

Justice in arrears: Policy options beyond the court fine



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Executive Summary

Background

In 2024, research carried out by the Centre for Justice Innovation on criminal court fines found that three out of four people who are sentenced in criminal courts are punished with a fine and that 50% of these fines have not been paid 12 months after sentencing. Our research found that the Government is unable to identify how much of this non-payment is due to an inability to pay because of low incomes and poverty; for example, there is no data available to indicate how many people who are fined are in receipt of benefits. Our quantitative analysis (using Citizens Advice client data) strongly suggested, however, that people with criminal court fine debts are twice as likely to report living in social housing and nearly twice as likely to be unemployed than other client groups, strongly indicating that people who struggle to pay fines are often in our most economically vulnerable communities.

Moreover, we found that the safeguards that aim to ensure the impact fines have on people who have committed the same offence but who have different incomes are failing. We found cases where people received fines set without anyone making an accurate assessment of their means. We heard that people found the payment processes confusing and haphazard. Finally, we spoke to a number of people who found that other financial penalties, imposed alongside their court fine, tipped their sentence from one that was a proportionate punishment into one that often pushed them further into debt and destitution. When speaking to magistrates, we consistently heard that they gave fines to people on low incomes, despite being aware that they could not pay, because their hands were tied by the law.

Recommendations for reform

As a follow-up to our research, we have been exploring recommendations for reform. In a companion report, we look at ways of improving the court and payment processes. In this report, we look at more radical policy reforms. In a public opinion survey we commissioned for this report, we found broad support (73%) for the use of alternative punishments when people are unable to pay fines. In this follow-up, we have focused on proposing solutions more likely to result in reduced crime, greater victim satisfaction and less cost to the taxpayer.

1. Increase the use of out of court resolutions

Out of court resolutions (OOCRs) are a range of options used by the police to resolve crime, without going to court. OOCRs are often used for lower-harm crimes, where an individual admits the offence or accepts responsibility and is willing to proceed with a condition/conditions. In 2024, 14 % of all cases were resolved in this way. Evaluations of successful OOCR programmes, such as Durham's *Checkpoint* and the West Midlands' *Alcohol Related Violence Course*, show reductions in reoffending and better outcomes. Recently published polling by Transform Justice strongly suggests victims of crime support their cases being resolved through OOCRs, agreeing that it is a better use of justice system resources than a court prosecution resulting in a fine.

In our public opinion polling, we found public support for the use of OOCRs for lower-harm offences like cannabis possession (53%) and public order offences (45%). Our research also identifies that OOCRs are particularly appropriate for a "revolving door" cohort, who are repeatedly fined for offences, such as shoplifting, that are fuelled by extreme deprivation and homelessness. We also found good, practical examples of this in action. For example, in the West Midlands, an evaluation of the Offender to Rehab programme, which diverts individuals engaging in prolific shoplifting into drug treatment, found that it led to a reduction in shoplifting worth £2.3 million.

In order to increase the use of OOCRs for people who would otherwise end up in court facing a court fine they are unlikely to be able to pay, we recommend a move away from the position whereby the quality and availability of OOCRs is primarily determined by local police priorities and resources. Instead, we recommend that the Government implements national standards on training, data collection and inspections to drive up consistency of OOCR delivery, and that it works with mayors and police and crime commissioners to better fund the interventions available to the police in terms of OOCRs. We also recommend that the Crown Prosecution Service produces guidance for magistrates to ensure that cases that have made it to court, and which are eligible for OOCRs, are considered for roll-back. Finally, we recommend that the National Police Chiefs' Council adds financial exclusion into their Gravity Matrices, which are decision-making tools used by the police to assess the seriousness of an offence and to determine whether an OOCR is appropriate, rather than prosecution.

2. Review and reform fixed penalty notices

Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) are summary fines intended to be an expedient resolution to minor offences, such as littering and speeding. However, our research found the non-payment rate of FPNs is high (50%). Furthermore, this non-payment results in significant numbers of people being prosecuted in court (which FPNs were originally designed to avoid). Our research indicates that this pattern of non-payment resulting in prosecution is particularly prevalent in low-income areas.

However, once the decision has been made to prosecute, there is little quantitative data to tell us what happens next. For example, the Government cannot identify how many court fines are given to (and not paid by) people who have been brought to court for failure to pay their FPN. The interviews we carried out for both our previous research and this second stage suggest the numbers are significant, but we are unable to quantify this. Assuming this cycle of non-payment is fuelling a significant number of criminal court fines, in our view the process is self-defeating, trapping people unable to pay small fines in a spiral of deepening criminalisation, when the original offence might be a minor as discarding a cigarette butt. We recommend that the Government urgently reviews the drivers of FPN non-payment and identifies how this feeds into court prosecutions and sentencing.

Our research found that, similar to the criminal court fine process, the enforcement process for FPNs does not effectively identify and respond to financial difficulty, and communicates poorly with people experiencing debt and mental health issues. The Government should reform the FPN sanction system in line with good debt enforcement practice, such as (i) the use of supportive communication methods (such as texts) rather than relying on letters; (ii) implementing “breathing space” periods before bringing prosecution; and (iii) offering structured payment plans.

