Judge**, an interactive sentencing website designed to engage users on the issue of sentencing and to challenge misconceptions about its leniency and fairness. You be the Judge shows how sentencing works via six short, filmed sentencing hearings that allow users to compare their sentencing decisions with those of the judges and magistrates. The website was promoted to teachers for use in schools and to public audiences of all ages. There is more information on You Be the Judge on pages 50-51.

Another of the strategic objectives we set ourselves in 2021 was to seek opportunities to collaborate with academics, particularly with a view to broadening the range of analytical work we can draw on and to which we can contribute. On 15 January 2025, in partnership with the Sentencing Academy and The City Law School, we hosted a seminar to explore perspectives on sentencing. The seminar was well attended. We were particularly pleased that David Gauke spoke at one of the sessions and answered questions on a wide range of topics.

There is more information on the presentations and discussions that took place at the seminar on pages 36-7.

The Imposition guideline

The final guideline to be published in the year ending 31 March 2025 was the revised overarching guideline relating to **the imposition of community and custodial sentences**. The original guideline was published in 2017. It is probably the single guideline most frequently referred to by sentencers because it concerns the approach to offenders who are on the cusp of immediate custody for terms of up to two years. The revised guideline aimed to provide more detailed guidance on all aspects of sentencing. There was an emphasis on offenders facing shorter periods of custody. However, the guideline also dealt with particular groups of offenders such as young adults up to the age of 25 and female offenders. Discussion of the guideline by the Council began in July 2022. Consultation in relation to the draft guideline took place at the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024. There were over 150 responses to the consultation on the draft guideline. The Council considered the responses at a series of meetings concluding in January 2025. The process in which the Council engaged was the same as had been adopted on many occasions over the last 15 years. Many suggested changes were put forward, some of which we adopted. There were some adverse comments in relation to parts of the draft guideline. In no instance was there even a significant minority who opposed the approach taken by the Council.

One section of the revised guideline dealt with various aspects of pre-sentence reports, the section being more detailed than the equivalent section in the original guideline. This section included a list of cohorts or groups for whom the guideline advised a pre-sentence report normally would be necessary. The reason for including the individual groups varied. The common theme was that a court would need as much information as possible about the group identified. The list was not exhaustive. At the suggestion of the Justice Committee, the Council added a paragraph after consultation emphasising that the list was non-exhaustive.

On the day that the revised Imposition of community and custodial sentences guideline was published – 5 March 2025 – there was reference to it in the course of a debate in the House of Commons. One of the groups for whom a report was said normally to be necessary was ethnic, cultural and faith minorities. It was suggested that the guidance in relation to pre-sentence reports created differential sentencing outcomes for ethnic minorities. Following the debate the Lord Chancellor wrote to me as Chairman of the Council. **I responded in writing.** I then met the Lord Chancellor with her officials to discuss the position. As a result she wrote to me again on 20 March 2025. The Council was invited to take one of two courses: remove the list of cohorts or groups for whom a pre-sentence report normally would be necessary; re-open the consultation on the revised Imposition guideline.

The full Council met to consider the request made by the Lord Chancellor. We considered that there was no basis for

taking the first course. The Council is an independent public body which operates via a well-established statutory framework. Its purpose in part is to preserve the independence of the judiciary in relation to sentencing. The statutory framework provides for the executive and Parliament (and all other interested parties) to provide input to any draft guideline within the consultation process. That is what happened in this case.

The Council considered carefully the proposition that we should re-open the consultation process. The Council decided not to do so. I explained the reasons for our decision in some detail in an **open letter to the Lord Chancellor** on 27 March 2025. The letter remains available on the Council's website. I spoke to the Lord Chancellor on 31 March 2025. She told me that she intended to introduce legislation to prevent guidance in relation to the provision of pre-sentence reports for particular groups in any Council guideline. Since the revised Imposition guideline was due to come into effect the following day, I informed the Lord Chancellor that the in-effect date for the guideline would be postponed at least until the outcome of the legislative process was known. At the time of writing the legislation is still making its way through Parliament. Plainly the Council will not bring into effect any guideline which has been declared unlawful in legislation.

The Lord Chancellor's reason for inviting the Council to remove the list of cohorts was that in part it trespassed into the realm of policy. The Council respectfully disagreed with that analysis. A pre-sentence report is one means by which

a court can obtain information about an offender. The cohorts were those about whom information a court might be lacking information were a pre-sentence report not to be obtained. In the case of ethnic minorities the Council's rationale was that there are current disparities in sentencing which adversely affect ethnic minorities and that providing more information might assist in removing those disparities. This was not a matter of creating differential outcomes. A pre-sentence report does not determine the sentence imposed.

There has been reference at various stages of the progress of the relevant Bill through Parliament to the prospect of some further legislative action in relation to the Council. Given that there has not been any outline of what might be proposed I cannot offer any developed view on behalf of the Council. The only point that I would make at this stage is that the Council has operated since 2010 during which time hundreds of guidelines have been issued. The Council has provided an opportunity for the executive and Parliament to contribute to the development of sentencing guidelines in a way which did not exist hitherto. The current structure was deliberately created to provide a careful balance between quasi-political involvement in sentencing and judicial independence.

The people behind the guidelines

There have been some changes in Council membership over the past year. I am delighted to welcome Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon as a judicial member of the Council. Amanda brings a wealth of experience from her time on the bench and as an advocate. I am equally

pleased to announce the reappointment of Richard Wright KC for three years. Richard was appointed to the Council on 1 August 2022 with specific responsibility to represent criminal defence.

Sadly, this year we have said goodbye to Her Honour Judge Rosa Dean. Rosa was an active and vital member of the Council for six years, chairing the confidence and communication sub-committee and leading our work on the guidelines for sentencing offenders with mental disorders, developmental disorders, or neurological impairments; guidelines covering animal cruelty offences; and latterly the new guidelines for strangulation and suffocation.

In March 2025 we also bade farewell to Chief Constable Rob Nixon who had been serving as the non-judicial member of the Council with policing experience since 1 December 2023. We thank Rosa and Rob for their significant contributions to our work and wish them the best for the future.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Office of the Sentencing Council. They are the Council's most valuable resource. I continue to be greatly impressed by their expertise, professionalism and dedication.



**Lord Justice William Davis
Chairman**

June 2025

Introduction

The Sentencing Council is an independent, non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). It was set up by Part 4 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to promote greater transparency and consistency in sentencing, while maintaining the independence of the judiciary.

The aims of the Sentencing Council are to:

- promote a clear, fair and consistent approach to sentencing
- produce analysis and research on sentencing, and
- work to improve public confidence in sentencing

On 4 November 2021, the Council published a five-year strategy and supporting work plan, which were developed following a public consultation held to mark the Council's 10th anniversary in 2020. The strategy commits the Council to five objectives:

- To promote consistency and transparency in sentencing through the development and revision of sentencing guidelines
- To ensure that all our work is evidence-based and to enhance and strengthen the data and evidence that underpin it

- To explore and consider issues of equality and diversity relevant to our work and take any necessary action in response within our remit
- To consider and collate evidence on effectiveness of sentencing and seek to enhance the ways in which we raise awareness of the relevant issues
- To work to strengthen confidence in sentencing by improving public knowledge and understanding of sentencing, including among victims, witnesses and offenders, as well as the public

This annual report documents the work undertaken by the Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 in the context of the five strategic objectives.

Also included, in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, are two reports considering the impact of sentencing factors (pages 56-60) and non-sentencing factors (pages 61-4) on the resources required in the prison, probation and youth justice services to give effect to sentences imposed by the courts in England and Wales.

For information on past Sentencing Council activity, please refer to our earlier annual reports, which are available on our website at: [sentencingcouncil.org.uk](https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk)

Key events 2024/25

2024		
April	1	Miscellaneous amendments come into effect
	8	Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon appointed to the Council
	24	Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment consultation closed
May	14	Non-fatal strangulation and suffocation statistical bulletin published
	15	Non-fatal strangulation and suffocation consultation opened, consultation paper and draft resource assessment published
	22	Aggravated vehicle taking and other motoring matters consultation closed
June	12	Immigration offences consultation closed
July	1	Improvements to online magistrates' courts sentencing guidelines launched
	10	Sentencing Council business plan 2024/25 published
	11	You be the Judge interactive website launched
August	1	Bladed articles and offensive weapons guidelines evaluation published
September	5	Miscellaneous amendments to sentencing guidelines 2024 consultation opened and consultation paper published
	10	Sentencing Council annual report 2023/24 published
	11	Ancillary orders guidance consultation opened and consultation paper published
	24	Effectiveness of sentencing options review of research published

November	29	Four Corners Conference hosted by the Judicial Council of Ireland
December	10	Independent research review of Overarching principles: domestic abuse guideline and Council's response published
	16	Strangulation and suffocation offences data tables published
	17	Strangulation and suffocation sentencing guidelines and consultation response published
2025		
January	9	Council's submission to Independent Sentencing Review 2024-25 published
	10	Perspectives on sentencing one-day conference held
	21	Hare coursing statistical summary and data tables published
	22	Hare coursing offences consultation opened and consultation paper and draft resource assessment published
February	11	Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment offences data tables published
	12	Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment sentencing guidelines, final resource assessment and response to consultation published
	18	Aggravated vehicle taking and other motoring related matters data tables published
	19	Aggravated vehicle taking and other motoring related matters sentencing guidelines and consultation response published
March	5	Imposition of community and custodial sentences revised guideline and response to consultation published

Strategic objective 1:

Promoting consistency and transparency in sentencing through the development and revision of sentencing guidelines

The purpose of the Sentencing Council for England and Wales is to promote a clear, fair and consistent approach to sentencing by issuing sentencing guidelines that provide clear structures and processes for judges and magistrates to use in court. This purpose is underpinned by the statutory duties for the Council that are set out in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

Responses to the 10th anniversary consultation held by the Council in 2020 provided broad support for our view that the production and revision of guidelines should remain our key focus.

The sentencing guidelines are intended to help ensure a consistent approach to sentencing, while preserving judicial discretion. Under the Sentencing Act 2020, a court must follow relevant sentencing guidelines unless satisfied in a particular case that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so.

When developing guidelines, the Council has a statutory duty to publish a draft for consultation. At the launch of a consultation, we will seek publicity via mainstream and specialist media, as well as promoting it via social media and on the Sentencing Council website. We make a particular effort to reach relevant professional organisations and representative bodies, especially those representing the judiciary and criminal justice professionals, but also others with an interest in a particular offence or group of offenders. Many of the responses come from organisations representing large groups so the number of replies does not fully reflect the comprehensive nature of the contributions, all of which are given full consideration by the Council.

The work conducted on all guidelines during the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 is set out in this chapter. To clarify what stage of production a guideline has reached, reports of our work fall under one or more of four key stages:

1. Development
2. Consultation
3. Post-consultation
4. Evaluation and monitoring

The table at Appendix C sets out the production stages of all sentencing guidelines.

Aggravated vehicle taking, vehicle registration fraud and other motoring related matters

The previous sentencing guidelines for aggravated vehicle taking offences involving accident causing injury, dangerous driving and causing damage to vehicle/property were published in 2008 by the Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC). These applied in the magistrates' courts, but there were no guidelines for the Crown Court. An earlier guideline for vehicle licence and registration fraud dated back to 2008 but was to a large extent obsolete following the abolition of physical tax discs.

Development

We developed the draft aggravated vehicle taking guidelines alongside a wider package of motoring guidelines relating to dangerous and careless driving offences but waited to consult on the former to allow us to include in our proposals any changes stemming from consultation on the wider package. The guidelines are consistent with those for dangerous and careless driving offences, while the vehicle registration fraud guideline was drafted taking into account current sentencing practice, drawing on the existing guideline (but putting it into the stepped format now familiar to sentencers), with elements of fraud-related guidelines also factored in.

Following responses to our 2022 consultation on motoring guidelines, the Council also considered what further guidance we could give to sentencers to assist in imposing driver disqualifications. We were also aware of various issues relating to motoring guidelines, many of which arose from suggestions and queries from guideline users.

Consultation

Between February and May 2024, the Council consulted on proposals for six new and revised sentencing guidelines covering:

- Aggravated vehicle taking – injury caused (Theft Act 1968, section 12A(2)(b))
- Aggravated vehicle taking – dangerous driving (Theft Act 1968, section 12A(2)(a))
- Aggravated vehicle taking – vehicle/property damage caused (Theft Act 1968, section 12A(2)(c) and (d))
- Aggravated vehicle taking – death caused (Theft Act 1968, section 12A(2)(b))
- Vehicle registration fraud (Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, section 44)

We also put forward for consultation a draft overarching guideline on driver disqualification. This brought together the Council's existing guidance on disqualification and set out the principles the courts should follow when setting the length of a disqualification. We consulted on various minor and technical amendments, including an increase in the starting point fine for use of a mobile phone while driving. To support the consultation, we tested the guidelines with sentencers, completing qualitative interviews with seven magistrates and four Crown Court judges.

