

Sentencing Council meeting:
Paper number:

28 January 2022
**SC(22)JAN06 - Perverting the Course of
Justice and Witness intimidation**

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1 ISSUE

1.1 This is the final meeting to sign off the guidelines ahead of a planned consultation in March. This meeting will look at the proposed draft resource assessment (RA) and ask the Council to confirm it is content with the guidelines ahead of consultation. During the 12 week consultation we will also do some road testing of the guidelines.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 At today's meeting the Council are asked:

- To consider the draft RA
- To sign off the guidelines ahead of consultation

3 CONSIDERATION

Perverting the Course of Justice (PTCJ)- Annex A

3.1 The changes agreed at the meeting in November have been made, and can be seen within **Annex A**. The Council agreed that the top of the range in A1 should increase from six to seven years, with the consultation explaining the reasons for the gap between the top of the range and the maximum sentence. As shown on page 2 of **Annex B**, only two offenders received a sentence greater than seven years in 2020. The Council also agreed to include the wording '*for cases of particular gravity, sentence above the top of the range may be appropriate*', as can be seen on page three. In light of the decision made on the burglary guideline at the last meeting to remove that exact wording from the guideline, the Council are asked to confirm whether this wording should remain or not. It may be that the Council feels it is appropriate to include this wording for this guideline, given the maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Question 1: Does the Council want the wording 'for cases of particular gravity, sentences above the top of the range may be appropriate' to remain or not?

3.2 In considering the guideline for PTCJ ahead of sign off a further aggravating factor is

suggested. This is prompted by the recent case of *R v Ahmed*¹, which concerned a barrister who conducted a prolonged campaign against an ex-partner when the relationship ended acrimoniously. This took the form of forging emails and texts to propret that the victim was harassing her, falsely accused him of rape, which resulted in him being arrested and questioned, and culminated in the offender stabbing herself, claiming the victim had stabbed her. In reading transcripts of cases there was also a similar case of a police officer who framed his partner, also a serving police officer, to make it look as if she was dealing drugs, was part of a drugs crime gang, was tampering with evidence and so on, seemingly because he was jealous of her success at work.

3.3 The fact that both these offenders used their knowledge of the criminal justice system to help them commit the crimes seems to make the offending worse. In addition, there is arguably something about the fact that as police officers/barristers the fall into criminality seems that much greater than for an ordinary citizen. There may not be many of these cases but it still may be appropriate to have an aggravating factor for when these cases arise. Therefore, a new aggravating factor of '*Offender was in a position of responsibility within the criminal justice system (e,g police officer, solicitor)*' is proposed. It may not be as relevant in witness intimidation although conceivably could still arise.

Question 2: Does the Council wish to include a new aggravating factor of 'Offender was in a position of responsibility within the criminal justice system' for PTCJ? Should it also go into witness intimidation?

3.4 There are not many other offence specific aggravating and mitigating factors currently for both guidelines. It may be that there are not any further relevant ones, but at this stage the Council are asked to consider whether there are any others that should be added. The witness intimidation guideline is at **Annex C**.

Question 3: Are there any further aggravating or mitigating factors that should be included for both offences?

3.5 The changes agreed at the last meeting to the witness intimidation guideline have been made and can be seen at **Annex C**, namely the removal of '*unsophisticated nature of conduct*' from low culpability.

Sign off of final guideline for consultation

3.6 The Council are now asked to review both guidelines for the last time prior to the consultation and confirm that it is content to sign them off ahead of the consultation. The

¹ R v Ahmed (Anisah Arif) [2021] EWCA Crim 1786

draft consultation document will be circulated to the Council for comment via email in February.

Question 4: Is the Council content to sign both guidelines off ahead of the consultation?

4 EQUALITIES

4.1 At this stage of guideline development, there are no obvious disparities in sentencing outcome or sentence lengths between offenders of each age, sex and ethnicity. However, this will continued to be monitored during the consultation stage and the decision whether or not to add wording regarding disparities to the published guidelines will be made alongside the development of the definitive guideline as we will have an extra year of data available to check the trends and make a more informed, up-to-date decision.

4.2. The consultation document will include a section on equalities and outline the work we have done so far and will ask respondents questions on the issues to see if there are any other equalities issues not already considered that should be.

5 IMPACT AND RISKS

5.1 Overall, it is anticipated that the new draft guidelines will improve consistency of sentencing for these offences, but not lead to any notable changes in sentencing severity. The full draft resource assessment for these offences can be found at **Annex D**.

5.2 For perverting the course of justice, estimating the impact is made more difficult by the varied nature of the underlying offences and the somewhat limited information in the transcripts available, so it's important to note that these findings should be treated as indicative only. However, using the information available, we anticipate that sentences and sentence lengths using the draft guideline will remain broadly in line with the outcomes given by sentencers prior to the draft guideline. Therefore, we anticipate that there will be limited impact on prison and probation resources.

