

What types of sentence can offenders get?

There are four main types of sentence: the toughest, prison, is used when a crime is so serious, or an offender's record is so bad, no other sentence will do.

Offenders will normally spend half their sentence in prison, and the rest on licence in the community. Being on licence means offenders have to obey certain rules, which could include wearing an electronic tag which restricts where they can go. If they don't follow the rules, they can be sent back to prison.

Community sentences both punish, through things such as unpaid work removing graffiti, and try to help people stay out of trouble through things like treatment for drug addiction. This is not a soft option - offenders can be made to do between 40 and 300 hours of demanding work.

Fines are for less severe offences and are the most common type of sentence.

The amount of fine is set by the court after considering the seriousness of the offence and how much money the offender has.

Finally, we have discharges - these are used for the least serious offences for which the experience of being taken to court is thought to be punishment enough. But a discharge can come with conditions that mean the offender must stay out of trouble – if they commit another crime, they can be sentenced for the first offence and the new one.