Post-consultation

We received 68 written responses to the consultation from individuals and organisations. Over the course of autumn 2024, the Council considered all the responses received very carefully. As a result of the suggestions made by consultees, we made a number of changes to the proposals, including:

- when property has been damaged in a case of vehicle taking, expanding the harm to be taken into account to cover 'economic, commercial, cultural or personal value to the victim' to be clear harm is not limited to the financial impact, and
- increasing the sentence levels we had proposed for cases where there is high culpability but low-level damage so it is consistent with other guidelines. The Council did also bring down the sentence levels consulted on for low culpability offenders where a death has been caused to reflect the fact that they may have been a passenger or been coerced or otherwise played a peripheral role in the offending (although such an offender may still expect to get a custodial sentence of several years), and
- increasing fine levels for using a mobile phone when driving. The Council was already intending to increase the fine level to Band B for this offence. Following consultation, we added examples where an even higher fine would be appropriate (ie 'where there was a high level of traffic or pedestrians in vicinity or for a repeat offence').

The definitive guidelines, updates and amendments were published alongside the consultation response document and final resource assessment on 19 February 2025. They came into force on 1 April.

Evaluation and monitoring

We aim to evaluate the guidelines in due course. This is likely to be when they have been in force for enough years that there is sufficient data to assess the impact that the guidelines have had on sentencing practice.

Media coverage

The consultation and publication of the guidelines were covered in the Solicitors' Journal and New Law Journal, as well as in the Daily Express.

“Drivers who commit motoring offences that result in death, injury or damage to property in vehicles they do not have permission to drive, can cause anguish and inconvenience both to the vehicle owner and to victims affected by their driving.

“Victims can suffer serious consequences including death or life-changing injuries or serious damage to property including to the vehicles that were used without permission. The guidelines we are publishing today will allow courts to take a consistent approach to sentencing these offences.”

His Honour Judge Simon Drew KC on the launch of the sentencing guidelines for aggravated vehicle taking offences and other motoring matters, 19 February 2025

Ancillary orders

Development

The Sentencing Council has provided guidance on ancillary orders in various places on our website as well as within offence specific guidelines (usually at step six or seven). Most of this guidance is provided for magistrates' courts. The Council decided to improve the consistency, accessibility and presentation of the current information and to provide more detailed guidance for both magistrates' courts and the Crown Court.

Consultation

We consulted on the proposed guidance from 11 September to 4 December 2024. We received 45 responses.

Post-consultation

Consultation responses were supportive of the proposed approach, which is to embed guidance on specific ancillary orders in relevant guidelines. There were helpful suggestions for amendments and additions to the content of the guidance on many of the ancillary orders, and the Council made changes to improve accuracy and clarity.

The definitive guidelines were published on 25 June 2025 to come into effect on 1 July 2025.

Arson and criminal damage

On 1 October 2019, the Council's arson and criminal damage offences definitive guidelines came into effect. These guidelines cover several arson and criminal damage offences and the offence of threats to destroy or damage property.

Evaluation and monitoring

This year, work started on an evaluation of these guidelines. The work includes reviewing the information gathered from the data collection that ran in magistrates' courts during 2017/18 and 2021, where sentencers provided details of factors they took into account and the sentence they imposed when sentencing criminal damage offences.

We are using this and other sources of evidence, such as sentencing data up to 2023 from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database and transcripts of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks, to help us assess the impact and implementation of the arson and criminal damage offences definitive guidelines. We plan to publish this evaluation in 2026.

Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment

Prior to the publication on 12 February 2025 of two new guidelines for blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment, there had been no guidelines for these offences. These are serious offences: the maximum penalty for kidnap and false imprisonment is life imprisonment; for blackmail, it is 14 years' custody.

Consultation

The consultation on draft guidelines for blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment offences ran between 31 January and 24 April 2024. Alongside the consultation we produced a resource assessment, statistical summary and data tables showing current sentencing practices for the offences included. During the

consultation, we also conducted a short survey and qualitative interviews with 14 Crown Court judges to help us understand more about how the proposed guidelines might be applied and used in practice.

Post-consultation

The responses to the consultation were considered alongside the results from small scale research conducted with judges to test the guidelines. Respondents were broadly supportive of the Council's proposals, with some suggestions made for amendments to the draft guidelines. As a result of these suggestions some changes were made. These included adding additional factors at step two in the kidnap and false imprisonment guideline to ensure that any offences committed within a domestic abuse context could be appropriately aggravated.

The definitive guidelines were published on 12 February and came into force on 1 April 2025. They were accompanied by a final resource assessment and data tables presenting current sentencing practice for the relevant offences.

Media coverage

The launch of the blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment guidelines was covered by the New Law Journal and the Liverpool Echo.



Caernarfon Magistrates' Court

Evaluating the Bladed articles and offensive weapons guidelines

The guidelines for sentencing offenders convicted of **possessing or threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon** came into effect on 1 June 2018. There are two guidelines for sentencing adults covering eight offences: Bladed articles and offensive weapons – possession and Bladed articles and offensive weapons – threats, and a third that covers the same offences but applies only to the offenders aged under 18: Bladed articles and offensive weapons (possession and threats) – children and young people.

On 1 August 2024, the Council published an evaluation of the bladed articles and offensive weapons guidelines, examining the potential impact and implementation of the guidelines and exploring whether there is any evidence of issues with the implementation of the guidelines or any unanticipated impacts.

The evaluation considered the available evidence from multiple sources, including trend analysis of sentencing outcomes using data from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database, content analysis of a sample of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks and Court of Appeal transcripts, as well as analysis of a Sentencing Council data collection exercise in relation to adults sentenced for possession offences at magistrates' courts.

The Council concluded that, overall, based on the findings presented in the evaluation, the guidelines are operating as intended and do not present any cause for concern with respect to having any unintended impact. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the available evidence was analysed during a period that is likely to have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This may have influenced the extent to which conclusions could be drawn, particularly regarding the longer-term impact of the guidelines.

For two of the guidelines – the adult possession guideline and the children and young people guideline – we also concluded that specific findings of the evaluation warranted further work.

Regarding the Bladed articles and offensive weapons – possession (adults) guideline, the Council considered the findings in relation to the culpability assessment, which found that a small number of cases appeared to have been categorised in a way that was not anticipated. As a result, we decided that it would be appropriate to revisit this aspect of the guideline.

We have committed to reviewing the package of guidelines as part of our 2025-26 work plan.

In relation to the Bladed articles and offensive weapons (possession and threats) – children and young people guideline, we are keeping the trend in outcomes for 10- to 15-year-olds sentenced for possession under review to ensure there are no unintended consequences of the guideline.

Data collection and publication

Alongside the evaluation of the Bladed article and offensive weapons guidelines, on 1 August 2024 the Council also published two datasets containing data from the targeted data collection we ran in two waves before and after the publication and launch of the definitive guidelines in June 2018.

The pre-guideline data collection ran between 1 November 2017 and 30 March 2018 and the post-guideline data collection ran between 23 April 2019 and 30 September 2019. Sentencers in all magistrates' courts in England and Wales were asked to fill in a form when sentencing offences of possession of a bladed article or offensive weapon, where this was the principal offence. The data collection was mostly administered online via our website, although a small number of forms for the pre-guideline data collection were circulated on paper in an attempt to boost response rates.

The published data includes two cleaned datasets for the pre- and post-guideline periods, which were analysed and presented in the guideline evaluation.



Officials from the Office of the Sentencing Council

Bladed articles and offensive weapons

The guidelines for sentencing offenders convicted of possessing or threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon came into effect on 1 June 2018. There are three guidelines covering eight offences:

- Bladed articles and offensive weapons – possession (adults only)
 - possession of an offensive weapon in a public place
 - possession of an article with blade/point in a public place
 - possession of an offensive weapon on education premises
 - possession of an article with blade/point on education premises
 - unauthorised possession in prison of a knife or offensive weapon
- Bladed articles and offensive weapons – threats (adults only)
 - threatening with an offensive weapon in a public place
 - threatening with an article with a blade/point in a public place
 - threatening with an article with a blade/point or offensive weapon on education premises
- Bladed articles and offensive weapons (possession and threats) children and young people, which covers the same offences as the

adult guidelines but applies only to the sentencing of offenders aged under 18.

Evaluation and monitoring

On 1 August 2024, the Council published an evaluation of the Bladed article and offensive weapons guidelines. The evaluation examined the potential impact and implementation of the guidelines, describing the research and analysis that was undertaken and exploring whether there is any evidence of any implementation issues or unanticipated impacts of the guidelines.

There is a report of the evaluation on pages 19-20.

Breach offences

In 2018 the Council issued guidelines to assist the courts in sentencing offenders who have not complied with 11 specific types of court order, including suspended sentence orders, community orders, protective orders and sexual harm prevention orders. The guidelines came into effect on 1 October 2018.

Evaluation and monitoring

This year, we have continued our evaluation to help us assess the impact and implementation of seven of the sentencing guidelines for breach offences:

- Breach of suspended sentence orders
- Breach of community orders
- Breach of protective orders

- Breach of sexual harm prevention orders
- Breach of criminal behaviours orders
- Failure to surrender to bail
- Fail to comply with notification requirement

We have analysed information from a data collection exercise in magistrates' courts, data from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database, and a sample of Crown Court sentencing transcripts to observe any changes to the factors relevant to sentencing and in the type of disposals being imposed. We have also conducted small-scale survey research with sentencers and probation practitioners to understand their experiences of using the guidelines. We plan to publish our evaluation in autumn 2025.

Domestic abuse

The Council's Overarching principles: domestic abuse definitive guideline identifies the principles relevant to the sentencing of cases involving domestic abuse. It came into effect on 24 May 2018.

Evaluation and monitoring

To assess how the overarching guideline on domestic abuse is used in sentencing we commissioned academics at Nottingham Trent University to conduct a research review. The review was conducted via a survey and interviews with sentencers as well as analysis of Crown Court sentencing transcripts and data obtained from our court data collections. It focused on sentencers' understanding, interpretation, implementation, application and thoughts of the current guideline as well as the

impact of the presence of domestic abuse on the sentence.

The review, published in December 2024, found that there was generally a high level of satisfaction among sentencers with how the guideline was used in practice. However, we have identified some areas where minor changes would improve the clarity and accessibility of the guideline and help the courts better reflect the seriousness of domestic abuse when it is present in other offences:

- changing the name of the guideline to 'Domestic abuse: overarching principles'
- linking the guideline to guidance on compensation and restraining orders
- rewording the 'domestic context' aggravating factor to include the word 'abuse', and
- adding 'domestic abuse context' as an aggravating factor to another 20 offence specific guidelines

Hare coursing

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced increased penalties for offences related to hare coursing and two new offences of trespass with intent to search for or to pursue hares with dogs and being equipped for that activity. The legislation came in response to longstanding concerns that a fine was insufficient to deal with the harm caused by hare coursing activity, which can include damage, harassment and violence. No sentencing guidelines have previously existed for hare coursing-related offences.

Development

The Council considered that a sentencing guideline would be beneficial to the magistrates' courts, given the new powers available to the courts under the legislation of custodial sentences up to six months and the possibility of community orders. We began considering the scope of a hare coursing guideline in late 2023 and early 2024, conducting early discussions with rural magistrates and those responsible for investigating and prosecuting hare coursing offences. The Council developed a draft guideline later in 2024.

Consultation

We consulted on a draft guideline between 22 January and 25 April 2025. As part of the consultation, we conducted focus groups with magistrates in three geographical areas where relatively high numbers of hare coursing offences are sentenced to obtain their views on the draft guideline. A draft resource assessment, statistical summary and data tables were produced alongside the consultation.

Post-consultation

The Council received 138 written responses to the consultation and we are now considering these responses alongside the feedback received during the focus groups. The aim is for a definitive guideline to be published in autumn 2025.

Media coverage

This consultation was covered widely in relevant trade press, including NFU Online, Farmers' Weekly and Farming News, as well as on BBC News and in the regional press.

Housing offences

Development

The Council has approved the development of various individual and organisation housing related offences guidelines. These include guidelines for unlawful eviction and harassment, offences related to letting houses in multiple occupation, and housing standards offences.

Unlawful eviction

The Council approved drafts of two guidelines (individual and organisation) covering the nine offences of unlawful eviction and harassment under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977.

As part of the unlawful eviction and harassment guidelines development process, small-scale qualitative interviews were undertaken with 10 magistrates, five district judges and three circuit judges in November and December 2024. The intention of these interviews was to test how the draft guidelines may be used in sentencing and to feed into finalising the draft guidelines ahead of consultation.

Houses in multiple occupation/ housing standards

The Council also agreed to develop guidelines for other offences related to housing that may be typically committed by landlords. These include offences under the Housing Act 2004 related to the licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), overcrowding of HMOs, as well as failures to comply with enforcement and prevention action carried out by local authorities in relation to standards of housing more generally.

Consultation

The Council considered various amendments to the draft guidelines as a result of this research, and we plan to consult on all these housing related guidelines together in autumn 2025. Alongside the consultation, we will publish a draft resource assessment and statistical summary

Immigration

Until the Council's new definitive guidelines come into effect later in 2025, there have been no sentencing guidelines for immigration offences. There are, however, a large number of separate immigration offences of varying levels of seriousness carrying penalties up to a maximum term of life imprisonment.

The Council has prepared six guidelines covering eight of the more serious immigration offences. The guideline for facilitation offences (Assisting unlawful immigration and Helping asylum-seeker to enter the United Kingdom) increases sentencing severity reflecting the rise in the maximum penalty for the

facilitation offences from 14 years' to life imprisonment by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. In relation to the other offences, as is common with most of our new guidelines the Council has been guided by our statutory duty to have regard to current sentencing practice. The guidelines for those offences have therefore been set to be broadly in line with current sentence levels.