5.3 For witness intimidation, it is also anticipated that sentencing levels will remain relatively stable under the new draft guideline. There was some variation in the lengths of sentences given in transcript resentencing, but overall, it is anticipated that the length of sentences received by offenders will remain broadly stable. As such, it is anticipated that any impact the guideline has on prison or probation resources would be limited.

5.4 During the consultation road testing will be conducted on the guidelines which will test how sentencers use the draft guidelines which can highlight areas that cause confusion and will generally aid our understanding of how the guidelines will operate in practice.

Question 5: Is the Council content with the draft resource assessment at Annex D?

Annex A

Perverting the Course of Justice

Common law

Triable only on indictment

Maximum: Life imprisonment

Offence range: Community order – 7 years' custody

STEP ONE

Determining the offence category

The court should determine the offence category with reference only to the factors in the table below. In order to determine the category the court should assess **culpability** and **harm**.

The level of **culpability** is determined by weighing up all the factors of the case. **Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.**

CULPABILITY	
Demonstrated by one or more of the following:	
A- High Culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct over a sustained period of time• Sophisticated and/or planned nature of conduct• Underlying offence very serious
B- Medium culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other cases that fall between categories A and C because:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Factors are present in A and C which balance each other out and/or○ The offender's culpability falls between the factors described in A and C
C- Lower culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unplanned and/or limited in scope and duration• Unsophisticated nature of conduct• Underlying offence was not serious• Involved through coercion, intimidation or exploitation• Offender's responsibility substantially reduced by mental disorder or learning disability

HARM	
The level of harm is assessed by weighing up all the factors in the case.	
Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serious consequences for an innocent person(s) as a result of the offence (for example time spent in custody/arrest)• Serious distress caused to innocent party (for example loss of reputation)• Serious impact on administration of justice• Substantial delay caused to the course of justice
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suspicion cast upon an innocent person as a result of the offence• Some distress caused to innocent party• Some impact on administration of justice• Some delay caused to the course of justice
Category 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited effects of the offence

STEP TWO

Starting point and category range

Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions

For cases of particular gravity, sentences above the top of the range may be appropriate

Harm	Culpability		
	A	B	C
Category 1	Starting Point 4 years' custody Category Range 2 - 7 years' custody	Starting Point 2 years' custody Category Range 1 -4 years' custody	Starting Point 1 years' custody Category Range 9 months - 2 years' custody
Category 2	Starting Point 2 years' custody Category Range 1 -4 years' custody	Starting Point 1 years' custody Category Range 9 months - 2 years' custody	Starting Point 9 months' custody Category Range 6 months - 1 years' custody
Category 3	Starting Point 1 years' custody Category Range 9 months - 2 years' custody	Starting Point 9 months' custody Category Range 6 months - 1 years' custody	Starting Point High level community order Category Range Medium level community order - 6 months custody

Below is a **non-exhaustive** list of additional elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether a combination of these or other relevant factors should result in any upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors:

- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- Offence committed whilst on bail

Other aggravating factors:

• Offender was in a position of responsibility within the justice system (e.g police officer, solicitor)

- Offender involves others in the conduct
- Vulnerable victim
- Offence committed in a domestic context
- Commission of offence whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Evidence concealed/destroyed
- Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision or while subject to court order(s)

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- No previous convictions or no relevant/recent convictions
- Remorse
- Good character and/or exemplary conduct
- The offender was in a lesser or subordinate role if acting with others/performed limited role under direction
- Physical disability or serious medical conditions requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
- Mental disorder, learning disability (where not taken into account at step one)
- Age and/or lack of maturity
- Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives

STEP THREE

Consider any factors which indicate a reduction for assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account [section 74 of the Sentencing Code](#) (reduction in sentence for assistance to prosecution) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

STEP FOUR

Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any potential reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with [section 73 of the Sentencing Code](#) and the [Reduction in Sentence for a Guilty Plea](#) guideline.

STEP FIVE

Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the [Totality](#) guideline.

STEP SIX

Compensation and ancillary orders

In all cases, the court should consider whether to make compensation and/or other ancillary orders. Where the offence has resulted in personal injury, loss or damage

the court must give reasons if it decides not to order compensation ([Sentencing Code, s.55](#)).