3. Enforce rail fare evasion via the civil justice system

Train operating companies, who run the rail services in England, Scotland and Wales, have several options they can pursue in response to passengers travelling without a valid ticket, including recovering the original fare, or an unpaid penalty fare, in the civil courts. However, our research finds that train companies have consistently exercised their right to pursue criminal prosecutions instead. Between 2021–2023, over 35,000 people annually were successfully prosecuted for fare evasion, with the number of prosecutions increasing by 52% between 2019 and 2023.

We recognise the need for train companies to take action when individuals travel without paying the correct fare, to protect lost revenue and uphold the fairness of the system. However, the Office of Road and Rail (ORR)'s recent review found that the system of rail fare evasion: (i) is a “wild west” of revenue protection, where a lack of national coordination and oversight has enabled each train operator to take a different approach; (ii) incentivises companies to pursue criminal charges, incentives made stronger by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) reforms, such as the Single Justice Procedure and the common platform, which have streamlined the court process; (iii) encourages a range of increasingly unfair practices, such as bringing criminal charges against individuals for first-time incidents and

accidental or minor breaches of terms and conditions; (iv) fails to take into account the role that “difficult personal finances”, as described by the ORR, often plays in individuals’ decisions to travel without a valid ticket.

While there should be consequences for those who do not fairly contribute to the service they are using, the impact of a conviction on a person’s criminal record is not proportionate, particularly given that financial sanctions can be imposed via other means, including the civil justice system. We recommend that the Government decriminalises the act of rail fare evasion, and instead develops a national policy framework, and supporting guidance, that sets out a graduated set of actions in response to fare evasion using formal warnings, penalty fare notices and ultimately the pursuit of unpaid penalty fare notices through the civil courts.

4. Decriminalise poverty-related offences

We also looked at offences that often result in a fine that are strongly associated with poverty.

Truancy

In 2024, over 25,000 fines were issued to parents for the truancy of their children. Our review of the evidence found that, contrary to their purpose of deterring truancy, court fines simply serve to punish families, and those on low incomes disproportionately, when what they need is help to overcome the complex challenges they face. There is no evidence that criminalisation reduces school absences. We recommend the offence of truancy contained within the Education Act 1996 is repealed and, instead, the Government explores adoption of the Danish truancy model in which social services lead the response to children who persistently miss school, and can apply non-criminal measures involving the care of the child.

Sex work

While offences criminalising sex work activities are rarely prosecuted (and where they are, they usually result in fines), there is evidence that strongly suggests the threat of prosecution hinders safe working environments for sex workers. Independent polling suggests that over 60% of the public support the decriminalisation of sex work, and we recommend the Government repeal the laws that prohibit soliciting, brothel keeping and kerb crawling (the relevant legislation is spread over several Acts).

Offences associated with homelessness

In 2024, half of the 200 people prosecuted for offences strongly associated with homelessness, such as begging and rough sleeping, received a fine. The Government is repealing the Vagrancy Act 1824 to – in the words of then Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner – end “injustice towards some of the most vulnerable in society, who deserve dignity and support”. However, in the process, the Government is adding powers under the Police and Crime Bill to “recreate the Vagrancy Act 1824 offence of trespassing with intent to commit a criminal offence” and the new Respect Order, both of which we suggest are likely to be used by the police and local authorities against homeless people in particular. While we support the repeal of the Vagrancy Act, we urge Parliament not to re-introduce the harms it causes via the backdoor through the Police and Crime Bill.

Conclusion

Our estimates suggest that, in implementing these reforms, we could take nearly 60,000 cases out of the criminal courts every year while reducing the negative impacts of court fines on people on low incomes. Our research suggests that there is significant public support for many of these measures, including the greater use of OOCs by victims themselves, and these steps can play a vital role in making the criminal justice system fairer and more effective.

Recommendations

1. Increase the use of out of court resolutions (OOCRs)

- The Government should implement national standards on training, data collection and inspections to achieve a consistent delivery of diversion schemes.
- The Government, mayors and police and crime commissioners should work together to fund greater availability of interventions for use in OOCRs.
- The Crown Prosecution Service should produce guidance for magistrates to ensure that cases that have made it to court, and which are eligible for OOCRs, are considered for roll-back.
- The National Police Chiefs' Council should include financial exclusion in the adult Gravity Matrix.

2. Reform the fixed penalty notice (FPN) system

- The Government should urgently review the drivers of FPN non-payment and identify how they feed into court prosecutions and sentencing.
- The Government should reform the FPN sanction system in line with good debt enforcement practice:
 - Use supportive and modern communication methods (such as text).
 - Write off low-cost FPNs.
 - Implement “breathing space” periods before bringing prosecution.
 - Offer payment plans.

3. Enforce rail fare evasion via the civil justice system

- The Government should decriminalise the act of rail fare evasion.
- The Government, with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), should develop a national policy framework, and supporting guidance, that sets out a graduated set of actions in response to fare evasion using formal warnings, penalty fare notices and ultimately the pursuit of unpaid penalty fare notices through the civil courts.

