



Ministry
of Justice

Glossary of terms

Term

Definition

Attorney General's Office The Attorney General's office supports the Attorney General and Solicitor General who give legal advice to the Government. They are also known as Law Officers.

Charge This is the criminal offence or offences alleged against the defendant (see definition of a defendant below) which they will face at court. Once someone has been charged the formal court process will start.

Civil orders In this context, a civil order is a court order that imposes prohibitions or requirements on the defendant to reduce the risk of harm they pose to victims and (in some cases) the general public. Only the police may apply for most orders. Breach of a civil order is a criminal offence, for which the person subjected to the order can be prosecuted.

Consular staff Staff at a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate (which represent the UK in other countries) whose role is to provide advice and assistance to British nationals in difficulty abroad.

Term

Definition

Court of Appeal	The Court of Appeal deals with appeals from other courts or tribunals. The court hears appeals against convictions and sentences given in the Crown Court (see below).
Crime reference number	The reference number provided, by the police, to an individual following the reporting of an offence.
Criminal justice system	A term used to describe the systems and organisations involved in delivering justice. This includes the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, courts, prisons and probation.
Cross-examination	Cross-examination is the questioning of a witness, who has already given their evidence in court, in order to challenge the witness' evidence or credibility.
Crown Court	In England and Wales, the Crown Court is the court which deals with the more serious offences including murder, rape or robbery.

Term	Definition
Crown Prosecution Service	<p>The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales. The CPS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decides which cases should be prosecuted • determines the appropriate charges in more serious or complex cases, and advises the police during the early stages of investigations, and • prepares cases and presents them at court
Defence lawyer	<p>The defence lawyer advises the defendant, They can represent the defendant at court or arrange for an independent barrister to do so.</p>
Defendant	<p>If a suspect has been charged with a crime and told to go to court, they will be called a defendant.</p>
Early evidence kit	<p>These are used to collect time-sensitive DNA evidence from a victim. With the victim's consent, samples are taken a trained officer using a swab, or the officer may ask the victim to take samples from intimate parts of their own body.</p>

Term

Definition

Evidence

Evidence is the material presented and relied upon in court to determine whether or not the defendant is guilty of the offence(s) with which they have been charged, or any other matter which is in dispute between the parties.

Evidence may be in the form of written or video recorded accounts of witnesses, forensic evidence (like DNA, blood), physical evidence (CCTV footage), or medical evidence.

Expenses

Witnesses going to court to give evidence or to give a Victim Personal Statement can claim back costs such as travel, meals or childcare.

Forensic evidence

In the context of sexual offence investigations, forensic evidence is evidence of contact (by any person) with the crime scene. It includes something the suspect has left at the crime scene that could prove the crime, such as fingerprints, fibres of clothing, footwear imprints or DNA.

Term

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Forensic medical examination

An examination by a qualified person to accurately record injuries and collect any DNA samples from the victim. Material collected or recorded may be used as evidence in a police investigation and any prosecution if the victim decides to report a crime.

Guilty

A person who has admitted responsibility at court or been found responsible by magistrates, District Judge or jury, for committing an offence.

Hearing

Where the prosecution, defence, and judge/ magistrate meet in a courtroom to decide issues in respect of the defendant's case. They are usually open to the public.

Term

Definition

Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs)

An ISVA is an adviser who works with victims of sexual offences, irrespective of whether they have reported the offence to the police. They provide specialist tailored support to victims including impartial information about all their options, such as reporting to the police, accessing Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services, and specialist support such as pre-trial therapy and sexual violence counselling. ISVAs also provide information on other services that victims/survivors may require, for example health and social care, housing, or benefits.

Intermediary

The role of an intermediary is to enable communication with parties in police enquiries and court and tribunal proceedings whose ability to participate is diminished due to being under the age of 18, or suffering from a mental or physical disorder or impairment.

Interview

The police carry out interviews with suspects. They may also interview victims and witnesses in order to gain information and accounts about matters under police investigation.

Term

Definition

Investigation

An investigation is conducted by the police to gather evidence in order to decide whether a person should be charged with an offence.

Jury

The jury is made up of 12 members of the public. They listen to the evidence presented to them during trials in the Crown Court. They then decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty of the offence.

Lines of enquiry

During an investigation, the police will make reasonable inquiries to locate and gather material relevant to the case. What is reasonable depends on the nature of the case. If there is dispute as to what is believed to have taken place, the police will follow all reasonable lines of inquiry by, for example, locating further witnesses or recovering other material. The police must pursue all reasonable lines of inquiry whether they point towards or away from the suspect.