STEP SEVEN

Reasons

[Section 52 of the Sentencing Code](#) imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

STEP EIGHT

Consideration for time spent on bail

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and [section 52 of the Sentencing Code](#)

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Annex B: Perverting the course of justice and witness intimidation data tables

Perverting the Course of Justice

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, 2010-2020

	Number of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Discharge	27	11	9	6	11	12	5	5	4	4	2
Fine	17	6	2	5	6	7	3	5	1	2	1
Community sentence	176	91	81	46	70	47	25	18	26	14	15
Suspended sentence	446	406	352	360	409	380	341	350	245	246	171
Immediate custody	441	463	420	510	430	447	402	394	338	294	206
Otherwise dealt with	7	7	6	5	3	5	5	16	15	16	9
Total	1,114	984	870	932	929	898	781	788	629	576	404

	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Discharge	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Fine	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Community sentence	16%	9%	9%	5%	8%	5%	3%	2%	4%	2%	4%
Suspended sentence	40%	41%	40%	39%	44%	42%	44%	44%	39%	43%	42%
Immediate custody	40%	47%	48%	55%	46%	50%	51%	50%	54%	51%	51%
Otherwise dealt with	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Final average custodial sentence length (ACSL) for adult offenders sentenced to immediate custody for perverting the course of justice, 2010-2020

ACSL (years) ¹	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Mean	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.2
Median	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.7
Proportion of indeterminates ^{2,3}	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Notes:

1) Excludes life and indeterminate sentences

2) This is calculated as the number of offenders given an indeterminate custodial sentence, out of the number of offenders given a sentence of immediate custody.

3) For 2010-2012, the indeterminate sentence figures include the sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) and Extended Sentences for Public Protection (EPP). These sentences were introduced in 2005 and abolished in 2012.

Final sentence lengths⁴ received by adult offenders sentenced to immediate custody for perverting the course of justice, 2010-2020

	Number of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Less than 1 year	340	359	298	389	345	329	300	270	259	197	140
1 to 2	78	73	88	73	53	75	70	76	54	72	38
2 to 3	12	20	19	29	20	24	20	27	16	17	17
3 to 4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
4 to 5	9	7	11	12	12	13	8	16	6	5	6
5 to 6	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	2	0	0
6 to 7	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2
7 to 8	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
8 to 9	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
9 to 10	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Greater than 10 years	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	1
Indeterminate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	441	463	420	510	430	447	402	394	338	294	206

	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Less than 1 year	77%	78%	71%	76%	80%	74%	75%	69%	77%	67%	68%
1 to 2	18%	16%	21%	14%	12%	17%	17%	19%	16%	24%	18%
2 to 3	3%	4%	5%	6%	5%	5%	5%	7%	5%	6%	8%
3 to 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4 to 5	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	4%	2%	2%	3%
5 to 6	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
6 to 7	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
7 to 8	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
8 to 9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9 to 10	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Greater than 10 years	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Indeterminate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Notes:

- 4) Sentence length intervals do not include the lower bound but do include the upper bound sentence length. For example, the category 'Less than 1 year' includes sentence lengths less than or equal to 1 year, and '1 to 2 years' includes sentence lengths over 1 year and up to and including 2 years.

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by **sex** and sentence outcome, 2020

Sex	Number of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Female	2	1	4	60	33	7	107
Male	0	0	11	111	173	2	297
Not recorded/not known	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sex	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Female	2%	1%	4%	56%	31%	7%	100%
Male	0%	0%	4%	37%	58%	1%	100%
Not recorded/not known	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by **age group** and sentence outcome, 20'20

Age group	Number of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
18 to 20	0	0	1	8	13	1	23
21 to 24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25 to 29	2	0	3	50	78	5	138
30 to 39	0	0	2	43	68	1	114
40 to 49	0	1	4	40	28	1	74
50 to 59	0	0	3	26	15	1	45
60 to 69	0	0	2	4	4	0	10
70 and over	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not recorded/not known	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Age group	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
18 to 20	0%	0%	4%	35%	57%	4%	100%
21 to 24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25 to 29	1%	0%	2%	36%	57%	4%	100%
30 to 39	0%	0%	2%	38%	60%	1%	100%
40 to 49	0%	1%	5%	54%	38%	1%	100%
50 to 59	0%	0%	7%	58%	33%	2%	100%
60 to 69	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%	100%
70 and over	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not recorded/not known	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by **ethnicity** and sentence outcome, 2020

Ethnicity	Number of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Asian	0	0	3	14	14	0	31
Black	0	0	0	8	16	1	25
Mixed	0	0	0	4	9	1	14
Other	0	1	1	0	2	0	4
White	1	0	11	81	111	5	209
Not recorded/not known	1	0	0	64	54	2	121

Ethnicity	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Asian	0%	0%	10%	45%	45%	0%	100%
Black	0%	0%	0%	32%	64%	4%	100%
Mixed	0%	0%	0%	29%	64%	7%	100%
Other	0%	25%	25%	0%	50%	0%	100%
White	0%	0%	5%	39%	53%	2%	100%
Not recorded/not known	1%	0%	0%	53%	45%	2%	100%