4. Decriminalise poverty-related offences

- The Government should repeal the offence of truancy contained within the Education Act (1996).
- The Government should explore adoption of the Danish truancy model in which social services lead the response to children who persistently miss school, and can apply non-criminal measures involving the care of the child.
- The Government should repeal the laws that prohibit soliciting, brothel keeping and kerb crawling (the relevant legislation is spread over several Acts).
- While we support the Government's commitment to repeal of the Vagrancy Act, we urge Parliament not to re-introduce the harms it causes via the backdoor through the Police and Crime Bill.

Background

Previous research

In 2024, our research on criminal court fines, [*“Where the hell am I going to get that money from?”*](#), found:

- Three out of four people who are charged in court for a crime will be punished with a fine.
- 50% of court fines have not been paid 12 months after sentencing.
- The Government is unable to identify how much of this non-payment is due to an inability to pay because of low incomes and poverty – for example, there is no data available to indicate how many people who are fined are in receipt of benefits.
- Our quantitative analysis (using Citizens Advice client data) strongly suggested, however, that people with criminal court fine debts are twice as likely to report living in social housing and nearly twice as likely to be unemployed than other client groups, strongly indicating that people who receive fines are often in our most economically vulnerable communities.
- Our interviews found that people who received court fines were often those on low incomes, whereby the requirement to pay such fines pushed them further into debt.
- Our research identified a spectrum of impacts, from an inconvenience to a manageable hardship, and for those on the lowest incomes, the impact was disproportionately severe, pushing them into destitution or unmanageable debt, and taking a severe toll on their mental and physical health.
- We spoke to a number of people who found that other financial penalties, imposed alongside their court fine, often tipped their sentence from one that was a proportionate punishment into one that pushed them further into debt and destitution. We repeatedly heard of cases where magistrates felt compelled to impose fines on people in poverty, despite being aware that they would never be able to pay them back.
- The safeguards that aim to ensure the fine has an equal impact on people of different means are failing. We found cases where people received fines set without anyone having made an accurate assessment of their means. We heard that the payment processes were confusing and haphazard.

Purpose of report

Our next phase of work on court fines has been to develop solutions to these issues. In this report, we look at how we can ensure only the cases that need to come to court do so. In a sister project, we are looking at how we can improve the court process where cases do come to court and are likely to lead to a fine.

This report firstly explores public attitudes to the use of court fines and provides useful insights into the public appetite for change. Secondly, the report looks at four areas of reform, proposing better solutions for cases that currently result in court fines that often go unpaid. They are:

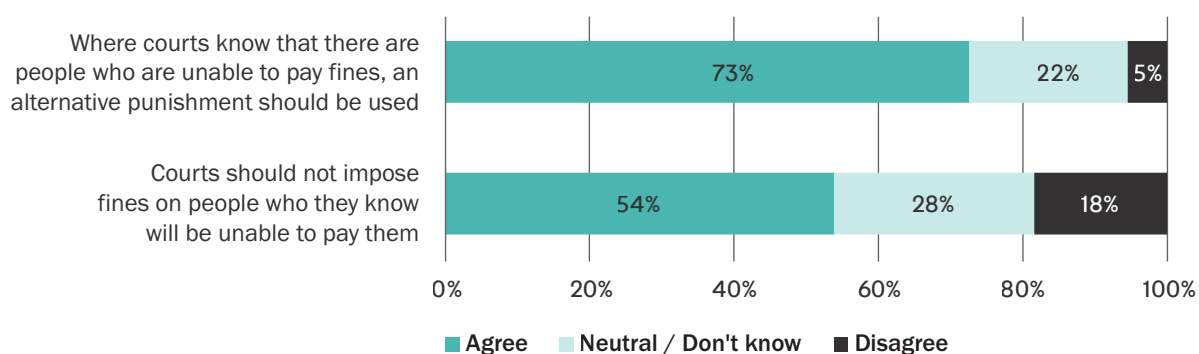
1. Increase the use of out of court resolutions.
2. Review and reform the fixed penalty notices.
3. Enforce rail fare evasion via the civil justice system.
4. Decriminalise poverty-related offences.

This briefing examines each of these groups in turn, outlining what a more appropriate response could look like, and the practical steps policymakers can take to create a fairer and more effective system of court fines. In doing so, we have focused on proposing solutions more likely to result in reduced crime, greater victim satisfaction and less cost to the taxpayer.