Consultation

We consulted on the six draft guidelines between 20 March and 12 June 2024. To support the consultation, we also produced a draft resource assessment and statistical summary.

During the consultation period, interviews were conducted with six circuit judges on the draft guidelines for Assisting unlawful immigration and Possession of false identity documents, etc with improper intention, and with seven magistrates on Knowingly arrives in the United Kingdom without valid entry clearance. All sentencers approached for interview had experience of sentencing such cases. Interviews were not conducted with the other three guidelines due to the very low volume of offences.

Post-consultation

We received 26 responses to the consultation from a wide range of respondents: some of the responses were from groups or organisations, and some from individuals. The majority of consultees provided positive feedback on the proposed guidelines, including some helpful proposals for change. As a result of the views expressed there have been changes made to the wording of a

number of factors within the guidelines, and to some sentences.

Media coverage

This consultation was covered in the Solicitors' Journal and New Law Journal, as well as in the Yorkshire Evening Post.

Imposition of community and custodial sentences

The definitive guideline, Imposition of community and custodial sentences, which came into effect on 1 February 2017, provides guidance to the courts on the approach they should follow when deciding whether offenders should be given community or custodial sentences.

Consultation

As reported in last year's annual report, the Council agreed to undertake a significant revision of the Imposition guideline based on changes to legislation, case law and case management guidance, evidence about the experiences of individual offender groups and a review of trend analysis of the guideline published in March 2023.

Between 29 November 2023 and 21 February 2024 we consulted on proposed substantial changes to the content of the guideline, several new sections, and a restructure of the guideline so that it would align better with the chronological order in which a sentencing court would follow it. Alongside the consultation, small-scale research with sentencers was undertaken to explore how the proposed changes may be interpreted. This

involved interviews with 10 sentencers and focus groups with 13 sentencers, which included magistrates, district judges, recorders and circuit judges.

The aim of the proposed revisions was to provide more comprehensive information around the process through which courts should consider the imposition of a community or custodial sentence. The revisions were also designed to make sure that the courts:

- have the most comprehensive information available to them about the circumstances of the offence and the offender and the range of sentencing options available
- are clear about the importance of tailoring the sentence to the individual offender and their circumstances, and
- consider the full breadth of options when deciding the sentence.

Post-consultation

There were 150 official responses submitted to the consultation. Respondents included magistrates and judges, charities and non-governmental organisations, academics, medical professionals, legal professionals, governmental and parliamentary bodies, criminal justice professionals and members of the public, as well as our statutory consultees, the Justice Committee and then Lord Chancellor through the sentencing minister.

As was expected, responses to the consultation covered a wide range of different viewpoints. Across all responses, most elements of the

guideline had both agreement and some disagreement from different respondents.

In general, however, almost all the 150 respondents considered the draft guideline an overall improvement on the current guideline and expressed positive views about most of the amendments and additions.

The Council carefully considered all 150 responses to the consultation in finalising the definitive guideline. All sections and almost all sub-sections were updated following views and suggestions from respondents, all of which are set out in our consultation response paper.

The revised Imposition of community and custodial sentences guideline was published on 5 March 2025 alongside the consultation response paper and a

final resource assessment, which looked at the potential impact of the guideline on prison and probation resources. The in-effect date was subsequently paused while the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill was introduced in Parliament.

Media coverage

On the launch of the guideline, initial media attention (New Law Journal, Law Society Gazette and Guardian) swiftly changed focus to cover an exchange in Parliament between the Lord Chancellor and the shadow justice minister about aspects of the guideline.

“The Imposition guideline is one of the most important of all the Sentencing Council’s guidelines. It is fundamental to judicial decision-making.

“A sentence properly tailored to the individual circumstances of the offender and the offence, that makes full use of the range of sentencing options available and is based on evidence, has the greatest likelihood of being effectively completed, while still fulfilling the purposes of sentencing.”

Lord Justice William Davis, Chairman, on the launch of the revised sentencing guideline, Imposition of community and custodial sentences, 5 March 2025

Intimate images

The Online Safety Act came into force on 31 January 2024, creating two new offences:

- Sending etc photograph or film of genitals ('cyber flashing')
- Sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film

Development

Following an initial scoping exercise conducted in early 2024, the Council had agreed to make developing guidelines for these offences and the further, expected, new related offences a priority, with timescales for the work dependant on new legislation. The Council intends to start work on this project later in 2025 once all the new offences proposed in the Data (Use and Access) Bill and Crime and Policing Bill, both before Parliament at the time of writing, are in force.

Intimidatory offences

The Council's definitive guidelines for sentencing intimidatory offences came into effect on 1 October 2018. The guidelines cover offences of harassment, stalking, disclosing private sexual images, controlling or coercive behaviour, and threats to kill.

Evaluation and monitoring

This year we have continued our evaluation of these guidelines, considering evidence from multiple sources. We have continued to analyse data from the data collections that ran across magistrates' courts during

2017/18 and 2019, where sentencers were asked to provide details of the factors they took into account and the sentence they imposed when sentencing harassment and stalking offences. We have also analysed data up to 2022 from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database, including demographic data (age, sex and ethnicity) and transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks.

The evaluation has been peer reviewed and was published on 18 May 2025.

Manslaughter

The Council's definitive guidelines for sentencing manslaughter offences came into force on 1 November 2018. This package of four guidelines covers:

- unlawful act manslaughter
- manslaughter by reason of loss of control
- manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility
- gross negligence manslaughter.

Evaluation and monitoring

This year, we started work on evaluating the manslaughter guidelines, to explore the impact of the guidelines on sentencing practice, as well as whether there have been any implementation issues.

The evaluation is considering evidence from multiple sources, including analysis of sentencing data up to 2023 from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database and content analysis of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks from before and after the guideline came into effect. It is also drawing on findings from in-depth

interviews with sentencers to understand how the guideline works in practice.

We expect to publish this evaluation later in 2025.

Miscellaneous amendments to sentencing guidelines

Since the Council's inception in 2010, we have built up a large body of sentencing guidelines and accompanying materials. In order to be able to address any issues that arise with guidelines, the Council holds an annual consultation on miscellaneous amendments to guidelines and the materials that accompany them.

Development

We began work on compiling the fourth miscellaneous amendments consultation in April 2024. The issues covered were drawn from feedback from guideline users (often received via the feedback function embedded in the online guidelines) and requests from stakeholders including some in response to the previous consultation.

Consultation

We held the consultation between 5 September and 27 November 2024, asking consultees for views on the following proposals.

- Matters relevant primarily to magistrates' courts:
 - Supplementary information: new guidance on setting a fine for those on a variable income

- New guideline for the offence of using or keeping heavy goods vehicle if levy not paid
- Careless Driving: revising the guideline to change the factors to align with newer guidelines and replace reference to 'pedestrians' with 'vulnerable road users'
- Drive otherwise than in accordance with a licence: adding clarification to the guideline regarding offenders who are entitled to a licence but do not hold one
- Allocation guideline: various changes including changing the name of the guideline; updating the legislative references; clarifying wording relating to community orders; adding a reference to the Criminal Practice Directions in the Committal for sentence section; and providing additional information by way of an Annex
- Matters relevant to magistrates' courts and the Crown Court:
 - Sentencing children and young people guideline: changing references to 'children and young people' to 'children' in both the title (of this and other guidelines relating to sentencing under 18s) and in the text of all sentencing guidelines; and adding a reference to sentencing young adults at the beginning of the guideline

- Assistance to the prosecution: adding a dropdown to guidelines summarising the approach to be taken
- Sentencing very large organisations: adding some guidance on sentencing very large organisations to relevant guidelines
- Revenue fraud: adding a sentence table for offences where the maximum sentence has increased from 7 years to 14 years
- Totality: adding further guidance to the Totality guideline
- Shop theft and Benefit fraud guidelines: adding an expanded explanation to the mitigating factor ‘offender experiencing exceptional hardship’
- Wording relating to community orders in guidelines: clarifying the wording relating to programme requirements and adding a note relating to committal to the Crown Court
- Wording on mandatory minimum sentences: adding a reference stating where the burden of showing that exceptional circumstances exist lies
- Domestic abuse: adding the aggravating factor to more guidelines
- Standard language in guidelines: establishing a standard form of wording in guidelines

Post-consultation

There were 65 responses to the consultation. Most responses were broadly supportive of the proposals to which they responded but there were a number of critical responses and many suggestions for changes.

The Council considered the responses and made some changes to the proposals. These included: clarifications to the proposed Careless driving guideline; adding further detail to the annex to the Allocation guideline; adding references and links to the Criminal Procedure Rules to several guidelines; adding some further detail to the assistance to the prosecution guidance. The Council decided not to make the proposed change to the terminology in the Children and young people guideline, pending clarification of the language being used in forthcoming legislation.

We published a response to the consultation on 28 May 2025. The majority of the amendments were published on our website on 1 June, coming into effect on publication, except the amendments to the careless driving guideline, which came into effect on 1 July. The work to standardise language in some aspects of guidelines continued throughout summer 2025.

Public order

The Council's definitive guidelines for sentencing public order offences came into effect on 1 January 2020. The guidelines cover offences of:

- Riot
- Violent disorder
- Affray
- Threatening behaviour
- Disorderly behaviour with intent
- Disorderly behaviour
- Racially or religiously aggravated threatening behaviour
- Racially or religiously aggravated disorderly behaviour with intent

- Racially or religiously aggravated disorderly behaviour
- Stirring up hatred based on race, religion or sexual orientation

Evaluating and monitoring

This year we began work on an evaluation of the public order offences guidelines. We have started analysing sentencing data up to 2023 from MoJ's Court Proceedings Database and transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks, to help us assess the impact and implementation of the guidelines. We also plan to conduct in-depth interviews with sentencers to understand how the guidelines work in practice.

We expect to publish the evaluation by the end of 2025.



Officials from the Office of the Sentencing Council

Sentencing offenders with mental disorders, developmental disorders, or neurological impairments

The Council's overarching guideline for sentencing offenders with mental disorders, developmental disorders, or neurological impairments came into force on 1 October 2020.

Evaluating and monitoring

This year, work began on an evaluation of the guideline, to assess both the impact of the guideline on sentencing practice and sentencers' understanding, interpretation and application of the guideline. The evaluation includes an online survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews with sentencers to gather their views on the guideline and understand how the guideline works in practice. It also includes exploratory analysis of the Council's data collection data and content analysis of Crown Court and Court of Appeal sentencing remarks transcripts.

We expect to publish the evaluation in early 2026.

Strangulation and suffocation

Section 70(1) of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created an offence of non-fatal strangulation and a separate offence of non-fatal suffocation. The offences were introduced as part of the Government's Violence against women and girls strategy 2021 and came into force on 7 June 2022. These offences are often committed in the context of domestic abuse but can be carried out in any circumstances. The victim does not have to suffer any physical injury for the offence to have been committed.

Development

The Council commenced development work on a draft guideline in the autumn of 2023. The draft guideline was finalised in the spring of 2024, and we opened a consultation on our proposals in May. Alongside the consultation, we published a draft resource assessment and statistical summary.

During the consultation we conducted interviews with ten Crown Court judges to explore how the guideline might work in practice.

Post-consultation

The new guideline for strangulation and suffocation offences was published on 17 December 2024 and came into effect on 1 January 2025. The guideline applies to both the simple offence of strangulation or suffocation and the racially or religiously aggravated offence.

There is a statutory maximum of five year's custody for the non-aggravated offence and a maximum of seven years' custody for the aggravated offence. The purpose of the guideline is to make sure that those who seek to harm others in this way receive sentences that reflect the seriousness of these offences.

Alongside the definitive guideline, we published a final resource assessment and data tables presenting current sentencing practice for the relevant offences.

Media coverage

The launch of the guideline was covered in the Solicitors' Journal, New Law Journal and New Family Lawyer. It was also mentioned on the BBC News website and in the Liverpool Echo.

“Strangulation and suffocation are very serious offences that create a real and justified fear of death. Victims can experience extreme terror and a high degree of psychological harm, even where no physical injuries are visible.

“This new sentencing guideline from the Sentencing Council recognises the inherent harm to the victim of these offences. It makes sure that judges and magistrates have clear guidance so that all cases where strangulation or suffocation has occurred are sentenced in an appropriate and consistent manner.”

Her Honour Judge Rosa Dean on the launch of the sentencing guidelines for strangulation and suffocation offences, 17 December 2024



Strategic objective 2:

Ensuring that all our work is evidence-based, and working to enhance and strengthen the data and evidence that underpin it

The Council carries out analysis and research into sentencing to enable us to meet the statutory duties set out in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Our analysis and research work is an integral part of guideline development: it contributes to all stages of the process and ensures the Council develops guidelines that meet our aims and objectives. We draw on a range of different data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as undertaking our own research, to inform our work.

Undertaking research and analysis to support the development of guidelines and other statutory duties

The Council regularly carries out social research and analysis that aims to augment the evidence base underpinning guidelines, making sure, in particular, that guidelines are informed by the views and experiences of those who sentence. We conduct primary research with users of the guidelines, principally Crown Court judges, district judges and magistrates. We use a range of methods, including surveys, interviews and group discussions. Our researchers also review sentencing literature and analyse transcripts of Crown Court sentencing remarks. This work helps to inform the content of the guidelines at an early stage of development and explore any behavioural implications. At times, and where relevant, we also conduct research with victims, offenders and members of the public.