Final average custodial sentence lengths (ACSL) received by adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by sex, 2020

Sex	ACSL (years) ⁵	
	Mean	Median
Female	1.1	1.0
Male	1.2	0.7
Not recorded/not known	-	-

Final average custodial sentence lengths (ACSL) received by adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by sex, 2020

Age group	Mean	Median
18 to 20	1.1	0.8
21 to 24		
25 to 29	0.9	0.7
30 to 39	1.1	0.7
40 to 49	1.5	0.9
50 to 59	2.5	0.7
60 to 69	*	*
70 and over	-	-
Not recorded/not known	-	-

Final average custodial sentence lengths (ACSL) received by adult offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice, by sex, 2020

Ethnicity	Mean	Median
Asian	1.0	0.8
Black	1.1	1.0
Mixed	0.6	0.5
Other	*	*
White	1.2	0.7
Not recorded/not known	1.4	0.8

* = ACSL has not been calculated where the number of offenders sentenced to immediate custody is fewer than 5.

- = No offenders were sentenced to immediate custody.

Notes:

5) Excludes life and indeterminate sentences

Witness Intimidation

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for witness intimidation, 2010-2020

	Number of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Discharge	13	7	5	2	4	3	6	4	2	1	0
Fine	4	3	0	2	0	5	3	2	1	1	1
Community sentence	106	73	54	39	46	51	32	22	29	15	13
Suspended sentence	145	140	95	102	115	147	143	128	88	71	46
Immediate custody	256	277	227	223	238	243	266	208	178	142	110
Otherwise dealt with	11	18	8	7	11	8	11	8	7	7	5
Total	535	518	389	375	414	457	461	372	305	237	175

	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Discharge	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Fine	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Community sentence	20%	14%	14%	10%	11%	11%	7%	6%	10%	6%	7%
Suspended sentence	27%	27%	24%	27%	28%	32%	31%	34%	29%	30%	26%
Immediate custody	48%	53%	58%	59%	57%	53%	58%	56%	58%	60%	63%
Otherwise dealt with	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Final average custodial sentence length (ACSL) for adult offenders sentenced to immediate custody for witness intimidation, 2010-2020

ACSL (years) ¹	2010	2011 ⁶	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Mean	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
Median	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Proportion of indeterminates ^{2,3}	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Notes:

6) Excludes 1 case of witness intimidation in 2011, where the data suggested that the sentence was above the statutory maximum for this offence (5 years' custody).

Final sentence lengths⁴ received by adult offenders sentenced to immediate custody for witness intimidation, 2010-2020

	Number of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011 ⁶	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Less than 1 year	200	220	185	185	187	191	198	152	128	102	79
1 to 2	41	48	38	31	45	44	60	48	40	36	28
2 to 3	10	6	2	6	5	8	7	6	7	3	3
3 to 4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4 to 5 years	4	2	2	1	1	0	1	2	3	1	0
Total	256	276	227	223	238	243	266	208	178	142	110

	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced										
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Less than 1 year	78%	80%	81%	83%	79%	79%	74%	73%	72%	72%	72%
1 to 2	16%	17%	17%	14%	19%	18%	23%	23%	22%	25%	25%
2 to 3	4%	2%	1%	3%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	3%
3 to 4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4 to 5	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for witness intimidation, by sex and sentence outcome, 2020

Sex	Number of adult offenders sentenced							Total
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with		
Female	0	0	5	4	6	1	16	
Male	0	1	8	42	103	4	158	
Not recorded/not known	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	

Sex	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Female	0%	0%	31%	25%	38%	6%	100%
Male	0%	1%	5%	27%	65%	3%	100%
Not recorded/not known	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%

Number and proportion of adult offenders sentenced for witness intimidation, by **age group** and sentence outcome, 2020

Age group	Number of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
18 to 20	0	1	4	8	15	0	28
21 to 24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25 to 29	0	0	3	11	28	3	45
30 to 39	0	0	5	17	44	1	67
40 to 49	0	0	1	5	12	0	18
50 to 59	0	0	0	4	7	1	12
60 to 69	0	0	0	1	4	0	5
70 and over	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not recorded/not known	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Age group	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
18 to 20	0%	4%	14%	29%	54%	0%	100%
21 to 24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25 to 29	0%	0%	7%	24%	62%	7%	100%
30 to 39	0%	0%	7%	25%	66%	1%	100%
40 to 49	0%	0%	6%	28%	67%	0%	100%
50 to 59	0%	0%	0%	33%	58%	8%	100%
60 to 69	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%	0%	100%
70 and over	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not recorded/not known	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Ethnicity	Number of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Asian	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
Black	0	0	1	1	3	0	5
Mixed	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	0	1	9	37	77	4	128
Not recorded/not known	0	0	2	7	24	1	34