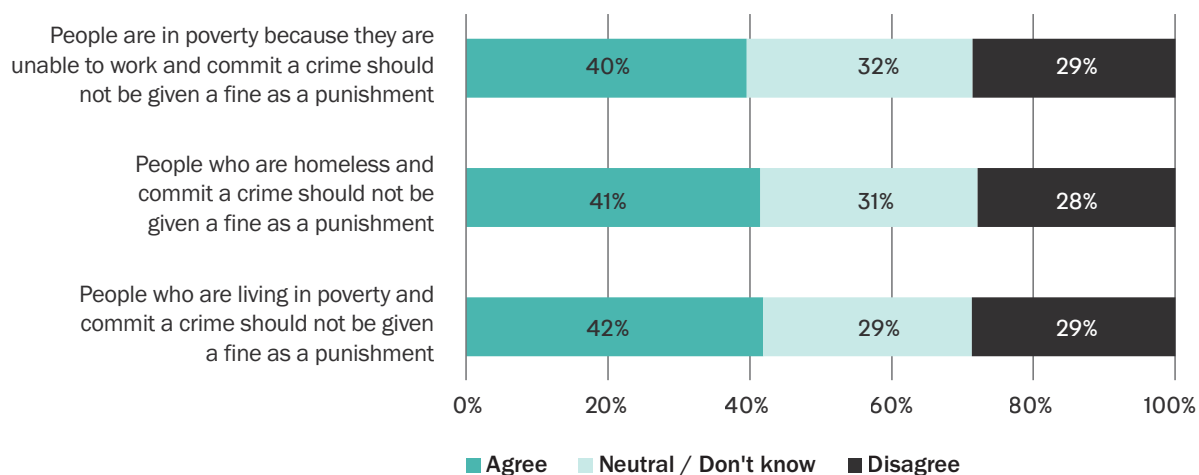
Public attitudes

We commissioned a public opinion survey,^a to understand public attitudes to the use of criminal court fines, and to the types of offending that frequently result in them.

The results show there is consistent support for not imposing a fine on someone who is experiencing poverty: 73% of people agreed that an alternative punishment should be used where courts know that there are people who are unable to pay fine. Just 18% of those surveyed disagreed with the suggestion that the courts should not impose fines on people who they know will be unable to pay them.



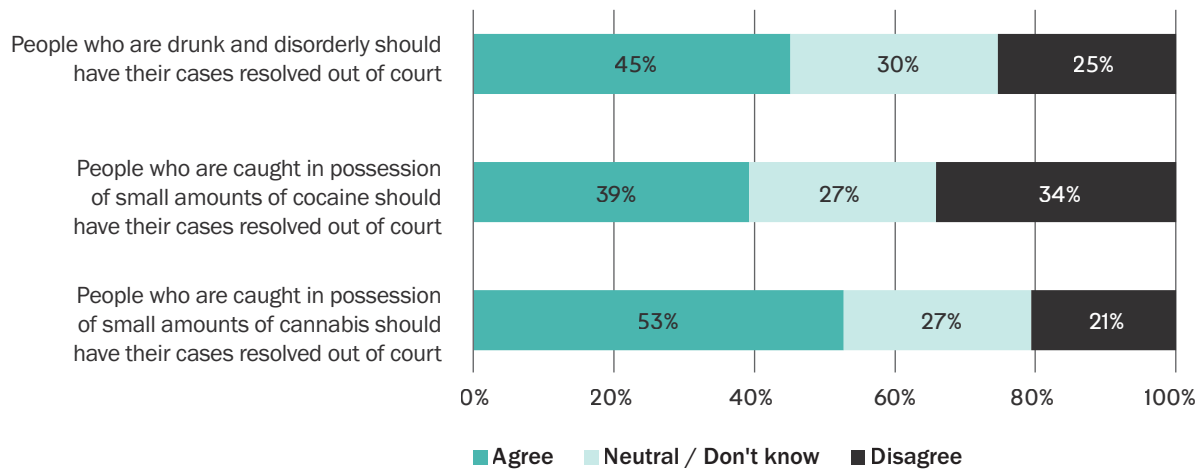
There was widespread support for not imposing a fine on: someone who is unable to work, with a net agreement figure (numbers agreeing minus those disagreeing) of 40%; someone who is homeless (41%); and people who are in poverty (42%).



We also tested public attitudes to resolving a greater volume of lower-harm crimes out of court, via a police-led disposal that can require offenders to attend courses, engage in drug treatment and apologise to victims. We found that there was significant support for this approach, over processing in the courts, particularly for possession of small amounts of cannabis (53%) and drunk and disorderly offences (45%).

^a This survey was conducted on behalf of the Centre by Survation, who surveyed 1,014 adults aged 18+ in the UK between 25 and 28 April 2025 via an online panel.

This indicates public support for finding an alternative approach to fines where poverty is an issue. This paper is dedicated to identifying what these better alternatives could be.



1. Increasing the use of out of court resolutions

The findings of our 2024 research exposed an unjust practice in our magistrates' courts – individuals on low incomes repeatedly being fined for the lowest-harm crimes. We frequently heard how the fine had little prospect of being paid, and contributed to the person's financial insecurity, often a driving factor in the offending itself.

Achieving a better outcome in these cases does not require overhauling the courts or looking to other jurisdictions. A more effective approach already exists within the current powers of the justice system in England and Wales. For many years, out of court resolutions (OOCRs) have been used in parts of the country to deal with eligible cases without processing the individual through the courts, providing them with an opportunity to participate in a tailored programme of support, education or victim engagement.¹

For many of the people we interviewed in 2024, a referral into a light-touch intervention that is well set up to reduce the harms of their offending, and to engage with the underlying behaviours, would have been a more pragmatic and problem-solving outcome than a court fine.² This outcome also avoids the large court costs that are billed to every court attendee, such as the surcharge, which was cited by interviewees as making the total amount feel unpayable.