During the development of draft guidelines, we also draw on a range of data sources, where available, to produce statistical information about current sentencing practice, including offence volumes, average custodial sentence lengths and breakdowns by age, sex and ethnicity. We use this information to understand the parameters of current sentencing practice, consider potential issues of disparity and fulfil the Council's public sector equality duty (see page 69). In some instances, however, data are not available so there are limits to the analysis we can undertake.

When required, the Council also undertakes research and analysis to support some of our wider statutory duties, to provide further information in specific areas or to fill gaps in existing data. We are also continuing to seek opportunities to collaborate with academics and external organisations. During 2024/25, this work has included further research to examine issues related to effectiveness in sentencing. We also hosted an academic seminar in January 2025 to share knowledge and understanding with leading experts in the field of sentencing. There is more on the seminar on pages 36-7.

Perspectives on sentencing

On 10 January 2025 the Sentencing Council and the Sentencing Academy co-hosted 'Perspectives on sentencing'. This one-day conference, which was opened by the Lady Chief Justice and our Chairman, brought together leading experts in the field of sentencing to explore important and current sentencing-related issues in a series of presentations and discussions.

Victims and sentencing

Council member Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon and Dr Jay Gormley from the University of Glasgow discussed victims and sentencing in a session chaired by Council member Johanna Robinson. The discussion was extensive and insightful, covering the terminology used when talking about victims and how victims want their experiences validated and to be informed about how long the criminal justice process may take. Audience members also fed into discussion around the use of victim personal statements.

The Independent Sentencing Review

The Rt Hon David Gauke, Chairman of the Independent Sentencing Review and former Justice Secretary, gave delegates an insight into his perspective on the Review and its priorities. Gauke's opening remarks covered the prison capacity crisis, the government's implementation of the Standard Determinate Sentences measure, the inability to build new prisons fast enough to address the problems, and the potential for further capacity crises in coming years. Gauke flagged the need to set realistic expectations: any recommendations need to be deliverable and consider how best to use resources effectively.

The final report from the Independent Review was published on 22 May 2025.

Research presentation: Research review on the effectiveness of sentencing

Dr Jay Gormley covered his research reviews that were commissioned by the Council and published in 2022 and 2024. The 2022 review focused on the effectiveness of different sentencing options on reducing reoffending, as well as cost effectiveness. The findings suggest that, among the factors that can help reduce reoffending, social relationships and housing are important, and alcohol and drug treatment options can help where an offender has an addiction. The evidence also suggests that some sentencing options are less effective at reducing reoffending, and that these may include short custodial sentences.

The 2024 review covered four perspectives on the effectiveness of sentencing: from victims, offenders, the public, and sentencers. The research found that, for the victim, the sentence imposed may not be the only factor that is important. Victims also want the offender to be held accountable.

Sentence inflation: What are the solutions?

An official from the Office of the Sentencing Council presented data relating to sentence disposals between 1970 and 2015, as well as custodial sentences imposed between 2013 and 2023. He outlined some potential drivers of longer sentences over these periods, including in particular increases to maximum penalties, statutory aggravating factors and other legislative changes, before noting a number of issues to consider in relation to sentence inflation. These included the need for political will to make changes, whether any changes to sentencing guidelines are needed, the impact of murder sentences under Schedule 21 on sentences for other offences, and the fact there are unlikely to be any 'quick fixes.'

The purposes of sentencing

In the final session of the day, Professor Peter Hungerford-Welch from The City Law School posed some questions about the five statutory purposes of sentencing and how they are prioritised. Discussion centred on whether sentencers should state the highest priority purpose of sentencing in their sentencing remarks, and whether there should be more detailed guidance on how to decide priorities. He also asked whether, and to what extent, the public know about – and accept – the five purposes.



The Rt Hon David Gauke presenting at our sentencing seminar

Assessing the resource implications of guidelines

The Council has a statutory duty to produce a resource assessment to accompany each sentencing guideline that estimates the effects of the guideline on the resource requirements of the prison, probation and youth justice services. This assessment enables the Council and our stakeholders to understand better the consequences of the guidelines in terms of impact on correctional resources. The work that goes into resource assessments also results in wider benefits for the Council.

The process involves close scrutiny of current sentencing practice, including consideration of the factors that influence sentences. This analysis provides a 'point of departure' for the Council when we are considering the appropriate sentencing ranges for a guideline.

Where the Council intends a guideline to improve consistency, while causing no change to the overall severity of sentencing, the guideline sentencing ranges will aim to reflect current sentencing practice, as identified from the analysis. Where we intend a guideline to effect changes in the severity of sentencing for an offence, the Council may set sentencing ranges higher or lower than those indicated by current sentencing practice.

We publish resource assessments to accompany our consultations and our definitive guidelines. Alongside our draft guidelines for consultation we also publish a summary of the statistical information that has helped inform their development.

Monitoring the operation and effect of guidelines and drawing conclusions

The real impact of a guideline on sentencing – on sentence outcomes, different groups, and on resources – is assessed through monitoring and evaluation after the guideline has been implemented. To achieve this, we use a range of different approaches and types of analysis. These approaches include bespoke, targeted data collections in courts, where we collect information on a range of factors relevant to the sentencing decision, including harm and culpability factors, aggravating and mitigating factors, guilty plea reductions and sentence outcomes.

Our next data collection is planned for 2026 and, in line with the feedback we received following a collection in 2023, we are hoping to increase the number of responses by reducing the number of offences for which we collect data and reducing the length of the forms sentencers will be asked to complete.

We also conduct qualitative interviews, focus groups and surveys with sentencers, analyse sentencing transcripts and undertake statistical analysis of administrative data. This work is largely conducted in-house but we may commission external contractors to undertake some of the work. For example, in 2023, we commissioned academics at Nottingham Trent University to assess how the overarching guideline on domestic abuse is used in sentencing. A [report on the research](#), its findings and the Council's response, can be found on our website.

Publishing Sentencing Council research

We publish our research, data and statistical outputs on the analysis and research pages of our website. The data from the Crown Court Sentencing Survey (CCSS), which we conducted between 1 October 2010 and 31 March 2015, is published on our website, as well as more recent data collected from courts on theft from a shop or stall, drug offences, bladed article offences, and robbery offences. We will publish data from other such targeted data collections in due course.

More information about the analysis and research we have undertaken to support the development of new guidelines or evaluate existing guidelines is included throughout chapter 1 of this report.

Reporting on sentencing and non-sentencing factors

The Council has a statutory duty to produce sentencing factors and non-sentencing factors reports. These reports can be found on pages 56-64.

Strategic objective 3:

Exploring and considering issues of equality and diversity relevant to our work and taking any necessary action in response within our remit

It is the Council's long-held view that equality and diversity should be fully and properly considered throughout the entire guideline development process. As part of the five-year plan we made in 2021, we set ourselves a strategic objective to: explore and consider issues of equality and diversity relevant to our work and take any necessary action in response within our remit.

We have established a dedicated working group to advise the Council on matters relating to equality and diversity and make sure that the full range of protected characteristics is considered in our work. Members also consider ways in which the Council could engage more effectively with, and take account of the views and perspectives of, representatives of people with protected characteristics, and with offenders and victims.

Understanding the impact of sentencing guidelines

The Council's commitment to ensuring that sentencing guidelines apply fairly across all groups of offenders and do not cause or contribute to any potential disparity of outcome for different demographic groups is reflected throughout the development and evaluation process.

We review any available evidence on disparity in sentencing for each guideline we develop or revise and, if the evidence suggests disparity, we highlight this as part of the consultation process. We place wording in the draft guideline to draw sentencers' attention to the disparities and, when we have examined the data for the offence and reviewed the consultation

responses, the Council will then consider whether similar wording should be retained in the published definitive guideline. We include in all definitive guidelines signposts to important information in the Equal Treatment Bench Book, which is compiled by the Judicial College, and remind sentencers of the need to apply guidelines fairly across all groups of offenders.

To enable the Council to explore fully the potential impact of sentencing guidelines on different demographic groups and groups with protected characteristics, we collect and analyse data, where available, and undertake in-depth analytical work. We now routinely publish sentencing breakdowns by age, sex and ethnicity alongside definitive guidelines and draft guidelines for consultation and are also exploring whether we can link to other MoJ data to facilitate more analysis in this area. As part of our research interviews, we also ask sentencers whether they think the sentencing of any groups may be particularly impacted by the draft guideline under discussion.

Learning from consultees' insight and experience

The potential for disparities in sentencing to arise from aspects of sentencing guidelines may not be obvious. Our consultation documents seek views from as wide an audience as possible on whether such potential exists, specifically asking consultees to consider whether there are:

- any aspects of the draft guideline that they feel may cause or increase disparity in sentencing
- any existing disparities in sentencing of the offences covered in the guideline that they are aware of, which the draft guideline could and should address, and/or
- any other matters relating to equality and diversity that they consider the Council should be aware of and/or that we could and should address in the guideline

Guarding against potential causes of disparity

The Council made a commitment, when agreeing our five strategic objectives in 2021, to examine whether there is any potential for our work, or the way in which we carry it out, inadvertently to cause disparity in sentencing across demographic groups.

In autumn 2021, we commissioned the University of Hertfordshire to look at equality and diversity in the work of the Council. The aims of the research were to identify and analyse any such potential and to recommend actions we might take to guard against it. A [report on the research](#), its findings and the Council's response, are available on our website.

Following on from this work, the Council's analysis and research team undertook a review to explore some of the recommendations, specifically those relating to aggravating and mitigating factors and their expanded explanations. [This review](#), which we outlined in last year's annual report, led to the Council making amendments to a number of mitigating factors and their associated expanded explanations and introducing three new mitigating factors, all of which came into effect on 1 April 2024.

We continue to review whether the data are available to allow us to undertake more work in this area.

“Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment are serious offences. They are personal in nature, can leave victims feeling distressed and violated, and are often committed in cases involving domestic abuse.

“The new guidelines from the Sentencing Council will enable the courts to take a consistent approach to sentencing these offences and help them pass sentences that recognise the full extent of the devastating impact these crimes can have on victims’ lives.”

Mrs Justice Juliet May on the launch of the sentencing guidelines for blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment offences, 12 February 2025

Strategic objective 4:

Considering and collating evidence on effectiveness of sentencing and seeking to enhance the ways in which we raise awareness of the relevant issues

The Council's duty in relation to cost and effectiveness appears in two sections of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Section 120 states that the Council should have regard to the cost of different sentences and their relative effectiveness in preventing reoffending when preparing guidelines. Section 129 states that the Council may also promote awareness of these issues.

Prior to 2022 the approach taken to discharging this duty involved the consideration by Council members of an annual internal digest and review of current research and evidence of effectiveness. This supplemented Council members' significant existing expertise and experience in sentencing matters and was brought to bear in Council discussions when considering the development of guidelines.

When publishing our strategic objectives in November 2021, the Council responded to the views of respondents to our 10th anniversary consultation that the annual digest should be publicly available. We agreed to publish a review every two years that would outline the latest research evidence, allow the Council to be more transparent about the evidence we consider and help us promote knowledge and understanding of effectiveness among sentencers.

To meet this commitment, in September 2022, we published a literature review, **The effectiveness of sentencing options on reoffending**, written by a team of academics led by Dr Jay Gormley. The review considers in particular evidence relating to reoffending, reflecting the Council's statutory duty to have regard to the effectiveness of sentences in preventing reoffending. It also considers evidence on related areas such as the impact of sentencing on long-term desistance from offending, on deterrence, and on the cost-effectiveness of different sentences.

In line with the commitment to publish a review every two years, we published a follow up to the 2022 literature review in September 2024. This review, also authored by Dr Jay Gormley, **Reconceptualising the effectiveness of sentencing: four perspectives**, built on the 2022 review and brought together the evidence on the effectiveness of sentencing from the perspectives of offenders, the general public, victims and sentencers. The review covered research related to the groups' differing perspectives of sentencing effectiveness, exploring factors such as deterrence, punishment, knowledge and understanding of sentencing and the role of sentencing in the context of procedural justice.

Strategic objective 5:

Working to strengthen confidence in sentencing by improving public knowledge and understanding of sentencing

The Sentencing Council has a statutory duty to have regard to the need to promote public confidence in the criminal justice system when developing sentencing guidelines and monitoring their impact. The Council has interpreted this duty more widely and we have set ourselves a specific objective to take direct steps to improve public confidence in sentencing.

Understanding public attitudes

To meet our statutory duty and our strategic objective to improve public confidence, the Council must have a clear and detailed picture of current attitudes to sentencing among the public.

On 24 September 2024 we published a research review looking at the effectiveness of sentencing. As set out in chapter 4 (page 44), the review uses the perspectives of four key groups as a means to consider a wider range of issues relevant to effectiveness of sentencing. As well as considering sentencers' perspectives, the review looks at those of offenders (specifically with regard to deterrence), victims and the public.

Reconceptualising the effectiveness of sentencing options: four perspectives concludes that what makes a sentence effective from these perspectives is complex. While sentences themselves matter, it is also vital that, as far as possible, all feel that the harm done to victims has been recognised, the offender has been held to account and victims and society have been listened to.

Making sentencing more accessible and easy to understand

Research indicates that being exposed to, and feeling informed about, the criminal justice system and sentencing helps people have more confidence in the effectiveness and fairness of both. The Council aims to help the public understand the principles and processes of sentencing by making them more transparent and accessible.