Ethnicity	Proportion of adult offenders sentenced						
	Absolute and conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with	Total
Asian	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Black	0%	0%	20%	20%	60%	0%	100%
Mixed	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	100%
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	0%	1%	7%	29%	60%	3%	100%
Not recorded/not known	0%	0%	6%	21%	71%	3%	100%

Final average custodial sentence lengths (ACSL) received by adult offenders sentenced for witness intimidation, by sex, age and ethnicity, 2020

Sex	ACSL (years) ⁵	
	Mean	Median
Female	0.6	0.5
Male	0.9	0.8
Not recorded/not known	*	*

Age group	Mean	Median
18 to 20	0.9	0.8
21 to 24	-	-
25 to 29	0.9	0.8
30 to 39	0.8	0.7

40 to 49	0.6	0.6
50 to 59	1.4	1.5
60 to 69	*	*
70 and over	-	-
Not recorded/not known	-	-

Ethnicity	Mean	Median
Asian	0.7	0.5
Black	*	*
Mixed	-	-
Other	-	-
White	0.9	0.8
Not recorded/not known	0.9	0.8

Please note: The figures above include those presented for 2020 include the time period since March 2020 in which restrictions were placed on the criminal justice system due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore possible that these figures may reflect the impact of the pandemic on court processes and prioritisation and the subsequent recovery, rather than a continuation of the longer-term series, so care should be taken when interpreting these figures.

Annex C

Witness Intimidation

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, s.51(1) and s.51(2)

Triable either way

Maximum: 5 years' custody

Offence range: Community Order- 4 years' custody

STEP ONE

Determining the offence category

The court should determine the offence category with reference only to the factors in the table below. In order to determine the category the court should assess **culpability** and **harm**.

The level of **culpability** is determined by weighing up all the factors of the case. **Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.**

CULPABILITY	
Demonstrated by one or more of the following:	
A- High Culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Actual or threat of violence to witnesses and/or their families• Deliberately seeking out witnesses• Breach of bail conditions• Conduct over a sustained period of time• Sophisticated and/or planned nature of conduct
B- Medium culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-violent conduct amounting to a threat• Other cases that fall between categories A and C because:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Factors are present in A and C which balance each other out and/or○ The offender's culpability falls between the factors described in A and C
C- Lower culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unplanned and/or limited in scope and duration• Involved through coercion, intimidation or exploitation• Offender's responsibility substantially reduced by mental disorder or learning disability
HARM	
The level of harm is assessed by weighing up all the factors in the case.	
Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serious impact on administration of justice• Serious distress caused to victim• Contact made at or in vicinity of victim's home
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some impact on administration of justice• Some distress caused to the victim
Category 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited effects of the offence

STEP TWO

Starting point and category range

Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions

Harm	Culpability		
	A	B	C
Category 1	Starting Point 2 years' custody Category Range 1 -4 years' custody	Starting Point 1 years' custody Category Range 9 months-2 years' custody	Starting Point 9 months' custody Category Range 6 months - 1 years' custody
Category 2	Starting Point 1 years' custody Category Range 9 months -2 years' custody	Starting Point 9 months' custody Category Range 6 months - 1 years' custody	Starting Point 6 months custody Category Range High level community order - 9 months' custody
Category 3	Starting Point 9 months' custody Category Range 6 months -1 years' custody	Starting Point 6 months custody Category Range High level community order – 9 months' custody	Starting Point Medium level community order Category Range Low level community order – 6 months custody

Below is a **non-exhaustive** list of additional elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether a combination of these or other relevant factors should result in any upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors:


- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- Offence committed whilst on bail

Other aggravating factors:

- Offender involves others in the conduct
- Use of social media

- Vulnerable victim
- Offence committed in a domestic context
- Commission of offence whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Evidence concealed/destroyed
- Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision or while subject to court order(s)

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
 - Remorse
 - Good character and/or exemplary conduct
 - The offender was in a lesser or subordinate role if acting with others/performed limited role under direction
 - Physical disability or serious medical conditions requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
 - Mental disorder, learning disability (where not taken into account at step one)
 - Age and/or lack of maturity
 - Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
- 

STEP THREE

Consider any factors which indicate a reduction for assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account [section 74 of the Sentencing Code](#) (reduction in sentence for assistance to prosecution) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

STEP FOUR

Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any potential reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with [section 73 of the Sentencing Code](#) and the [Reduction in Sentence for a Guilty Plea](#) guideline.