There are several schemes across the country that routinely offer this response to low-level offending:

- The Alcohol Related Violence Course in the West Midlands, and Checkpoint in Durham, are schemes that both take an early intervention approach to offending that is linked with emotional regulation and anger management, and problems with alcohol and substance use.
- The Out-of-Court Diversion Suite is run by Cambridgeshire Constabulary and diverts individuals who have committed low-level offences, such as cannabis possession, shoplifting and robbery, into a trauma-informed approach to address their offending behaviour.

Interrupting the revolving door of crime

OOCRs are a particularly appropriate response to offending committed by the revolving door cohort, who are frequently fined repeatedly for offences that are fuelled by extreme deprivation and homelessness, such as shoplifting, street-based drug use and public order offences.³ We observed two cases at court that exemplify the futility of imposing a fine in these kinds of cases:

- A man was sentenced to a fine for a drink driving offence. His solicitor explained that he was unemployed and homeless, and living in the van that was stationary at the time of the offence. He was ordered by the court to pay £250, consisting of a £120 fine plus additional financial charges.
- A man was sentenced to a Community Order for two shoplifting charges, and was required by the court to pay £279.97 in compensation for the cost of the stolen goods. His solicitor told the court that he experienced issues with substance use addiction and could not work because of this. He already owed £2,563 in existing court fines.

OOCRs have a greater chance of interrupting this cycle of offending by directing people towards welfare services that can address the root causes, such as drug support, mental health care and housing assistance.⁴ Evidence shows that the use of community resolutions may be a particularly effective outcome, as it avoids the imposition of inappropriate or overly demanding conditions on high-need, low-risk individuals, while still providing the chance to engage with potentially life-changing interventions.⁵

Some police forces have taken a proactive approach to diverting shoplifting cases, an offence that primarily occurs as a result of issues stemming from homelessness and addiction. This has become a pressing issue in recent years, as shoplifting related to destitution has risen during the cost of living crisis, prompting the Chief Inspector of Constabulary Andy Cooke to urge officers to use discretion when prosecuting those who are stealing to eat.⁶

In the West Midlands, the Offender to Rehab programme, an initiative funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, diverts individuals engaging in prolific shoplifting from court and provides access to residential drug treatment. An evaluation of the scheme found that it led to a reduction in shoplifting worth £2.3 million.⁷ This demonstrates what can be achieved for both people caught up in the justice system and businesses when there is buy-in to this approach.

Victims see the value

Polling by the charity Transform Justice found that victims are supportive of having their case resolved out of court and, in cases of shoplifting, consider it be a better use of justice system resources than a fine.⁸ Many had experienced the court process as stressful and did not value prosecution for its own sake, preferring practical solutions such as returning stolen property or making amends.⁹ This research found that OOCRs meet many of these priorities for victims, who valued having a greater say in the outcome and saw rehabilitative interventions as more capable of preventing reoffending.¹⁰

Recommendations

OOCRs have become a routine part of police practice in pockets across England and Wales, yet the national picture shows that their overall use has fallen. In 2010, they constituted 26% of all disposals; by 2024 this had fallen to 14%.¹¹ There is also wide variation in how these schemes operate, with each of the 43 forces taking a different approach to the decision over who is diverted, to the intervention and to the outcome.¹² The 2025 Independent Review of the Criminal Courts, led by Sir Brian Leveson, supported expanding the use of OOCRs as a way of freeing up resources to deal with more serious and complex cases.¹³

By restoring the proportion of cases that are resolved out of court, and bringing more national consistency to how this work is delivered, we can reduce the burden on the courts to impose and enforce fines that are not being paid. We recommend:

- 1. The Government should implement the recommendations of our report, [Strengthening Community Diversion](#), to improve the national delivery of OOCRs.**
- 2. The Government, mayors and police and crime commissioners should work together to direct funding via their police and crime plans to develop, enhance and monitor effective OOCRs.**
- 3. The Crown Prosecution Service should produce guidance for magistrates to ensure cases that have made it to court and are eligible for OOCRs are considered for roll-back, taking inspiration from the guidance produced for the youth courts.^b**
- 4. The National Police Chiefs' Council should add financial exclusion to their Gravity Matrices, by including the following question in their key factors checklist:^c “Do they have a realistic prospect of paying a financial penalty?”, so that financial exclusion is considered as part of the decision-making process to divert an individual.**

^b The CPS is currently developing guidance on this for the youth courts.

^c The Gravity Matrix is a tool the police use to inform the decision-making process to divert a case from court.

2. Improve fixed penalty notices enforcement

We heard, time and again, in the interviews we conducted in phase I, that people who had received a court fine had often done so for what sounded like minor social infractions, such as dropping a cigarette. This was confusing to us, as behaviour like littering does not usually demand a criminal justice response. Further investigation has revealed that lying behind these criminal court cases was often the functioning (or not) of a different system – the system of fixed penalty notices.

Fixed penalty notices

Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) are used by a range of authorities to respond to minor social violations, and they give the individual the opportunity to avoid prosecution in exchange for the payment of a fixed fine. They are most frequently used by the police for traffic offences, such as driving without a seatbelt or without an MOT or – by far the most common – speeding. In 2023, 30% of the three million motoring offences were resolved in this way.^{14, d} FPNs can also be imposed by local authorities for environmental offences, such as dropping litter, dog fouling and fly tipping.