Using the media

We publicise the Council's work via the mainstream and specialist media. Our aim is to make sure that sentencers and criminal justice practitioners are aware of what work the Council is undertaking and are kept informed about the publication of new guidelines and when they come into effect. We also use the media to make sure that practitioners and stakeholders with an interest in specialist topic areas are aware of our consultations so that they are able to respond and share their knowledge and expertise with the Council.

Achieving media coverage for the publication of new guidelines or consultations also provides us with opportunities to inform the wider public about how sentencing works and the role played by the Council and the guidelines in enabling the courts to take a consistent, fair and transparent approach to sentencing.

The definitive guidelines and consultations published over the period of this annual report were supported by

a programme of communication activities targeting the media, including national and regional print, online and broadcast channels, relevant specialist titles and criminal justice publications.

The work of the Council remained of significant interest to the media. Over the course of the year, we achieved coverage across a wide range of print and online outlets, including The Times (226 mentions), The Telegraph (189 mentions), The Guardian (138 mentions) and the Daily Mail (115 mentions). We also achieved coverage in the Mirror, Sun, Independent and Express, as well as leading regional titles such as the The Yorkshire Post, The Northern Echo, Western Mail, Birmingham Mail and Newcastle Evening Chronicle.

The Council's activities were also reported in Law Society Gazette, Solicitors' Journal, New Law Journal, Police Professional, Police Oracle and a range of subject-specific publications.

The coverage we achieved throughout the year for individual guideline and consultation launches is set out in chapter 1 of this report.

Sentencing Council website

For many people, our website [sentencingcouncil.org.uk](https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk) is their first encounter with the Sentencing Council. The primary role of our website is to provide access to sentencing guidelines for criminal justice professionals, but other areas of the site are designed to promote a greater understanding of sentencing among our public and other non-specialist audiences.

Our website explains how sentencing works in accessible, plain language using text and video. It provides information on the purposes of sentencing, the types of sentences available and the decision-making that lies behind sentencing. It gives broad information on some often-sentenced offences and debunks common sentencing myths. The content of the site provides clear, helpful context to the sentencing guidelines to improve the transparency of sentencing and make it more accessible to the public.

The blog pages on our website allow us to publish accessible content to help improve public understanding of how the sentencing decision-making process works and the array of factors that are taken into account.

During the course of the reporting year, we undertook a review of the Council's website to inform the process of identifying a new development team and began work to refresh the website, which we expect to complete in late summer 2025. We are grateful to our current suppliers, Bang Communications Ltd, for the work they have done over a number of years to help us make the online sentencing guidelines and supporting tools a defining feature of life in the criminal courts of England and Wales.

You be the Judge

On 11 July 2024 the Council launched You be the Judge, a new, interactive, sentencing website. Developed in partnership with the Judicial Office, the independent body that supports the judiciary across the courts of England and Wales, You be the Judge is designed to give users an opportunity

to experience the courts in action and engage them in the considerations of sentencing. Users watch six dramatised scenarios, based on real examples, to do with burglary, fraud and assault, and possession of drugs, a knife and a firearm. Having heard the facts of the case and watched the judge or magistrates weigh up the aggravating and mitigating factors, users have an opportunity to decide what they think an appropriate sentence should be, which they can then compare with the actual sentence imposed.

You be the Judge is designed to help people become better informed about how the courts work, understand the way in which judges and magistrates make decisions about sentencing and challenge misconceptions about its leniency and fairness. It is a crucial tool in the Council's work to improve public confidence in sentencing.

There is more on You be the Judge and our July launch event on pages 50-51.

“You be the Judge gives the public a unique opportunity to see for themselves how complex the sentencing process is and how sentencing guidelines help judges and magistrates take a consistent approach. Watching the scenarios, people will be able to see how judges and magistrates balance the seriousness of the offence, the impact on the victim, the circumstances of the offender and the need to protect the public in deciding on a proportionate and appropriate sentence.”

Lord Justice William Davis, Chairman, on the launch of You be the Judge,
11 July 2024

Launching You be the Judge

On 11 July 2024, the Council launched **You be the Judge**, an interactive website that allows users to put themselves in the role of a judge or magistrate to make decisions based on real-life cases and decide what they think the sentence should be. Our Chairman, accompanied by the Lady Chief Justice, launched the website at King's Academy Prospect School in Reading, where Her Honour Judge Khatun Sapnara engaged pupils in what they told us was 'a very enjoyable and informative' discussion about the cases.

The aim of the platform is to help people understand how sentencing works through a series of six shortened, dramatised cases. Users of the website listen to the facts of each case and weigh up the aggravating and mitigating factors before deciding what they think is an appropriate sentence. They can then compare their decision with the one handed down by the judge or magistrates. Each case shows the difficult and complex process judges and magistrates go through to decide a sentence and how they follow sentencing guidelines to take a consistent and transparent approach.

Fraud

In this scenario, Deborah King pleads guilty in magistrates' court to a charge of fraud. King worked as a carer and withdrew £1,500 using a resident's bank card. Viewers are asked to weigh up King's good behaviour, her remorse and her low risk of reoffending against her offence of fraud and the breach of a close and trusting relationship.

Possession with intent to supply class A drug

This scenario follows the case of James Dickens, who pleads guilty in the Crown Court to possession of a controlled drug of class A, which he was attempting to sell at a festival. To determine the final sentence, viewers are asked to identify the aggravating factors, including that the festival goers were children, and the mitigating factors, such as the offender has no previous convictions and is relatively young.

Possession of a bladed article

Taking place in the youth court, this scenario follows Stephen, a 17-year-old who was found to be carrying a knife on the way home from college. This is Stephen's second such offence and viewers are asked to consider whether there are any exceptional circumstances in the case that might justify the court not imposing an otherwise mandatory four-month detention and training order.

Robbery

This Crown Court scenario asks the viewer to consider the case of Mr Adam Khan, who pleads guilty to robbery. Viewers are told that the victim sustained serious injuries and that the defended has previous convictions for carrying weapons, and they must weigh these factors against Mr Khan's young age – he is 23 – and other circumstances of the offence.

Assault on an emergency worker

The defendant in this magistrates' court case assaulted a paramedic by spitting on her as she was carrying out her duties. Viewers know that the defendant, Mr Bracey, has previous convictions, but they must work out what difference it might make that he was drunk at the time and how much more serious it is that the assault was on an emergency worker.

Possession of a firearm

The defendant in this case, Georgia Sheraton, pleads guilty in the Crown Court to possession of a handgun, an offence that carries a minimum sentence of five years in prison. Georgia says she was hiding the gun for her boyfriend but did not know it was a weapon. She is of good character, and it is her first offence. Viewers must consider whether these circumstances are enough to justify the court not imposing the minimum term.



Her Honour Judge Khatun Sapnara at the launch of You be the Judge

Reaching young people

The public confidence research we published in 2019 and 2022 told us that young people between school-leaving age and early 30s have greater confidence in the effectiveness and fairness of the criminal justice system than older people, and most say that hearing about the sentencing guidelines increases their levels of confidence. However, young people are less likely than any other age group to know about the guidelines.

To mitigate this lack of knowledge among the next generation of young adults, the Council has identified young people of school age as a priority audience. Our aim is to equip them with a knowledge and understanding of sentencing that will improve their confidence in the criminal justice system, whether they encounter it as victims, witnesses or defendants, and enable them to become critical readers of the media's reporting of sentencing.

We expect *You be the Judge* to be play a significant role in citizenship and PHSE (personal, health, social and economic) education. The Council also aims to continue to contribute to teaching activities that are run by our partners in the criminal justice system and other organisations who have far greater reach into schools than the Council could achieve alone.

In 2024/25 we continued our relationship with Young Citizens, an education charity that works in primary and secondary schools to help educate, inspire and motivate young people. We contribute content for the charity's national mock bar and magistrates' court trials and

have co-developed two key-stage 3 and 4 teaching packs for their SmartLaw resource: Sentencing Guidelines and Sentencing Myths. These resources support both citizenship and PHSE education and have the potential to reach more than 48,000 children.

Retaining the confidence of guideline users

It is vital that the criminal justice professionals who use sentencing guidelines have confidence in them and the body that produces them, not only to make sure that guidelines are implemented effectively but also because the Council wants those legal professionals to advocate for us with the public. For some members of the public, their first experience of sentencing guidelines will be through a defence lawyer or the Probation Service.

It is important that sentencers are confident not only that the substance of the guidelines is evidence based but also that the mechanisms of delivery are effective and have no adverse impact on their implementation. This year we put in place a series of improvements to the online magistrates' court and Crown Court sentencing guidelines as a result of research we carried out in 2023. The changes we have made include an upgraded search function that performs a 'smart search' and the introduction of drop-down menus to make it easier for users to find relevant guidelines and supplementary information. Our 2023 research explored how sentencers access, navigate and use the guidelines

and whether, and if so how, their experience could be improved. The first strand of the research was carried out by the Office of the Sentencing Council (OSC) and focused on sentencers' views on several areas of the website, including the use of tools such as the calculators we provide to assist magistrates in working out fines and drink-driving related disqualification periods, as well as the offence specific and overarching guidelines. The second strand of research was conducted on our behalf by the Behavioural Insights Team to help us understand how professionals are using and navigating the digital guidelines.



Reading Crown Court

Developing relationships with stakeholders and supporters

To further our work to engage stakeholders and build relationships across the criminal justice system, Council members and officials from the OSC give talks and presentations and deliver webinars covering all aspects of sentencing and the Council's approach to developing and evaluating guidelines.

In November 2024, we attended the Four Corners Conference in Dublin. Hosted by the Judicial Council of Ireland, the conference was the latest in what has become a biennial event for the four sentencing councils of the UK and Ireland. Delegates including our Chairman; Council member Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon; Head of the OSC, Steve Wade; and officials from the OSC, discussed developments in sentencing and sentencing research, as well as confidence in and perceptions of sentencing among the publics of the four nations.

OSC officials have engaged throughout the year with the Council's stakeholders. Officials spoke at a number of magistrate-led events to showcase the Council's work and, in particular, acknowledge the importance to the Council of contributions from across the magistracy to the development, monitoring and evaluation of sentencing guidelines.

On 10 October 2024 we attended a Magistrates' Leadership Executive event in Manchester. On 4 December 2024 we met the South East Regional Magistrates' Leadership Group in London, on 13 January 2025 we met the Midlands

Regional Magistrates' Leadership Group in Birmingham and, on 10 March 2025, we met the South West Regional Magistrates' Leadership Group in Worle.

In March 2025, OSC officials presented at three events with magistrates during the consultation for guidelines covering offences related to hare coursing to outline the Council's proposals. The discussions fed into the Council's consideration of responses to the consultation, which ran between January and April 2025.

On 8 May 2024, we delivered a webinar for members of the Magistrates' Association outlining the changes to guidelines that came into effect on 1 April 2024 following the 2023 miscellaneous amendments consultation.

On 16 April 2024, officials spoke at the Magistrates' Courts Legal Advisers' Conference in Nottingham, giving an outline of the proposed motoring offences guidelines, which were then subject to consultation. The discussion fed into the Justices' Legal Advisers and Court Officers Service submission to the consultation. This was followed on 5 June 2024 by an online presentation to legal advisers as part of their Legal Learning at Work Week, which again focused on the proposed motoring guidelines.

On 12 and 20 March 2025, the lead policy official for the Council's motoring guidelines spoke to teams from Brake and Roadpeace, two organisations who help support the families of victims of road traffic accidents, explaining the sentencing framework in England and Wales and the role played by sentencing guidelines.

The Council welcomes opportunities to host and meet visitors from overseas seeking to learn more about the Sentencing Council and understand how the guidelines are developed and used. These occasions allow us in turn to learn about the criminal justice systems of other nations and discover whether and how sentencing guidelines are used in other jurisdictions.

On 24 April 2024, the Chairman met the New Zealand Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith at the New Zealand High Commission. They discussed sentencing in the two jurisdictions and the role of sentencing guidelines in England and Wales.

In December 2024, Council member Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon took part in a three-day series of seminars in Sierra Leone. As the only judge representing the UK, Amanda spoke to members of the judiciary, lawyers and officials from NGOs and the government about the implementation and use of sentencing guidelines, specifically in relation to murder and other offences that had carried the death penalty in that country before it was abolished. The visit was organised by A4ID: Advocates for International Development as part of its ROLE UK programme that works to strengthen the rule of law in developing countries.



Caernarfon Justice Centre

Sentencing and non-sentencing factors reports

In accordance with section 130 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, the Sentencing Council's annual report must contain a sentencing factors report. This report considers changes in the sentencing practice of courts and their possible effects on the resources required in the prison, probation and youth justice services.

Sentencing guidelines can be a driver of change in sentencing practice. With most new guidelines, the Council aims to increase the consistency of approach to sentencing, while generally maintaining the current level of sentencing. When a guideline is revised following legislation that increases the statutory maximum sentence for an offence, the Council takes that increase into account in deciding any appropriate changes to sentencing ranges and starting points.

Changes in sentencing practice can also occur in the absence of new sentencing guidelines and could be the result of many factors such as Court of Appeal guideline judgments, government legislation and changing attitudes towards different offences.

This report considers only changes in sentencing practice caused by changes in sentencing guidelines. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Council published definitive guidelines for sentencing offences related to:

- Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment
- Aggravated vehicle taking
- Strangulation and suffocation

We also published a revised overarching guideline on the imposition of community and custodial sentences.

