

Criminals Could Dodge Courtroom as Report Urges Radical Justice Reforms

July 9, 2025

— Categories: *Human Rights*



A review commissioned by the UK government has proposed a controversial overhaul of the criminal justice system to reduce the Crown Court backlog. The plan could see offenders in certain cases avoid traditional court proceedings, sparking concerns over justice, accountability, and public safety.

Radical proposals to ease the strain on Britain's overburdened courts may allow some criminals, including thugs, thieves, and drug dealers, to avoid full Crown Court trials. The recommendation, made in a comprehensive review led by former judge Sir Brian Leveson, outlines sweeping changes to help clear a backlog of nearly 77,000 cases, double the pre-pandemic figure.

At the heart of the proposal is a shift away from the automatic right to trial by jury for offences with a maximum sentence of up to two years. Instead, these cases could be handled in new "intermediate courts," overseen by a judge and two magistrates. Other options would include community-based punishments such as unpaid work, fines or drug rehabilitation programmes, depending on the severity of the crime.

Leveson's report also suggests expanding magistrates' sentencing powers from 12 months to two years and increasing the incentive for guilty pleas, raising the current one-third sentence discount to 40%. The goal, according to Leveson, is to streamline the justice process and ensure victims are not kept waiting for years before their case is heard.

While the intent to fix the system is broadly recognised, the recommendations have sparked a fierce debate. Critics argue these changes risk diluting justice and sending the wrong message to offenders. Former Victims' Commissioner Baroness Newlove said the proposals "betray the rights of victims" and allow serious offenders to "walk free without facing proper accountability." Others warn that fast-tracking justice without adequate safeguards could see miscarriages of justice and undermine public confidence.

Supporters, including Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley, argue that urgent reform is needed. He warned that “the entire system is creaking under pressure,” and that court delays risk people taking the law into their own hands if left unresolved.

Despite strong opinions on both sides, the Labour-run Ministry of Justice has yet to confirm whether it will adopt the recommendations. Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood has said a full government response will come later this year. Until then, concerns remain that tinkering with long-standing legal traditions without addressing root causes, such as lack of investment and staffing shortages, may do little more than plaster over a deep wound.