FPNs are very well used powers, and our interviews with police officers suggest that they favour the speedy resolution they offer compared to court proceedings. This is also supported by wider research that suggests FPNs are viewed positively by justice agencies as a form of expedient justice.¹⁵ The imposition of a fixed, one-off fine that does not result in a criminal record is a fair and proportionate response.

Non-payment of FPNs

The problem comes when we encounter non-payment of FPNs and the reasons why people do not pay them. If the FPN fine is not paid within the set period of time, an individual can be charged in court.^e As our research identified, the outcome of conviction is often a larger fine, additional court charges and a criminal record. Data shows that the non-payment rate of FPNs is very high. In 2023, nearly 50% of FPNs resulted in court action.¹⁶

Through a Freedom of Information request, we have been able to break down this statistic to show how many environmental enforcement FPNs^f resulted in prosecution across six local authorities in England.

Council	FPNs issued between April 2023 and March 2024	Paid within the 14-day limit (% of total brackets)	Not paid within the 14-day limit (% of total brackets)	Prosecution initiated for non-payment (% of total brackets)
Gloucester	59	13 (22%)	46 (78%)	3 (5%)
Bristol City	233	198 (85%)	35 (15%)	4 (2%)
Lambeth	8,989	5,890 (65.5%)	847 (34.5%)	398 (4%)
Medway	3,854	2,800 (72.7%)	1,054 (27.3%)	455 (11%)
Birmingham City	6,463	3,156 (48.8%)	3,307 (51.2%)	1,986 (31%)
Manchester	12,923	7,201 (55.7%)	5,722 (44.3%)	1,472 (12%)

d This figure excludes British Transport Police and the Metropolitan Police Service.

e Some people elect to go to court, where they want to contest the incident.

f Environmental offences are given for behaviours such as littering (including food waste, cigarette butts or chewing gum), graffiti, not cleaning up after your dog, or putting up posters without permission (“fly-posting”).

The data confirms that local authorities, particularly in large urban areas, do follow through with prosecution in cases involving types of behaviours such as dropping a cigarette or littering. In a 12-month period, nearly 2,000 people were prosecuted by Birmingham City Council.

The Association of Police Chief Officers (now the National Police Chiefs' Council) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents have argued that prosecution is a necessary deterrent. However, research suggests that there are a complexity of factors involved in what determines behaviour, and we cannot say with certainty that the threat of more serious sanctions improves payment rates.¹⁷ Moreover, the high rate of non-payment of FPNs does not suggest that the threat of a criminal conviction is an effective deterrent that secures payment. Indeed, by making non-payment of FPNs a matter for criminal courts, it is likely we are simply pushing uncollected debts from one state system to another, with 50% of all court fines not having been paid within 12 months.¹⁸

As with court fines, we have no public data telling us the socio-economic background of people who receive and fail to pay FPNs. What data we do have strongly suggests that the frequent occurrence of non-payment, similar to non-payment of criminal court fines, stems from people's inability to pay, rather than their unwillingness.

The high rates of FPN non-payment in Manchester (44%) and Birmingham (51%) suggests there is a correlation with high levels of poverty within the local population. Both councils rank among the seven most deprived local authorities in England; 43% of the population of Birmingham reside in the 10% most deprived areas.¹⁹ In contrast, Bristol City and Medway Council, areas with comparatively less deprivation,²⁰ have higher compliance rates.

This is supported by a wealth of wider evidence that shows how money owed to government agencies has increasingly become the most problematic type of debt.²¹ While this body of work does not specifically name FPNs, it does highlight the presence of debts that start off as small fines, for example unpaid parking ticket charges, which snowball into bigger debts that are owed to several public bodies.²²

Moreover, we know that there are high levels of poverty amongst people who are in contact with the criminal justice system.²³ Our prior research on court fines indicates that many of the people we spoke to encountered difficulties paying their court fine due to economic disadvantage, because they were unemployed, or receiving insufficient benefits, or, in some cases, because they were homeless.²⁴

Non-payment process

Our interviews also suggest that the way FPN fines and sanctions are administered does not follow the evidence on engaging effectively with people who are experiencing financial difficulty.

First, FPNs are not tailored to income, unlike court fines (in theory). They are a fixed value, and can range from £50 to £300, depending on the severity of the behaviour. This means that the fine does not take into account each individual's differing financial circumstances and their ability to pay it.

Second, individuals are not afforded flexibility over payment or payment plans, which is typically due within 14 or 28 days. Our research in phase I identified a cohort people in contact with the court system who were surviving on monthly budgets that did not cover their basic living costs. The FPN system is not set up to account for this. In addition, research shows that short and inflexible payment timelines often make people in financial distress feel panicked and overwhelmed, and less able to engage with creditors.²⁵ This particularly affects people with mental health challenges, who are disproportionately more likely to have financial troubles.²⁶

Communication about FPNs, and their non-payment, relies on letters. This is an outdated and ineffective approach to maintaining contact with a person, as administrative errors are made, people move address or misplace the notice.²⁷ Research also shows that letters are a poor way of engaging with people experiencing vulnerability and poor mental health.⁸ Prosecution occurs without confirmation that the individual has received the letters and is aware they are being charged with an offence.

