



Susan Hall AM
Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
(Sent by email)

21 December 2021

Dear Dominic,

Crown Court Backlog in London

I am writing on behalf of the London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee to raise concerns about the ongoing impact of the significant backlog of Crown Court cases in London.

The Committee welcomes the progress that has been made to tackle the backlog of cases in the Crown Courts in London. As of June 2021, there were 16,021 outstanding cases in London's Crown Courts, which represents a 72 per cent increase compared with March 2020.¹ For sexual offences cases, there were 940 outstanding cases in London's Crown Courts in June 2021, compared with 551 cases in June 2020.² This is an unacceptable and unsustainable situation for London.

The figures make for alarming reading for Londoners, more so because there is a human impact behind each of these cases. The Committee would like to draw to your attention the impact of the backlog on London's complainants and witnesses, and the wider impact on London's communities.

¹ London Assembly, [20 October 2021 Police and Crime Committee meeting](#), 20 October 2021

² Ibid

Impact on complainants and witnesses

On 20 October, the Committee discussed London's Crown Court case backlog with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Metropolitan Police Service (Met). At the meeting, the Met's Assistant Commissioner, Louisa Rolfe OBE, described the Met's concerns about the impact of the backlog on the wider criminal justice system, stating:

*"We are concerned. The proportion of live [Crown Court] cases where there are vulnerable victims or witnesses has also increased, so that is a great concern for us."*³

At the same meeting, the Committee discussed the impact of the backlog on complainants and witnesses, who are regularly required to wait months and – in some cases – years before their case is heard. The Committee is acutely aware that, particularly for rape and sexual offences, the longer it takes for a case to be heard, the more likely it is that complainants and witnesses will withdraw from proceedings.

Impact on the wider community

The Met also shared concerns about the risks of particularly complex cases, such as multi-handed cases involving significant organised crime, collapsing as the length of time for a case to be heard continues to grow. These types of crimes have material and long-lasting impacts on communities in London, and, in this context, the Committee shares the Met's concerns about the wider consequences of the backlog.

Response to date

The Committee recognises that several Nightingale Courts have been established in London, which have supported efforts to respond to the backlog.⁴ However, at present, the Committee is not satisfied that this response is commensurate with the scale of the problem facing London's Crown Courts. Nationally, the Crown Court backlog has grown since the pandemic, whereas in the Magistrates' Court, the number of outstanding cases has decreased.⁵

Moreover, the Nightingale Courts can only support efforts to pick up certain hearings, such as administrative, case management hearings, and hearings involving defendants on bail. This leaves little support for more complex and serious cases, which are more likely to have a significant impact on the complainants and witnesses involved.

Super courtrooms in London

Super courtrooms have been introduced around the country, including in Manchester and Loughborough, to tackle this problem.⁶ Given London is the most populous city in England and Wales, has experienced the biggest increase in the backlog of cases and is a city with a high share of the country's most serious criminal cases, the Committee would like to know whether or not the Government has decided to introduce a super courtroom in London, as well as any reasoning behind this decision.

³ London Assembly, [20 October 2021 Police and Crime Committee meeting](#), 20 October 2021

⁴ HM Courts and Tribunals Service, [Temporary Nightingale courts and extra court capacity](#), 8 November 2021

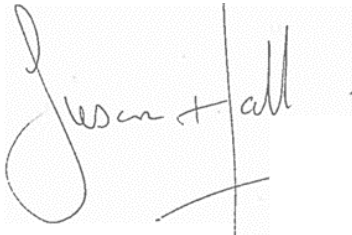
⁵ Ministry of Justice, [Criminal court statistics quarterly: April to June 2021](#), 30 September 2021

⁶ Ministry of Justice and HM Courts and Tribunals Service, Press Release, ['Super courtroom' opens in Loughborough](#), 9 November 2021

The Committee understands that MOPAC has already made representations to the Government about introducing super courtrooms in London. The Committee would urgently ask you to further consider the need for additional courtroom capacity, including super courtrooms, to deal with complex, multi-handed cases, given the acute needs in London.

I would be grateful if you could respond to the Committee's letter by Friday 21 January 2022. Your response should be copied to Janette Roker and Philippa Goffe, the Committee's Senior Policy Advisers (janette.roker@london.gov.uk) (philippa.goffe@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Hall', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Susan Hall AM
Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee

Copied to:

Dame Cressida Dick, Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service
Louisa Rolfe OBE, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service