STEP FIVE

Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the [Totality](#) guideline.

STEP SIX

Compensation and ancillary orders

In all cases, the court should consider whether to make compensation and/or other ancillary orders. Where the offence has resulted in personal injury, loss or damage the court must give reasons if it decides not to order compensation ([Sentencing Code, s.55](#)).

STEP SEVEN

Reasons

[Section 52 of the Sentencing Code](#) imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

STEP EIGHT

Consideration for time spent on bail

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and [section 52 of the Sentencing Code](#)

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Consultation Stage Resource Assessment

Perverting the Course of Justice and Witness Intimidation

Introduction

This document fulfils the Council's statutory duty to produce a resource assessment which considers the likely effect of its guidelines on the resources required for the provision of prison places, probation and youth justice services.¹

Rationale and objectives for new guideline

No current guideline exists for offences relating to perverting the course of justice, a common law offence. The Council is consulting on a new sentencing guideline for these offences, for use in all courts in England and Wales.

In May 2008, the Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC) published the Magistrates' Court Sentencing Guidelines (MCSG), covering most of the offences regularly going before magistrates' courts. This included the offence of witness intimidation under section 51(1) and section 51(2) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The MCSG only apply to sentences passed at magistrates' courts, and so there are no existing guidelines for this offence for use in the Crown Court. The Council is consulting on a new sentencing guideline for this offence, for use at all courts.

The Council's aim in developing the new and revised guidelines is to provide sentencers with a clear approach to sentencing these offences that will ensure that sentences are proportionate to the offence committed and in relation to other offences. It should also promote a consistent approach to sentencing.

Scope

As stipulated by section 127 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, this assessment considers the resource impact of the guideline on the prison service, probation service and youth justice services. Any resource impacts which may fall elsewhere are therefore not included in this assessment.

This resource assessment covers the new and revised guidelines for the following offences:

- Perverting the course of justice contrary to Common Law.

¹ Coroners and Justice Act 2009 section 127: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/section/127

- Intimidating a witness contrary to sections 51(1) and 51(2) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

These guidelines apply to sentencing adults only; they will not directly apply to the sentencing of children and young people.

Current sentencing practice

To ensure that the objectives of the guidelines are realised, and to understand better the potential resource impacts of the guidelines, the Council has carried out analytical and research work in support of them.

The intention is that the new and revised guidelines will encourage consistency of sentencing, especially where no guideline currently exists to better reflect current case law.

Knowledge of recent sentencing was required to understand how the new guideline may impact sentences. Sources of evidence have included the analysis of transcripts of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks for offenders sentenced for perverting the course of justice and witness intimidation, as well as sentencing data from the Court Proceedings Database.^{2,3} Knowledge of the sentences and factors used in previous cases, in conjunction with Council members' experience of sentencing, has helped to inform the development of the guidelines.

During the consultation stage, we intend to conduct research with sentencers, to explore whether the draft guidelines will work as anticipated. This research should also provide some further understanding of the potential impact of the guidelines on sentencing practice, and the subsequent effect on prison and probation resources.

Detailed sentencing statistics for the offences covered by the draft guideline have been published on the Sentencing Council website at the following link:
<http://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/publications/?type=publications&s=&cat=statistical-bulletin&topic=&year>.

Perverting the course of justice

In 2020, around 400 offenders were sentenced for perverting the course of justice and all of these were sentenced at the Crown Court. Around half of these offenders

² The Court Proceedings Database (CPD), maintained by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), is the data source for these statistics. The data presented in this resource assessment only include cases where the specified offence was the principal offence committed. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences this is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe. Although the offender will receive a sentence for each of the offences that they are convicted of, it is only the sentence for the principal offence that is presented here. The average custodial sentence lengths presented in this resource assessment are average custodial sentence length values for offenders sentenced to determinate, immediate custodial sentences, after any reduction for guilty plea. Further information about this sentencing data can be found in the accompanying statistical bulletin and tables published here: <http://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/publications/?s&cat=statistical-bulletin>.

³ Figures presented for 2020 include the time period since March 2020 in which restrictions were placed on the criminal justice system due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore possible that these figures may reflect the impact of the pandemic on court processes and prioritisation and the subsequent recovery, rather than a continuation of the longer-term series, so care should be taken when interpreting these figures.

(51 per cent) were sentenced to immediate custody and a further 42 per cent were given a suspended sentence order. Community orders accounted for 4 per cent of sentences and 2 per cent were recorded as otherwise dealt with.^{4,5}

Perverting the course of justice is a Common Law offence and, as such, the statutory maximum sentence is life imprisonment. For those receiving immediate custody in 2020, the average (mean) custodial sentence length (ACSL) was 1 year 2 months.