This escalation process occurs without determining if the FPN has not been paid because of issues associated with poverty or other vulnerabilities, which makes people less likely to engage with more forceful enforcement.²⁸ The National Audit Office quantified this, and estimated that the levying of additional charges increases the probability of the debt feeling unmanageable by 29%.²⁹

Lastly, prosecution often occurs via the Single Justice Procedure (SJP), a process for dealing with low-level offences without a court hearing, in which defendants submit their plea remotely and a single magistrate, supported by a legal advisor, reviews the case and determines their sentence. The SJP has been criticised for causing disproportionate harm to vulnerable defendants. Key issues include the lack of opportunity to make the court aware of mitigating factors, such as illness, mental health or poverty, and barriers that prevent people engaging with a remote court process.³⁰ The SJP also relies on letters to inform defendants of their prosecution, and many cases go ahead without acknowledgement that the notice has been received.

Recommendations

The evidence points to the role FPNs play driving low-income people into the court system, where they receive a fine they are unlikely to pay, for behaviour that does not warrant a criminal justice intervention. Every time a case reaches court that could have been resolved as an FPN, multiple opportunities have been missed to intervene in a more proportionate and effective way. We therefore recommend:

- 1. The Government should urgently review the drivers of FPN non-payment and identify how they feed into court prosecutions and sentencing.**
- 2. The Government should overhaul the sanction system of FPNs** and implement a different approach that is aligned with good debt enforcement practice.³¹ This includes:
 - i. Contacting individuals through a variety of communication channels, including email and text, and using simple, encouraging and supportive language.³²
 - ii. Offering more flexible payment options.
 - iii. Identifying vulnerable individuals and signposting them to money and debt advice services.³³
 - iv. Implementing a breathing space scheme, which pauses escalation until contact is made and a resolution agreed.
 - v. Making use of discretionary write-off powers, particularly for low-cost FPNs, where the amount does not justify the resources of the court process.

^g A survey by the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute found that 90% of people with money difficulties and poor mental health felt that letters about what they owed triggered feelings of fear, helplessness, panic and being overwhelmed. This made them ignore both the situation and the letter, particularly when the latter is written in a stern and legalistic tone. The National Audit Office estimates that the use of intimidating letters increases the likelihood that the debt will become harder to manage by 15%.

3. Enforce rail fare evasion via the civil justice system

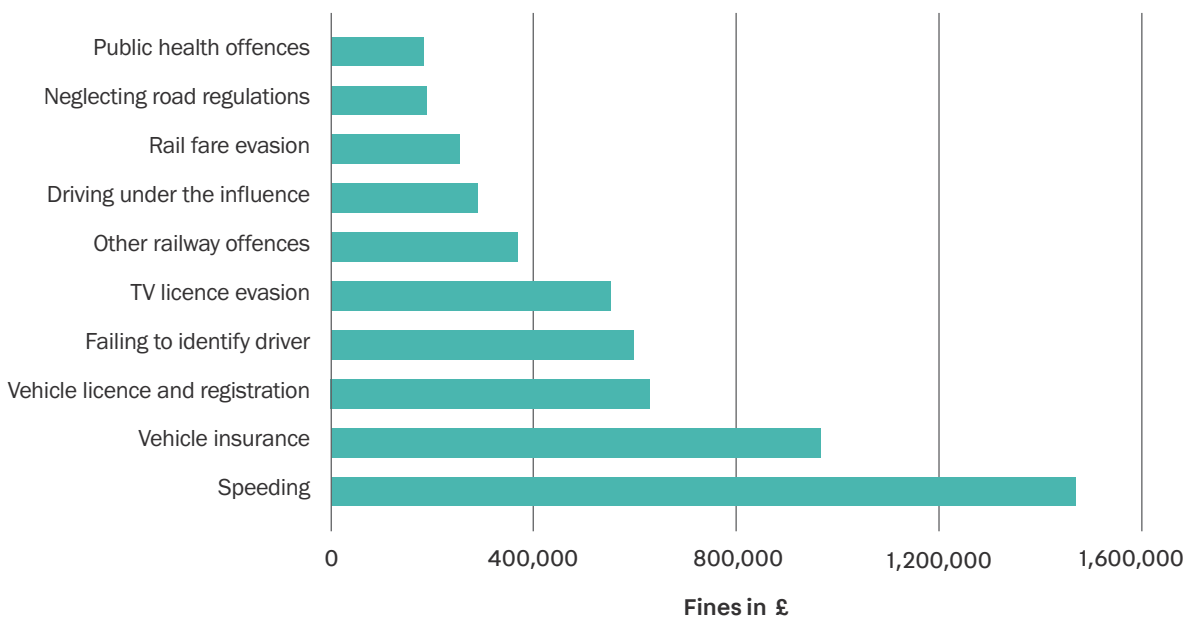
Train operating companies, who run the rail services in England, Scotland and Wales, have several options they can pursue in response to passengers travelling without a valid ticket. These include:

- No further action or a formal warning that harsher penalties will occur if the individual is found to be travelling without a ticket in the future;
- Recouping payment for the difference in fare (plus an administrative charge);
- Imposing a penalty fare notice of £50 plus the original ticket cost (rising to £100 if not paid within 21 days);
- Recovering the original fare, or an unpaid penalty fare, in the civil courts (plus investigation costs);
- Bringing criminal prosecution through the magistrates’ courts, for either a rail evasion offence, or non-payment of a penalty fare notice, which can lead to compensation and a return of prosecution costs.