Sentencing factors report

Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment

On 12 February 2025, the Council published two new definitive sentencing guidelines; a single combined guideline covering kidnap and false imprisonment contrary to common law, and another separate guideline covering the offence of blackmail under section 21 of the Theft Act 1986. There were previously no guidelines for these offences.

Sentence ranges in the new kidnap and false imprisonment combined guideline are almost entirely custodial. It is expected that offenders who currently receive a sentence of a discharge, fine or community order may instead receive a custodial sentence under the new guideline. However, this would affect only a small proportion of offenders.

It is also possible that, under the new guideline, some custodial sentences that currently fall within the range for suspension may increase to above the two-year threshold, potentially resulting in additional immediate custodial sentences.

Analysis indicated that the kidnap and false imprisonment combined guideline is anticipated to lead to an increase in the average custodial sentence lengths for these offences. Overall, these changes are expected to lead to a total requirement of around 50 additional prison places (around 20 prison places for kidnap and around 30 for false imprisonment).

For blackmail, it is also anticipated that the average custodial sentence length will increase under the new guideline. The guideline is estimated to result in a total requirement of around 10 additional prison places.

Aggravated vehicle taking

On 19 February 2025, the Council published five definitive sentencing guidelines for offenders convicted of a range of aggravated vehicle taking offences under the Theft Act 1968, as well as vehicle registration fraud under section 44 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

It is difficult to estimate the impact of the aggravated vehicle taking and vehicle registration fraud guidelines due to a lack of data available on how current cases would be categorised under the new guidelines. A considerable proportion of cases are sentenced in magistrates' courts where transcripts of sentencing remarks are not available. For the Crown Court, although transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks were available, some included limited information about the offence and for some it was unclear whether the offence was the principal offence sentenced.

However, it is intended that the new guidelines will improve consistency of sentencing for these offences and, where data was available to analyse, we expect overall that the guidelines should not lead to a substantial impact on prison and probation resources.

The evolution of sentencing guidelines

With the publication in February 2025 of new guidelines for aggravated vehicle taking offences, the Council replaced the last of the guidelines produced by our predecessor body, the Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC).

There have been judicially created sentencing guidelines in England and Wales for over 40 years. From the early 1980s the Court of Appeal increasingly laid down guidelines in the form of judgments. The guidance was broad and covered only a small proportion of offences.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created the Sentencing Advisory Panel to draft and consult on proposals for guidelines to be considered by the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal was not obliged to accept the Panel's recommendations, although it did in most cases.

In 2000, a government review of the sentencing framework conducted by John Halliday led to the establishment of the SGC. The Panel continued to draft and consult on guidelines, but the SGC rather than the Court of Appeal took ultimate responsibility for their creation and form. This was the first time that anyone other than a judge had been involved in setting sentencing guidelines.

In 2008 a sentencing commission led by Lord Justice Gage recommended that a single sentencing council take over the functions of both the Panel and the SGC and bring under one roof the research and analysis essential for producing evidence-based guidelines.

The Sentencing Council as we know it today was established by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The first of the Council's guidelines, covering assault and burglary, were issued in 2011, since when we have published guidelines covering more than 300 offences and 10 overarching subjects such as sentencing children, sentencing offenders with a mental disorder and sentencing cases in which domestic abuse is a relevant factor.

Sentencing Council offence specific guidelines introduced a step-by-step approach that provides a structure within which judges and magistrates can exercise their judicial discretion to ensure that the details of each individual case are reflected in the final sentence. This approach is easy for sentencers to apply and for the public, including victims, witnesses and offenders, to follow.

Significantly, where the courts had a statutory obligation to 'have regard' to the SGC guidelines, judges and magistrates **must follow** Sentencing Council guidelines 'unless the Court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so'.

Strangulation and suffocation

In December 2024, the Council published a new definitive sentencing guideline covering the offences of strangulation or suffocation and racially or religiously aggravated strangulation or suffocation under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 29, Serious Crime Act 2015, section 75A. There was previously no guideline for these offences, which came into force on 7 June 2022. While these offences are new, charging and sentencing volumes had been increasing since they came into force, and the Council considered that it would be important to develop a guideline to encourage consistency of sentencing.

Given that all the starting points in the guideline are custodial, the resource assessment suggested that it could be expected that any offenders who might currently receive a non-custodial sentence would instead receive a custodial sentence (immediate or suspended) under the guideline, although this affects a relatively small proportion of offenders.

Furthermore, analysis of transcripts of sentencing remarks estimated that the guideline is likely to result in a slight increase in custodial sentence lengths overall. The analysis suggested that the increase in sentence lengths may be attributed to the seriousness assessment in the new guideline resulting in fewer cases falling into the lowest category of seriousness and more cases falling into the higher culpability categories.

Overall, the resource assessment found that the strangulation and suffocation guideline provided for the most serious offences – those involving high culpability and high harm factors – to be sentenced appropriately, to ensure relativity and proportionality with other assault offence sentences with the same statutory maximum sentence. This is anticipated to increase custodial sentence lengths in some cases, which may result in a total requirement of around 80 additional prison places.

Because these are new offences it is difficult to ascertain whether current trends seen in volumes will continue. If the volume of offenders sentenced to immediate custody were to change, this could affect the estimated impact on prison resources.

Imposition of community and custodial sentences

In March 2025, the Council published a revised version of the overarching guideline on the imposition of community and custodial sentences. This replaced the previous Imposition guideline that was issued on 1 February 2017 and which superseded the SGC guideline *New Sentences: Criminal Justice Act 2003*. The revised guideline sought to provide clarity and guidance on when it is appropriate to suspend a custodial sentence and impose a suspended sentence order, to improve the overall consistency of approach.

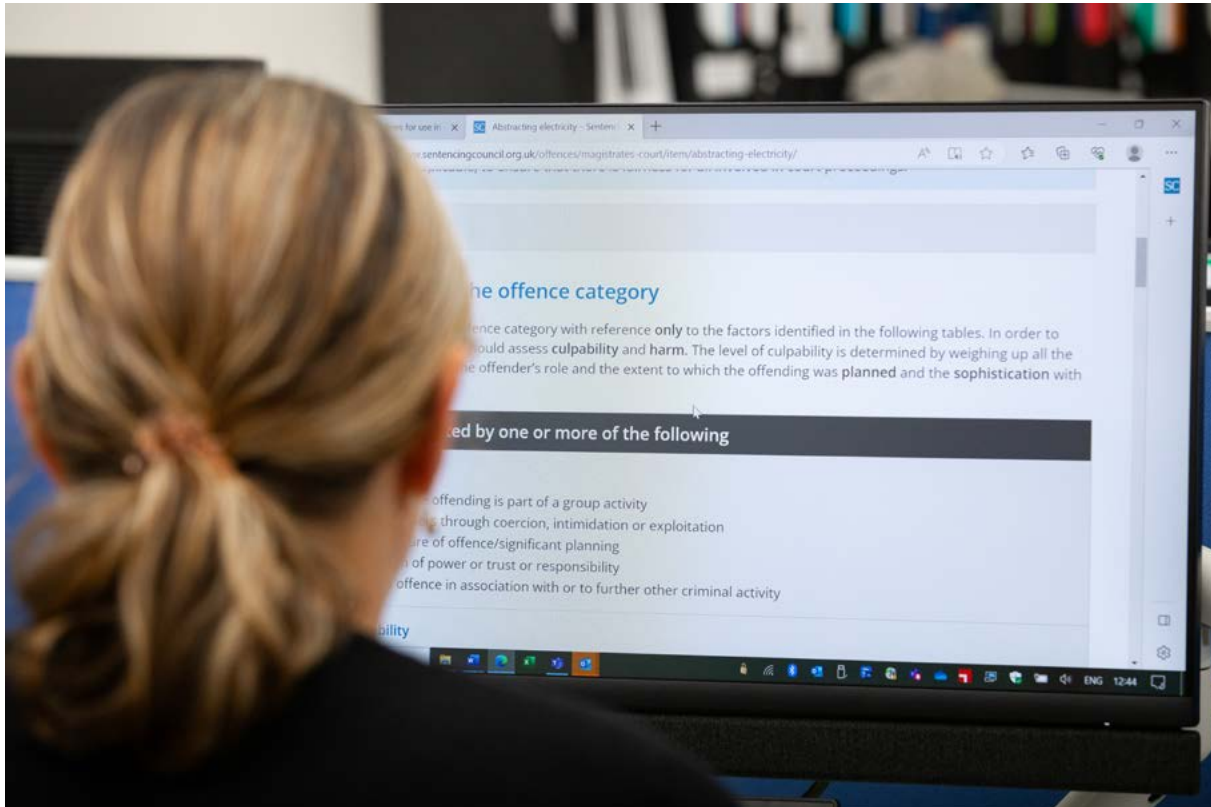
Overall, it was not possible to quantify precisely the impact of the Imposition guideline. However, we intended that, in the vast majority of cases, the revised guideline should not change overall sentencing practice but instead assist sentencers to apply a broader range of principles around the imposition of community and custodial sentences in a consistent way.

Regarding prison resources, the guideline is not expected to have a substantial impact for the majority of offenders. If there were to be an impact, we estimate that the direction of any change would be a decrease in required resources for prisons as a result of sentencers potentially imposing fewer short, immediate custodial sentences.

In terms of probation resource, although it is expected that the guideline would lead to changes in the way that probation resources are required, these changes cannot be quantified. For example, different lengths and volumes of requirements on community orders or suspended sentence orders could result in an increase in the range of lengths or number of requirements.

Changes to the guidance that emphasises the importance of pre-sentence reports (PSRs) may result in increases in requests for them as well as a possible increase in the number of adjournments requested for PSRs. However, the guidance is in accordance with current legislation and aligns with probation internal guidance and targets at the time of this work. Therefore, any increase in demand and impact on probation resources is unlikely to be solely as a result of the revision of the Imposition guideline.

Altogether, these changes may lead to an impact in the way that probation resources are required across probation-led services and these changes would need to be coordinated (for example, between staff in sentence management teams and staff in court teams responsible for PSRs) but may not necessarily lead to an overall increase or decrease in probation resources.



Official from the Office of the Sentencing Council

Non-sentencing factors report

The Council is required under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to prepare a report identifying the quantitative effect that non-sentencing factors are having, or are likely to have, on the resources needed or available to give effect to sentences imposed by courts in England and Wales.

In this report, we define non-sentencing factors and explain their importance to resource requirements in the criminal justice system. We then signpost the most recently published evidence on these factors.

Definition of non-sentencing factors and their significance

The approach taken by the courts to sentencing offenders is a primary driver of requirements for correctional resources in the criminal justice system. We discuss this in our report on sentencing factors (see pages 56-60). However, non-sentencing factors also exert an important influence on requirements for correctional resources.

Non-sentencing factors are factors that do not relate to the sentencing practice of the courts but which may affect the resources required to give effect to sentences. For example, the volume of offenders coming before the courts is a non-sentencing factor: greater sentencing volumes lead to greater

pressure on correctional resources, even if the courts' treatment of individual cases does not change.

Release provisions are another example: changes in the length of time spent in prison for a given custodial sentence have obvious resource consequences. For instance, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced provisions meaning those serving determinate custodial sentences for the most serious offences would serve two-thirds of their sentence in prison before being released automatically. The Act also gave the Secretary of State the power to refer high-risk offenders serving a determinate custodial sentence to the Parole Board to consider whether they can be released.

Statistics on the effect of non-sentencing factors on resource requirements

It is relatively straightforward to analyse the available data on non-sentencing factors. However, it is extremely difficult to identify why changes have occurred and to isolate the effect on resources of any individual change to the system. This is because the criminal justice system is dynamic and its processes are interconnected. Figure 1 (page 65) shows a stylised representation of the flow of offenders through the criminal justice system. It demonstrates the interdependence of the system and how changes to any one aspect will have knock-on effects in many other parts.

“Hare coursing can cause significant disturbance in the countryside and can be the cause of serious concern and distress to those who live in rural, often quite isolated, communities...”

“In developing our guideline, we have drawn on the expertise of police, rural magistrates and others involved in investigating, prosecuting and sentencing hare coursing offences.”

His Honour Judge Simon Drew KC on the launch of the consultation for sentencing guidelines for offences related to hare coursing, 22 January 2025

Volume of sentences and composition of offences coming before the courts

MoJ publishes 'Criminal justice system statistics quarterly' on GOV.UK, which reports on the volume of sentences and the offence types for which offenders are sentenced.

For the most detailed information on sentencing outcomes, follow the link on GOV.UK for Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2024 to use the outcomes by offence tool and open the sentence outcomes tab. The tool provides statistics on the total number of sentences passed and how this has changed through time. The statistics can be broken down by sex, age group, ethnicity, police force area and offence group.

The rate of recall from licence

An offender is recalled to custody by the Secretary of State if they have been released from custody but then breach the conditions of their licence or appear to be at risk of doing so. Because time served in custody is considerably more costly than time spent on licence, recall decisions have a substantial resource cost. Statistics on recall from licence can be found in the MoJ publication, Offender management statistics quarterly via the link on GOV.UK. The tables concerning licence recalls, Table 5.Q.1 to Table 5.Q.13, can be found via the link for 'Prison recalls: October to December 2024'. For example, Table 5.Q.1 contains a summary of the number of licence recalls since April 1999.

Post-sentence supervision

The Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 expanded licence supervision, which means that since 1 February 2015, all offenders who receive a custodial sentence of less than two years are subject to compulsory post-sentence supervision on their release for 12 months. MoJ publishes statistics on the number of offenders under post-sentence supervision in Offender management statistics quarterly. Follow the link for 'Probation: October to December 2024' and see Table 6.6.