Witness intimidation

In 2020, around 180 offenders were sentenced for intimidating a witness, with most (63 per cent) sentenced to immediate custody. A further 26 per cent received a suspended sentence, 7 per cent received a community order, 1 per cent received a fine and 2 per cent were recorded as otherwise dealt with.^{4,5}

The statutory maximum sentence for witness intimidation is 5 years' custody and in 2020, the ACSL for this offence was 11 months.

Key assumptions

To estimate the resource effect of a new guideline, an assessment is required of how it will affect aggregate sentencing behaviour. This assessment is based on the objectives of the new guideline and draws upon analytical and research work undertaken during guideline development. However, some assumptions must be made, in part because it is not possible precisely to foresee how sentencers' behaviour may be affected across the full range of sentencing scenarios. Any estimates of the impact of the new guideline are therefore subject to a substantial degree of uncertainty.

Historical data on changes in sentencing practice following the publication of guidelines can help inform these assumptions, but since each guideline is different, there is no strong evidence base on which to ground assumptions about behavioural change. In addition, for low volume offences, and those which have only recently been created, there are limited data available. The assumptions thus have to be based on careful analysis of how current sentencing practice corresponds to the guideline ranges presented in the proposed new guideline, and an assessment of the effects of changes to the wording of the guideline where a previous guideline existed.

The resource impact of the draft guidelines is measured in terms of the changes in sentencing practice that are expected to occur as a result of them. Any future changes in sentencing practice which are unrelated to the publication of the draft guidelines are therefore not included in the estimates.

In developing sentence levels for the new guidelines, existing guidance and data on current sentence levels has been considered. While data exists on the number of offenders and the sentences imposed, assumptions have been made about how

⁴ The category 'Otherwise dealt with' covers miscellaneous disposals. Please note that due to a data issue currently under investigation, there are a number of cases which are incorrectly categorised in the Court Proceedings Database (CPD) as 'Otherwise dealt with'. Therefore, these volumes and proportions should be treated with caution.

⁵ Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

current cases would be categorised across the levels of culpability and harm proposed in the draft guidelines using relevant transcripts, due to a lack of data available regarding the seriousness of current cases. As a consequence, it is difficult to ascertain how sentence levels may change under the draft guideline.

It therefore remains difficult to estimate with any precision the impact the guidelines may have on prison and probation resources. To support the development of the new guidelines, and to mitigate the risk of the changes having an unintended impact, research will be undertaken with sentencers during the consultation period, utilising different scenarios. Along with consultation responses, this should hopefully provide more information on which to base the final resource assessment accompanying the definitive guidelines.

Resource impacts

This section should be read in conjunction with the draft guideline available at: <http://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/consultations/>.

Overall impacts

The expected impact of each guideline is provided in detail below.

For both perverting the course of justice and witness intimidation offences, it is difficult to estimate the impact of the draft guidelines. However, it is anticipated that the new guidelines will improve consistency of sentencing for these offences, but not lead to any notable changes in sentencing severity.

Perverting the course of justice

There is currently no guideline for perverting the course of justice and the proposed guideline has three levels of culpability and three levels of harm. This leads to nine offence categories with sentences ranging from a community order to seven years' custody. The Council's intention with the new guideline is not to change sentencing practice and, as such, sentencing ranges have been set with current sentencing practice in mind.

Perverting the course of justice is an indictable only offence and as such all offenders are sentenced at the Crown Court. Analysis of a sample of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks⁶ has been undertaken to understand the possible effects of the guideline on sentencing practice. However, it should be noted that these types of cases vary as there are a number of different underlying offences for which an offender could be sentenced for perverting the course of justice. The sample of transcripts analysed covers a range of these underlying offences and as such offers some insight into the circumstances of the cases and the reasoning behind the sentence given. However, it is not possible to obtain information on all relevant underlying offences and for those cases for which we do have transcripts, they do not always provide all the information needed to accurately assess the seriousness and

⁶ A total of 27 transcripts of Crown Court sentencing remarks for perverting the course of justice from 2015, 2016 and 2017 were analysed to assess the impact this guideline may have on prison and probation services.

nature of the offence, as this can often vary from case to case. Therefore, findings presented in the resource assessment should be treated as indicative only.

Case law suggests that offences of perverting the course of justice often warrant a custodial sentence but that these do not always need to be long custodial sentences.⁷ Only one sentence range in the guideline has a non-custodial sentence outcome (category C3) and the analysis suggests that very few cases would fall into this category (none of the transcripts in the sample analysed). This is in line with current sentencing practice that shows that fewer than 10 per cent of offenders received a non-custodial sentence in 2020.

