

## **Victims' Commissioner responds as CPS rape charges slump to lowest ever despite huge rise in reports.**

My role is to champion victims and I have repeatedly, with others, called for rape and sexual assault cases to be prosecuted well. Again and again the figures get worse to the point where tens of thousands of women and many male victims are being denied the chance of justice. Is this ineptitude or, as seems clear but is denied by CPS leadership, deliberate policy to improve their conviction rate by abandoning thousands of cases of potentially traumatised men and women who look to CPS for support?

Women's groups have rightly warned rape is being decriminalised and thousands of victims present and future will pay the price.

Today's CPS' annual report on crimes of violence against women shows CPS decisions to prosecute rape are the lowest that have ever been recorded.

Over the long term, the report shows a 55 per cent decrease in the number of CPS decisions to charge over the last five years (3,910 in 15/16; 1,758 in 18/19). There was a 17 percent decrease in the number of decisions not to charge (2,271 in 15/16; 1,876 in 18/19).

Last year, CPS charged 1,758 defendants (down from 2,822 in 17/18). This comes when the number of rapes reported to the police is increasing exponentially every year, reaching 58,657 in 18/19 (ONS 2019).

The DPP blames the fall in police referrals. But, since 2014, CPS decisions to prosecute have fallen at almost double the rate than police referrals to CPS (55% and 23%).

The DPP says more work is going into each case, a slightly odd assertion given that all but a few are subsequently abandoned. The fact that it takes longer to make charging decisions helps to explain volume falls but doesn't explain why the proportion of cases charged has collapsed to lowest levels on record. I.e. when investigations are complete and all the work has been done, the simple fact is the CPS charge a much smaller proportion of cases referred to them.

The CPS say there has been an increase in volume and proportion of cases where police haven't responded when they have asked for more work. But even if you exclude this from the equation the charge rate has dropped steeply since 2014. So, none of these assertions, singly or together, explain these abysmal results.

It is now about a year since the famous meeting when a senior policy advisor was reported calling for 'a touch the tiller' to up convictions rates to 65% by cutting out a few hundred harder cases a year. Reference to 'the merits approach' - the correct evidence based decision making process was apparently erased from some CPS documents.

The figures show that in 2015/2016 the conviction rate was (57.9%) and in 2018/19 it was up to 63.4%. But, in 2015/6 the number of prosecutions (3,910 charges) and convictions (2,689) were higher than in 2018/19 so more rapists were taken off the street. Rape is often a serial offence so this policy or failure, whichever it is, is likely to be putting the public at risk.

The CPS reports that in response to the drop in charges last year, the Government announced an end to end review into the prosecution of rape, and I applaud that. This review has to be done in a fully independent and accountable way and victims and their organisations must be involved at every stage. I call on Prime Minister Johnson, who seems to care a great deal about victims of crime to intervene to show that this will happen and will

be given the resource it needs. The Government also has to commit to properly funding counselling and support services for all survivors of sexual violence.