



**Press release
Thursday 14th June 2018**

For immediate release

PPS NOTES RISE IN FILES INVOLVING A SEXUAL OFFENCE

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has received a rising number of files from police involving a sexual offence.

Statistics published today show a total of 1,512 files relating to sexual offences were sent to prosecutors during the 2017/18 financial year – a notable increase of 23.1% on the year before.

The PPS today published its [Quarterly Statistical Bulletin 2017/18](#), which presents key statistics on the activity of the PPS including files received, caseloads and prosecutorial decisions. It also covers decision types, including reasons for no prosecution, and the outcomes of prosecutions at court.

The statistics relate to the 2017/18 financial year (i.e. 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018) and includes comparisons with the equivalent period of the 2016/17 financial year.

The breakdown of PPS activity also revealed strong conviction rates of 84.8% in the Crown Court and 80.0% in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts.

Director of Public Prosecutions, Stephen Herron, welcomed the publication of such detailed information about the work of the PPS.

“This Bulletin gives the public and stakeholders an important insight into the work of the PPS and the organisation’s crucial role at the heart of the Criminal Justice System,” he said.

“These statistics illustrate clearly what has been another busy year for this organisation – with 42,395 files received and 50,231 decisions issued. I am heartened to note that conviction rates remain high across the Crown, Magistrates’ and Youth Courts in what is an indication of the high quality of decision-making throughout the office.

“I would like to thank all PPS staff who have continued to deliver a high quality prosecution service despite the continuing backdrop of the challenging financial times that face all public sector organisations.”

Key findings for the 2017/18 financial year include:

- The PPS received a total of 42,395 files which was a decrease of 3.5% on the corresponding period of 2016/17 (43,946). This reduction comprised decreases in files involving hybrid (down 4.9%) and summary (down 2.5%) offence types. At 1,868, the number of files received involving indictable offences, generally the more serious offences reported to the PPS, was similar to that of 2016/17 (1,878).
- There was a rise of 23.1% in the number of files received involving a sexual offence, up from 1,228 in 2016/17 to 1,512.
- The majority of files received were within two offence classifications: 32.6% related to ‘motoring offences’ (13,499) and 27.1% related to ‘violence against the person’ offences (11,194).
- As well as files received from the PSNI, 897 files were submitted by government departments and agencies. Of these, 46.2% were received from the Department for Communities and 39.8% from the Driver and Vehicle Agency.
- A total of 50,231 prosecutorial decisions were issued by the PPS. The Test for Prosecution was met for 69.2% of cases which included 30,725 decisions for prosecution and 4,028 for diversion from the courts.
- Of the 15,478 decisions for no prosecution, the vast majority (96.7%) did not pass the evidential test. The remaining 3.3% did not pass the public interest test.

- On average it took 201 calendar days for the issue of indictable prosecution decisions (prosecution in the Crown Court) which is fourteen days more than in 2016/17 (187 days). Summary prosecutions decisions (prosecution in the Magistrates' or Youth Court) required on average 33 days, an increase on the previous period (25 days).
- There were 1,510 defendants dealt with in the Crown Court. This was a decrease of 32.9% on the previous financial year (2,250).¹ The overall conviction rate in the Crown Court was 84.8% compared with 86.4% in 2016/17.
- A total of 28,066 defendants were dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts, a decrease of 0.2% on 2016/17 (28,128). The conviction rate in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts was 80.0%, an increase on 2016/17 (78.9%).

Mr Herron said it was interesting to note the significant increase in the number of files received involving a sexual offence during the 2017/18 year.

“There has been an intense level of public debate around the Criminal Justice System’s handling of serious sexual offences in a period only partly covered by this Statistical Bulletin,” the Director added.

“The PPS welcomes that debate and we also welcome the opportunity to make an active contribution to Sir John Gillen’s independent review which was established in April 2018 to consider a range of issues around how justice is delivered in these challenging cases.

“I would like to assure the public that we are fully committed to prosecuting allegations of serious sexual offending, where there is the evidence to do so, and we continue to urge victims to have the confidence to come forward and report their concerns and experiences to the police.”

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¹ It should be noted that the volume of cases dealt with during 2016/17 was well above normal levels. The withdrawal of defence services by the Bar Council and Law Society, in response to the Legal Aid reforms introduced by the Department of Justice, meant that no new cases were conducted in the Crown Court over the period from May 2015 to February 2016. Following the resolution of the dispute, the backlog of cases then had to be dealt with during the 2016/17 financial year.

Notes to Editor:

*The Criminal Justice Board commissioned an independent review of the arrangements to deliver justice in serious sexual offence cases in April 2018. Sir John Gillen is leading the review supported by an Advisory Panel. The Director of Public Prosecutions sits on the Criminal Justice Board and Acting PPS Senior Assistant Director Marianne O’Kane has been nominated to sit on the Advisory Panel. All media enquiries in relation to this review should be directed to the Department of Justice Press Office on 028 9052 6444.

*For any media queries in relation to the Public Prosecution Service, please contact the PPS Communications on 02890 897187.

Further information

This summary should be read in conjunction with the explanatory notes and user information provided (see pages 18 - 21 of the Statistical Bulletin).

These are 'Official Statistics' as defined in Section 6 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency are seconded to the PPS and are responsible for ensuring that the statistics produced comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The information presented in this bulletin is derived from the Case Management System, the main operational system within the PPS. This is a 'live' system with data being input on a daily basis.

The full bulletin may be viewed or downloaded here: <http://www.ppsni.gov.uk/Quarterly-Statistical-Bulletins-7877.html>. Any member of the public may comment on the report by contacting PPS as follows:

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