The rate at which court orders are breached

If an offender breaches a court order, additional requirements may be made to their order or they may face resentencing that could involve custody. Breaches can therefore have significant resource implications. Statistics on breaches can also be found in Offender management statistics quarterly. Follow the link for 'Probation: October to December 2024' and see Table 6.10 for a breakdown of terminations of court orders by reason.

Patterns of reoffending

MoJ publishes reoffending statistics in Proven reoffending statistics.

The frequency and severity of reoffending is an important driver of changes in requirements for criminal justice resources. Detailed statistics of how reoffending rates are changing through time can be found in the report. Additional statistics can be found in supplementary tables.

Release decisions by the Parole Board

Many offenders are released from prison automatically under release provisions that are set by Parliament and MoJ (with any change to the point at which those provisions apply being in itself a factor that has an effect on the prison population). However, in a minority of cases, which are usually those of very high severity, the Parole Board makes release decisions.

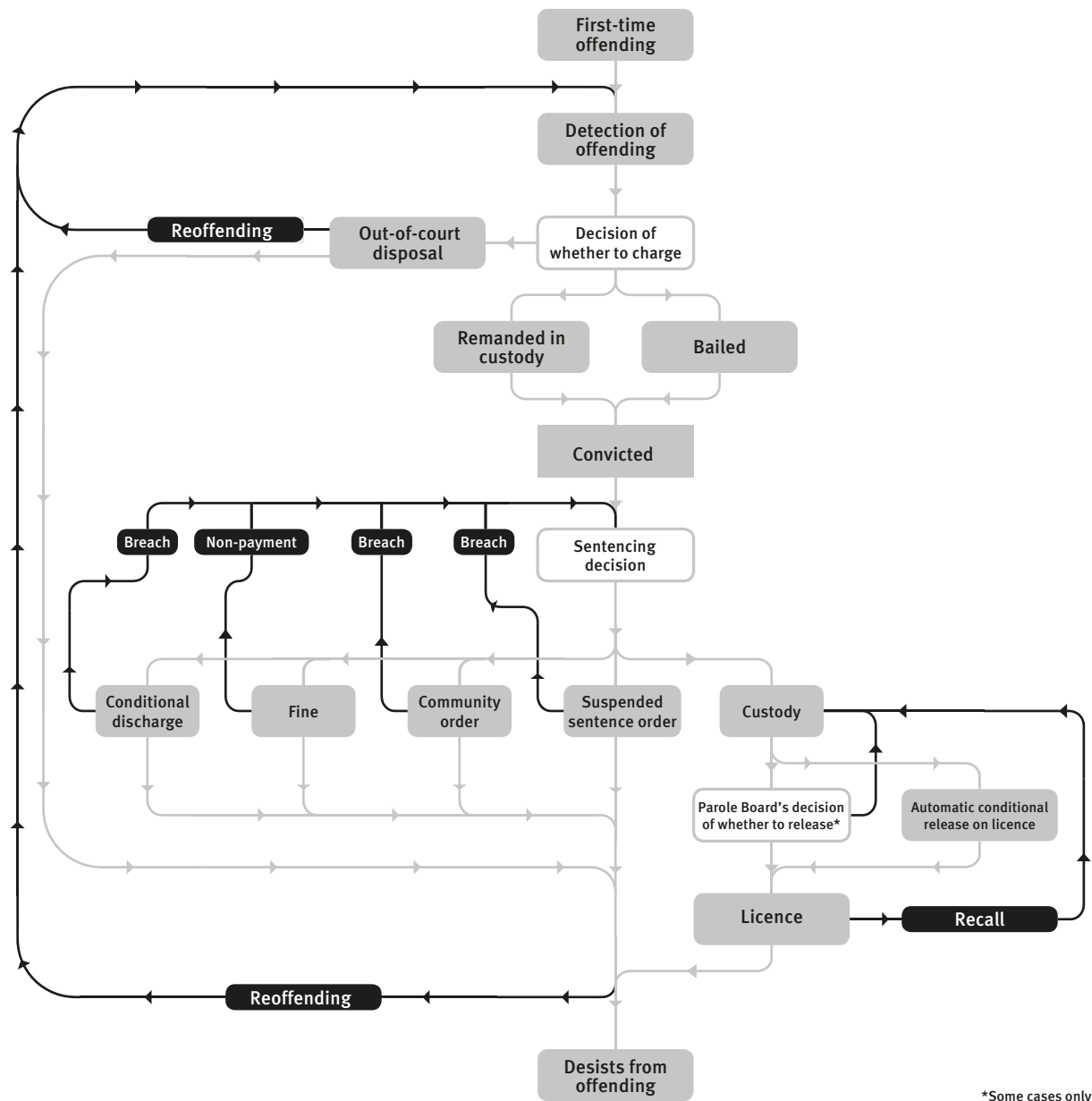
Statistics on release rates for these cases can be found in the annual reports of the **Parole Board for England and Wales**, which are published on GOV.UK.

Remand

Decisions to hold suspected offenders on remand in custody are a significant contributor to the prison population. The remand population can be broken down into the untried population and the convicted but yet to be sentenced population.

Statistics on the number of offenders in prison on remand can be found in MoJ's Offender management statistics quarterly. The prison population tables can be found via the link 'Prison population: 31 March 2025'. For example, Table 1.Q.1 contains data on how the remand population has changed each month over the past year.

Figure 1: Flow of offenders through the criminal justice system



Budget

Financial report

The cost of the Sentencing Council

The Sentencing Council’s resources are made available through MoJ, and the Council is not required to produce its own audited accounts. However, the Council’s expenditure is an integral part of MoJ’s resource account, which is subject to audit. The summary below reflects expenses directly incurred by the Council and is shown on an accrual basis.

	2024/25 (actual) £000s*
Total funding allocation	1,918
Staff costs	1,652
Non-staff costs	168
Total expenditure	1,820

* The total expenditure has been rounded to the nearest £1,000 independently from the constituent parts. Therefore, summing the parts may not equal the rounded total.

Appendix A: About the Sentencing Council

The primary function of the Sentencing Council, as defined in section 120 of the Coroners and Justice Act (CJA) 2009, is to prepare sentencing guidelines, which the courts must follow unless it is contrary to the interests of justice to do so (section 59(1) Sentencing Code).

The Council also fulfils other statutory functions as set out in the CJA 2009.

- Publishing the resource implications in respect of draft guidelines
- Preparing a resource assessment to accompany new guidelines
- Monitoring the operation and effect of our sentencing guidelines, and drawing conclusions
- Consulting when preparing guidelines
- Promoting awareness of sentencing and sentencing practice
- Publishing a sentencing factors report
- Publishing a non-sentencing factors report
- Publishing an annual report

Governance

The Council is an advisory non-departmental public body of MoJ. However, unlike most advisory non-departmental public bodies, our primary role is not to advise government ministers but to provide guidance to sentencers.

The Council is independent of the government and the judiciary with regard to the guidelines we issue to courts, our resource assessments, our publications, how we promote awareness of sentencing and our approach to delivering these duties.

The Council is accountable to Parliament for the delivery of our statutory remit set out in the CJA 2009. Under section 119 of the Act, the Council must make an annual report to the Lord Chancellor on how we have exercised our functions. The Lord Chancellor will lay a copy of the report before Parliament, and the Council will publish the report. Ministers are ultimately accountable to Parliament for the Council's effectiveness and efficiency, for our use of public funds and for protecting our independence. Section 133 of the 2009 Act states that the Lord Chancellor may provide the Council with such assistance as we request in connection with the performance of our functions.

The Council is accountable to the Permanent Secretary at MoJ as Accounting Officer and to ministers for the efficient and proper use of public funds delegated to the Council, in accordance with MoJ systems and with the principles of governance and finance set out in Managing Public Money, and other relevant HM Treasury instructions and guidance. The budget is delegated to the Head of the OSC from the Chief Finance Officer of MoJ. The Head of the OSC is responsible for the management and proper use of the budget.

The Chief Operating Officer of MoJ is accountable for ensuring that there are effective arrangements for oversight of the Council in our statutory functions and as one of MoJ's arm's-length bodies.

How the Council operates

The Council is outward-facing, responsive and consultative. We draw on expertise from relevant fields where necessary while ensuring the legal sustainability of our work.

The Council aims to bring clarity in sentencing matters, in a legally and politically complex environment.

The Council aims to foster close working relationships with judicial, governmental and non-governmental organisations and individuals while retaining our independence. These include: MoJ, Attorney General's Office, College of Policing, Council of His Majesty's Circuit Judges, Council of His Majesty's District Judges (Magistrates' Courts), Criminal Procedure Rules Committee, Crown Prosecution Service, Home Office, Judicial Office, Justices' Legal Advisers and Court

Officers Service, Magistrates' Leadership Executive, Magistrates' Association, National Police Chiefs' Council and many academics in related fields.

The Council engages with the public on sentencing, providing information and improving knowledge of, and confidence in, sentencing.

The Council meets usually 10 times a year to discuss current work and agree how that work should be progressed. The minutes of these meetings are published on our website.

The Council has sub-groups to enable detailed work on three key areas of activity.

Analysis and research – to advise and steer the analysis and research strategy, including identifying research priorities, so that it aligns with the Council's statutory commitments and work plan. Chaired by: Dr Elaine Freer.

Confidence and communication – to advise on and steer the work programme for the communication team so that it aligns with the Council's statutory commitments and work plan. Chaired by: Her Honour Judge Rosa Dean (until 6 April 2024).

Governance – to support the Council in responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance, by reviewing the comprehensiveness and reliability of assurances on governance, risk management, the control environment and the integrity of financial statements. The sub-group comments on and recommends the business plan to Council for approval. Independent member: Elaine Lorimer, Chief Executive, Revenue Scotland. Chaired by: Beverley Thompson OBE.

The sub-groups' roles are mandated by the Council, and all key decisions are escalated to the full membership.

Equality and diversity working group

We have established a working group to advise the Council on matters relating to equality and diversity and make sure that the full range of protected characteristics is considered in our work: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The group also considers ways in which the Council could engage more effectively with, and take account of the views and perspectives of, representatives of people with protected characteristics, and with offenders and victims.

Ad hoc working groups and contributions

Where necessary, the Council sets up working groups to consider particular aspects of the development of a guideline or specific areas of business. We also, where relevant, invite contributions from people who are not members of the Council but who have particular expertise and experience, including lived experience, of relevance to the guidelines.

Public sector equality duty

The Council is committed to meeting our obligations under the **public sector equality duty**. The public sector equality duty is a legal duty that requires public authorities, when considering a new policy or operational proposal, to have due regard to three needs:

- to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the 2010 Act
- to advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and
- to foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In developing guidelines, the Council considers the public sector equality duty in the context of the individual offences. Where there are offences that are aggravated by reasons of being related to a protected characteristic, this will be of particular relevance. Most guidelines include statutory aggravating factors at step two, relating to offences motivated by, or demonstrating hostility based on, protected characteristics. In addition, to assist sentencers in employing the principles of fair treatment and equality, we have placed links in all the guidelines to the Equal Treatment Bench Book published by the Judicial College.

The Council also considers data in relation to offenders sentenced for individual offences, including data on volumes of offenders sentenced grouped by sex, ethnicity and age, and this is published alongside the draft and definitive guidelines.

Our consultations include a consideration of the issues raised by the data and seek views as to whether there are any other equality or diversity implications that the guideline has not considered.

In all our communication, we actively seek to engage diverse audiences and ensure multiple voices and interests are represented, particularly in our consultations.

Relationship with Parliament

The Council has a statutory requirement to consult Parliament, specifically the Justice Committee, which is the House of Commons select committee that examines the expenditure, administration and policy of MoJ and associated public bodies.

The Council informs all organisations and individuals who respond to our consultations that their responses may be shared with the Committee in order to facilitate its work.



Officials from the Office of the Sentencing Council

Office of the Sentencing Council

The Council is supported in our work by the OSC, in particular in:

- preparing draft guidelines for consultation and publication, subject to approval from the Council
- ensuring that the analytical obligations under the Act are met
- providing legal advice to ensure that we exercise the Council's functions in a legally sound manner
- delivering communication activity to support the Council's business and objectives, and
- providing efficient and accurate budget management, with an emphasis on value for money

On 31 March 2025 there were 22 members of staff, including the Head of the OSC (19.8 FTE).

In the 2024 Civil Service People Survey, the OSC recorded a staff engagement index of 80 per cent. This places the Office 19 percentage points ahead of MoJ as a whole and 16 percentage points ahead of other MoJ arm's-length bodies. Asked whether they understood the Sentencing Council's objectives and how their work contributes to those objectives, 97 per cent of OSC staff agreed, placing the Office 10 percentage points ahead of other MoJ arm's-length bodies.