Term

Definition

Magistrates' court

All criminal cases start in a magistrates' court. Cases are heard by either a panel of 2 or 3 magistrates or by a district judge. Magistrates are volunteers who hear cases in their community. There is no jury in a magistrates' court. Cases that may be dealt with solely in a magistrates' court include motoring offences, common assault and burglary. More serious cases (such as murder, rape or robbery) are always passed to the Crown Court.

Not guilty

If the defendant pleads not guilty, they are saying that they did not commit an offence. If the defendant is found not guilty following a trial they are acquitted. This means a jury could not be sure that the defendant committed the crime.

Offender

An offender is someone who has committed a crime. If a defendant is found or pleads guilty during a case, they will be called the offender.

Parole Board

The Parole Board is an independent body that carries out risk assessments on prisoners to decide whether they can be safely released into the community.

Term

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Prosecutor

Prosecutors are qualified lawyers employed by the Crown Prosecution Service who charge, review, prepare and present criminal cases in England and Wales. The prosecutor who presents the case at the Crown Court may be an independent barrister instructed in respect of that case by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Public gallery

The Crown Court is usually open to the public. The public gallery is where people may sit quietly and listen at the back of the court. Members of the public can also listen from an agreed location by video link.

Restraining Order

A court order issued by the magistrates' court or Crown Court to prevent an individual from carrying out a particular action, such as approaching or contacting a person. Breach of a restraining order is a criminal offence.

Secretary of State for Justice

The minister who is the head of the Ministry of Justice. The Secretary of State is responsible for the administration of courts, prisons and probation services in England and Wales.

Term

Definition

Sentence

A sentence is the punishment the defendant will receive if they are found guilty or plead guilty. This could include a fine, community sentence or a prison sentence.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

A SARC offers confidential medical and practical support to people who have been raped or sexually assaulted. A SARC provides medical and forensic examinations and health care including emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. They can also put victims in touch with an ISVA or other support services.

Sexual Risk Order

This is a civil order which places restrictions and requirements on someone to protect the public from risk of sexual harm. There is no requirement for the individual to be convicted or cautioned for any offence. Breach of a sexual risk order is a criminal offence.

Specially trained officer

A police officer who responds when a sexual offence is reported. They gather evidence and information for the investigation and provide support to victims.

Term

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Stalking Protection Order

A Stalking Protection Order is a civil order which places restrictions and/or requirements on someone who has carried out acts associated with stalking. The police apply to the magistrates' court for this order. Breach of a stalking protection order is a criminal offence.

Suspect

A person who is suspected of committing a crime but who has not yet been charged.

The Victims' Code

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code) sets out the services and a minimum standard for these services that must be provided to victims of crime.

Third-party reporting

This is when someone other than the victim contacts the police to report a crime. This could be a GP, a friend or family member or a support organisation.

Transcript

A written or printed version of an interview or report made to the police. Transcripts can be used as evidence in court.

Trial

A trial is a formal examination of the facts of a case by a court of law. At a trial people give evidence and a judge, or magistrate or jury decides whether the defendant committed the crime.

Term

Definition

Unduly lenient scheme

A scheme that allows any member of the public to refer to the Attorney General's Office, a sentence a judge gave if they think it is too low. If the Attorney General's Office agrees that the sentence is too short (unduly lenient) they will send the case to the Court of Appeal. The scheme only applies to sentences imposed by the Crown Court for certain serious offences.

Victim Contact Scheme

The Victim Contact Scheme allows victims to receive information about the sentence someone receives and applies if an offender has been sentenced to 12 months or more in prison.

Victim Liaison Officer

A Victim Liaison Officer is part of the Victim Contact Scheme and can keep victims up to date once an offender has been sentenced. They provide information about key stages or events in the offenders' sentence such as their release. They can also ensure that victims' views and concerns are shared with the Parole Board when release is being considered.

Term

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Victim Personal Statement

The Victim Personal Statement gives victims an opportunity to explain how the crime has affected them, physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially or in any other way. If a defendant is found guilty, the court will take the Victim Personal Statement into account, along with all other evidence, when deciding an appropriate sentence.

Victims right to review scheme

This scheme enables victims to seek a review of certain Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or police decisions. The CPS Victims Right to Review Scheme allows victims to seek a review of CPS decisions not to start a prosecution or to stop a prosecution. Under the police Victims Right to Review Scheme, victims have the right to request a review if the police decide not to charge someone.

Witness

A witness is someone who provides evidence in respect of criminal proceedings. This may include the victim, people who saw the offence take place, police officers and forensic scientists.

Term

Definition

Witness Care Officer

A Witness Care Officer is employed by the police as part of a Witness Care Unit. They are a single point of contact to keep victims up to date on their case.

Witness Service

A service which can help victims and other witnesses understand the court process and feel more confident when giving evidence.

Witness statement

A formal written account, taken by the police, which sets out what the witness observed in relation to an alleged offence. This includes what the witness saw and heard.



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