The analysis also suggested that sentences using the draft guideline are broadly in line with the outcomes given by sentencers prior to the guideline. It suggested that the sentence types would remain similar under the new guideline; for example, offenders currently receiving a suspended sentence order would continue to do so, as would offenders currently receiving a sentence of immediate custody. The analysis did suggest that the small number of offenders currently receiving a non-custodial sentence (fines or community orders) may receive a short custodial sentence instead, under the new guideline.⁸ However, current sentencing practice indicates that non-custodial sentences account for fewer than five per cent of sentences each year and so these would likely be eligible for suspension.⁹ Therefore, it is anticipated that there will be limited impact on prison and probation resources.

The analysis further suggested that the sentence lengths for immediate custody given for these offences would remain broadly similar under the new draft guideline and that there would be limited, if any, need for additional prison places. However, further research will be conducted during the consultation stage to estimate the potential resource impact of the guideline and to understand how the guideline will be applied in practice.

Witness intimidation

The existing MCSG guideline for witness intimidation contains three categories of seriousness reflecting the 'nature of activity'. The new draft guideline adopts the Sentencing Council's standard stepped approach and applies to all courts. It is based on three levels of harm and three levels of culpability. The sentencing ranges have been set with current sentencing practice in mind, with a sentencing table ranging from a community order to four years' custody.

Most offenders sentenced for offences of witness intimidation are sentenced at the Crown Court (73 per cent in 2020) and analysis of a sample of Crown Court judges' sentencing remarks¹⁰ has been undertaken to understand the possible effects of the guideline on sentencing practice. As with perverting the course of justice, it is

⁷ *Abdulwahab* [2018] EWCA Crim 1399.

⁸ Very few transcripts were analysed for those sentenced to fines or community orders, however, all those that were included in the analysis, saw the sentence increased to custodial sentence. Therefore, this estimate provides an indication of the movement of sentences in relation to these cases.

⁹ Sentencers are able to suspend sentences of between 14 days and two years.

¹⁰ A total of 18 transcripts of Crown Court sentencing remarks for witness intimidation from 2015, 2017 and 2020 were analysed to assess the impact this guideline may have on prison and probation services.

anticipated that the sentencing levels will remain relatively stable under the new guideline.

The analysis also suggested that the sentence outcomes for witness intimidation would remain generally the same under the new draft guideline; for example, offenders currently receiving a suspended sentence order would continue to do so. There was some variation in the lengths of sentences given but, overall, it is anticipated that the lengths of sentences received by offenders sentenced to immediate custody will remain broadly stable. As such, it is anticipated that any impact the guideline has on prison or probation resources would be limited. However, further research will be conducted during the consultation stage to estimate the potential resource impact of the guideline and to understand how the guideline would be applied in practice.

Risks

Risk 1: The Council's assessment of current sentencing practice is inaccurate

An important input into developing sentencing guidelines is an assessment of current sentencing practice. The Council uses this assessment as a basis to consider whether current sentencing levels are appropriate or whether any changes should be made. Inaccuracies in the Council's assessment could cause unintended changes in sentencing practice when the new guidelines comes into effect.

This risk is mitigated by information that is gathered by the Council as part of the guideline development and consultation phase. This includes providing case scenarios as part of the consultation exercise which are intended to test whether the guidelines have the intended effect and inviting views on the guidelines. However, there are limitations on the number of factual scenarios which can be explored, so the risk cannot be fully eliminated. Transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks have provided a more detailed picture of current sentencing practice for these offences which has formed a large part of the evidence base on which the resource impacts have been assessed. However, it should be noted that due to the limited information within the transcripts and the case-specific nature of these offences, the findings of the resource assessment should only be interpreted as indicative of any resource impacts.

Risk 2: Sentencers do not interpret the new guidelines as intended

If sentencers do not interpret the guidelines as intended, this could cause a change in the average severity of sentencing, with associated resource effects.

The Council takes a number of precautions in issuing new guidelines to try to ensure that sentencers interpret them as intended. For the new draft guidelines, sentencing ranges have been decided on by considering sentence ranges in the MCSG witness intimidation guideline, in conjunction with sentencing data and Council members' experience of sentencing. Transcripts of sentencing remarks of relevant perverting the course of justice and witness intimidation cases have been studied to gain a greater understanding of current sentencing practice and to ensure that the guidelines are developed with current sentencing practice in mind. Research with sentencers due to be carried out during the consultation period should also enable

issues with implementation to be identified and addressed prior to the publication of the definitive guidelines.

Consultees can also feed back their views of the likely effect of the guidelines, and whether this differs from the effects set out in the consultation stage resource assessment. The Council also uses data from the Ministry of Justice to monitor the effects of its guidelines.

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