Senior management team

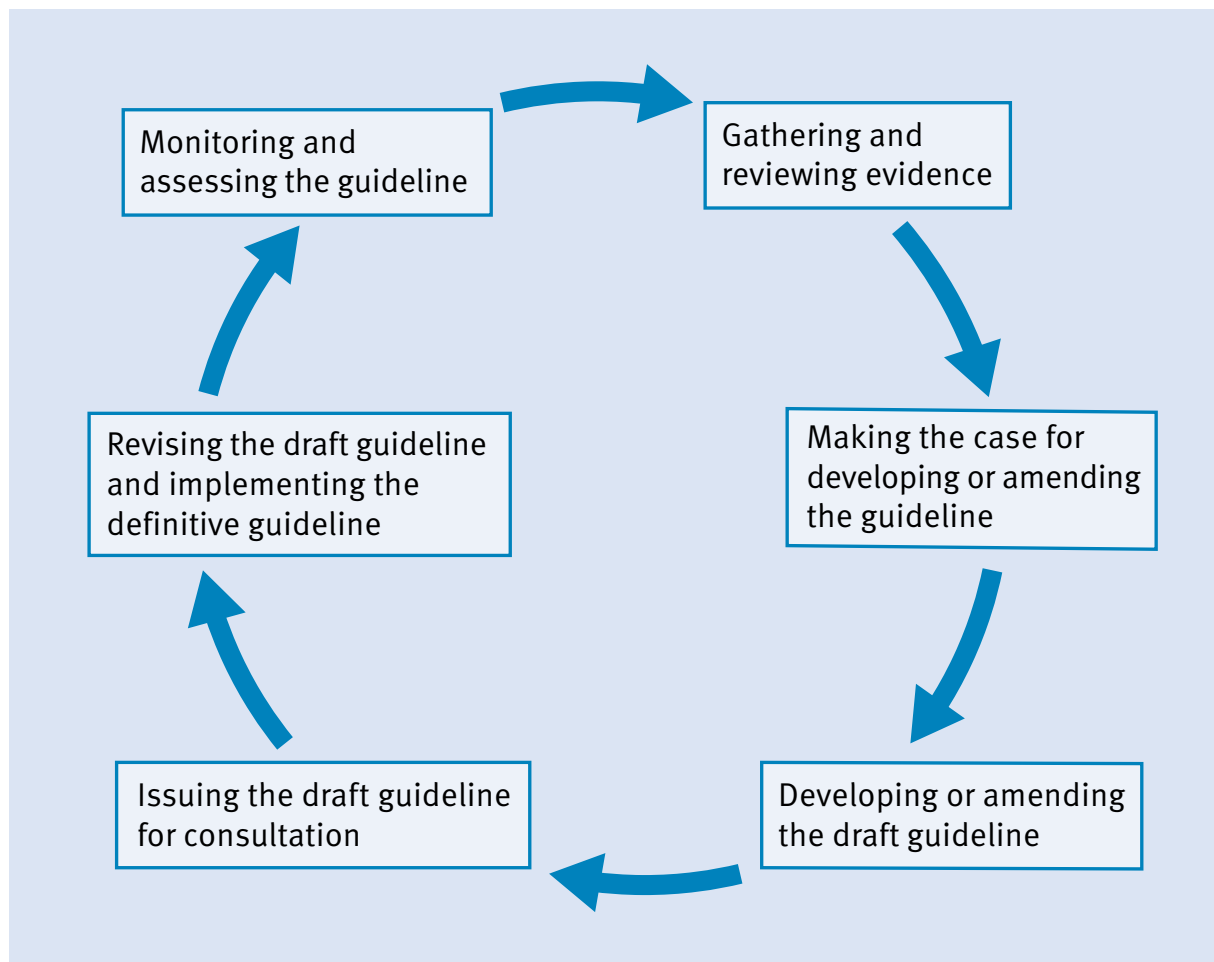
The work of the OSC is overseen by a senior management team comprising the Head of the OSC and senior staff. The role of the team is to:

- monitor and evaluate progress of the Council's workplan, as published in the business plan
- monitor and evaluate budget expenditure and make decisions regarding budget allocation
- undertake regular review of the risk register on behalf of the governance sub-group, with a view to ensuring that all information regarding delivery of the Council's objectives and mitigation of risks is current and updated, and
- consider and make decisions on any other issues relating to the work of the OSC as may be relevant

Guideline development

The Council has adopted a guideline delivery cycle (see figure 2 on page 72) that is based on the policy cycle set out by HM Treasury in the **Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation (2022)** and embeds a culture of continuous improvement within the development process. The process, from first consideration by the Council to publication of a definitive guideline, can extend to 18 months or more. However, if we believe there to be a pressing need, the process can be expedited. During this period, we will examine and discuss in fine detail all factors of the guidelines.

Figure 2



“The purpose of publishing our business plan is to make sure that everyone who has an interest in our work is kept informed of developments. The Council’s priorities can, and do, change throughout the year and from one year to the next.”

Lord Justice William Davis, Chairman, on publication of the Sentencing Council business plan 2024/25, 11 July 2024

Appendix B:

Membership of the Sentencing Council

The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, The Right Honourable the Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill, has the title of President of the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The President is not a member of the Council. In this role she appoints judicial members, with the agreement of the Lord Chancellor. The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice appoints non-judicial members, with the agreement of the Lady Chief Justice.

Membership of the Council at 31 March 2025

Judicial members

Chairman: the Right Honourable Lord Justice William Davis, appointed as Chairman 1 August 2022

In order of current appointment:

- The Honourable Mrs Justice Juliet May, 8 October 2020
- Jo King JP, 8 October 2020
- District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Stephen Leake, 23 May 2022

- The Right Honourable Lord Justice Tim Holroyde, 1 August 2022
- The Honourable Mr Justice Mark Wall, 2 January 2023
- His Honour Judge Simon Drew KC, 12 June 2023
- Her Honour Judge Amanda Rippon, 8 April 2024

Non-judicial members

In order of appointment:

- Beverley Thompson OBE, criminal justice system consultant and former Chief Executive Officer of Northampton Probation Service, 15 June 2018
- Dr Elaine Freer, Fellow and College Teaching Officer in law, Robinson College, University of Cambridge, 1 July 2022
- Richard Wright KC, 1 August 2022
- Johanna Robinson, National Adviser to the Welsh Government on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, 5 October 2023

- Stephen Parkinson, Director of Public Prosecutions, 1 November 2023
- Chief Constable Rob Nixon QPM, 1 December 2023 (following interim appointment from 5 May 2023)

Register of members' interests

On 31 March 2025, the following Council members had a personal or business interest to declare.

Dr Elaine Freer – is a self-employed barrister, a contributing author to Archbold Criminal Pleading, Evidence and Practice, a Deputy District Judge (Civil and Family) and a civilian volunteer at the City of London Police mounted branch.

Jo King JP – has been appointed an Independent Member of the Parole Board. Also, a close family member is a serving member of the Metropolitan Police.

Beverley Thompson OBE – is a trustee of the Butler Trust and is employed as Strategic Account Director at SERCO.



Sentencing Council meeting at the Royal Courts of Justice

Appendix C:

Sentencing guidelines production stages

*Activities conducted during the reporting year.

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Aggravated vehicle taking, vehicle registration fraud and other motoring related matters	Development	Throughout 2023
	*Consultation	February to May 2024
	*Post-consultation	Published 19 February 2025 Came into effect 1 April 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Ancillary orders	*Development	Autumn 2023, throughout 2024
	*Consultation	September to December 2024
	*Post-consultation	Published 25 June 2025 Came into effect 1 July 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Animal cruelty	Development	2021/22
	Consultation	May to August 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 15 May 2023 Came into effect 1 July 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Arson and criminal damage	Development	Throughout 2016/17
	Consultation	March to June 2018
	Post-consultation	Published 3 July 2019 Came into effect 1 October 2019
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Work commenced 2024/25
Assault and attempted murder	Development	Throughout 2018/19 and 2019/20
	Consultation	April to September 2020
	Post-consultation	Published 27 May 2021 Came into effect 1 July 2021
	Evaluation and monitoring	Data collection autumn 2022

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Blackmail, kidnap and false imprisonment	Development	Throughout 2022/23 and 2023/24
	*Consultation	January to April 2024
	*Post-consultation	Published 12 February 2025 Came into effect 1 April 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Bladed articles and offensive weapons	Development	Throughout 2015/16
	Consultation	October 2016 to January 2017
	Post-consultation	Published 1 March 2018 Came into effect 1 June 2018
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Evaluation published 1 August 2024
Breach offences	Development	Throughout 2016/17
	Consultation	October 2016 to January 2017
	Post-consultation	Published 7 June 2018 Came into effect 1 October 2018
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Data collection 2019. Evaluation in progress

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Burglary (revised)	Development	2020/21
	Consultation	June to September 2021
	Post-consultation	Published 19 May 2022 Came into effect 1 July 2022
	Evaluation and monitoring	Data collection autumn 2022
Child cruelty	Development	April to August 2022
	Consultation	4 August to 27 October 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 7 March 2023 Came into effect 1 April 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Children and young people	Development	Throughout 2015/16
	Consultation	May to August 2016
	Post-consultation	Published 7 March 2017 Came into effect 1 June 2017
	Evaluation and monitoring	Published 17 November 2020
Dangerous dogs	Development	Throughout 2014/15
	Consultation	March to June 2015
	Post-consultation	Published 17 March 2016 Came into effect 1 July 2016
	Evaluation and monitoring	Published October 2020

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Domestic abuse, overarching principles	Development	Throughout 2016/17
	Consultation	March to June 2017
	Post-consultation	Published 22 February 2018 Came into effect 24 May 2018
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Research review published 10 December 2024
Drug offences (revised)	Development	Assessment of original guideline and interim guidance published June 2018
	Consultation	January to May 2020
	Post-consultation	Published 27 January 2021 Came into effect 1 April 2021
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Firearms	Development	Throughout 2018/19 and 2019/20
	Consultation	October 2019 to January 2020
	Post-consultation	Published 8 December 2020 Came into effect 1 January 2021
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Firearms importation	Development	2020/21
	Consultation	June to September 2021
	Post-consultation	Published 24 November 2021 Came into effect 1 January 2022
	Evaluation and monitoring	
General guideline	Development	Throughout 2017/18 and 2018/19
	Consultation	June to September 2018
	Post-consultation	Published 24 July 2019 Came into effect 1 October 2019
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Hare coursing	Development	From autumn 2023
	*Consultation	January to April 2024
	*Post-consultation	Considering responses. Publication expected autumn 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Health and safety offences, corporate manslaughter and food safety and hygiene offences	Development	Throughout 2013/14
	Consultation	November 2014 to February 2015
	Post-consultation	Published 3 November 2015 Came into effect 1 February 2016
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Housing offences (unlawful eviction and harassment)	*Development	From late 2023, throughout 2024/25
	Consultation	
	Post-consultation	
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Immigration offences	Development	From January 2023
	*Consultation	March to June 2024
	*Post-consultation	Publication expected summer/autumn 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Imposition of community and custodial sentences (revised)	Development	From July 2022
	Consultation	November 2023 to February 2024
	*Post-consultation	Published 5 March 2025 Effective date to be confirmed
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Intimate images	Development	Scoping early 2024
	Consultation	
	Post-consultation	
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Intimidatory offences	Development	Throughout 2016/17
	Consultation	March to June 2017
	Post-consultation	Published 5 July 2018 Came into effect 1 October 2018
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Evaluation published 28 May 2025
Manslaughter offences	Development	
	Consultation	July to October 2017
	Post-consultation	Published 30 July 2018 Came into effect 1 November 2018
	*Evaluation	Work commenced 2024/25

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Mental disorders, developmental disorders or neurological impairments	Development	Throughout 2018
	Consultation	April to July 2019
	Post-consultation	Published 21 July 2020 Came into effect 1 October 2020
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Work commenced 2024/25
Modern slavery	Development	Throughout 2020/21
	Consultation	October 2020 to January 2021
	Post-consultation	Published 12 August 2021 Came into effect 1 October 2021
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Motoring offences	Development	From 2021 to 2023
	Consultation	July to September 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 15 June 2023 Came into effect 1 July 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Perverting the course of justice and witness intimidation	Development	2021/22
	Consultation	March to June 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 12 July 2023 Came into effect 1 October 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Public order offences	Development	Throughout 2017/18
	Consultation	May to August 2018
	Post-consultation	Published 16 October 2019 Came into effect 1 January 2020
	*Evaluation and monitoring	Work commenced 2024/25
Reduction in sentence for a guilty plea (revised)	Development	Throughout 2015/16
	Consultation	February to May 2016
	Post-consultation	Published 7 March 2017 Came into effect 1 June 2017
	Evaluation and monitoring	Published 17 November 2020

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Sale of knives, etc to persons under 18	Development	2021/22
	Consultation	June to August 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 15 February 2023 Came into effect 1 April 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Sexual offences	Development	2022/21
	Consultation	May to August 2021
	Post-consultation	Published 17 May 2022 Came into effect 31 May and 1 July 2022
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Strangulation and suffocation	Development	From autumn 2023
	Consultation	May to August 2024
	*Post-consultation	Published 17 December 2024 Came into effect 1 January 2025
	Evaluation and monitoring	

Guideline	Production stage	Timing
Terrorism	Development	From April 2019
	Consultation	22 October 2019 to 3 December 2019 and 20 October 2021 to 11 January 2022
	Post-consultation	Published 27 July 2022 Came into effect 1 October 2022
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Totality (revised)	Development	From September 2021
	Consultation	October 2022 to January 2023
	Post-consultation	Published 31 May 2023 Came into effect 1 July 2023
	Evaluation and monitoring	
Unauthorised use of a trade mark	Development	2020
	Consultation	July to September 2020
	Post-consultation	Published 5 August 2021 Came into effect 1 October 2021
	Evaluation and monitoring	



Copies of this report may be downloaded from
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