In June 2025, the Office of Road and Rail (ORR)^h conducted a review of how train companies employ these sanctions.ⁱ The Review found that a lack of national coordination and oversight has enabled each train operator to take a different approach.³⁴ Despite this disparity, train companies have consistently exercised their right to pursue criminal proceedings. Between 2021 and 2023, over 35,000 people annually were successfully prosecuted for fare evasion.³⁵ The number of prosecutions for unpaid penalty fares has significantly increased in recent years, with 52% more cases in 2023 than in 2019.³⁶

The most common sentencing outcome of a successful prosecution is a fine. Ministry of Justice data shows that rail fare evasion ranks among the top ten most common offences that result in a fine, alongside driving offences.³⁷

Fines by offences 2017-2024



Source: Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales 2024

^h The independent regulator for Britain's railways.
ⁱ Hereon referred to as the Review.

We recognise the need for train companies to take action when individuals travel without paying the correct fare, to protect lost revenue and uphold the fairness of the system. However, the ORR concluded that the lack of national policy and scrutiny has allowed a “wild west” of revenue protection to develop, which is not a fair system for those caught up in it, particularly individuals facing financial hardship. Train companies are permitted to bypass fairer and more proportionate sanctions, such as penalty fares, and opt outright for criminal prosecution. The fine and additional court costs that are imposed by the court can run into the hundreds, which is often disproportionate to the value of the ticket that was not paid, and is significantly higher than a penalty fare notice, which is a fixed amount of £50–£100.

Train operators are also incentivised to pursue criminal charges, as they are viewed as a more efficient and cost-effective way of recouping lost revenue than lengthy and costly county court proceedings.³⁸ In 2023, train operators were awarded £2–2.5 million in compensation by the criminal courts.³⁹ The Review also found that reforms introduced to streamline the court process have made criminal proceedings even easier for companies, such as the Single Justice Procedure (SJP) and the common platform.⁴⁰ The fair use of the SJP by train companies came under scrutiny in 2024, when the Chief Magistrate quashed 59,000 rail fare evasion convictions spanning several years that had been unlawfully prosecuted in this way.⁴¹

In addition, this regulatory vacuum has allowed train operators to adopt increasingly unfair practices. For example, it has become common to bring criminal charges against individuals for first-time incidents and accidental or minor breaches of terms and conditions. One respondent to the Review reported that they had been required to pay a total cost of £450 following criminal proceedings for being unable to produce a railcard for a £5.10 fare.⁴²

A system that is geared towards imposing the largest possible financial sanction fails to take into account the role that “difficult personal finances”, as described by the ORR,⁴³ often plays in individuals’ decisions to travel without a valid ticket. Respondents to the Review described how receiving a court fine worsened their financial insecurity and impacted their mental and physical health.⁴⁴ These experiences echo the findings of our 2024 research. This is a growing issue, as the cost of living crisis has reduced households’ budgets and subjected ticket prices to sharp inflationary increases.⁴⁵ Train companies have responded to this uptick in fare evasion by increasingly turning to criminal prosecution.

While there should be consequences for those who do not fairly contribute to the service they are using, the impact of a conviction on a person’s criminal record is not proportionate, particularly given that financial sanctions can be imposed outside of the justice system. A record can have serious and lasting impacts on a person’s life, particularly their employment and travel prospects. One respondent to the Review shared that four years after what they believed had been a successful appeal of a penalty fare, a criminal record check for a job revealed they had in fact been convicted of fare evasion.⁴⁶ We also question the justification for involving the criminal justice system at all. The ORR could not identify any evidence suggesting that criminal prosecution reduces fare evasion more than other measures, such as visible staff presence, passenger education, increased ticket checking and penalty fares.⁴⁷

It is not a fair deal for the people facing the sharp end of criminal proceedings, nor is it an appropriate use of the criminal justice system. The criminalisation of fare evasion means that the state and the public bear the cost of enforcing payment that is owed to privatised companies. This is an outlier. No other company is permitted to use the criminal justice system to recover outstanding debt in this way. For example, unpaid parking fines and utility bills are not a criminal matter, and payment is pursued through a county court judgment in the civil courts. While the criminal court route is favoured as an easy and profitable option for train operators, it takes limited time and resources away from an overstretched public institution dealing with serious criminal matters.

The Ministry of Justice is currently consulting on reforming the practice of private prosecutions, in response to the Post Office scandal. This may address many concerns the ORR has raised about the inconsistent and unfair practices of train operating companies. However, we do not believe that tweaks to this system will resolve the fundamental issue that these cases should not be a matter for the criminal courts.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

1. The Government decriminalises the act of rail fare evasion, by:

- Repealing section 5 of the Regulation of Railways Act 1889, which makes it an offence to travel by railway without paying the correct fare, failing to show a ticket, and failing to give a correct name and address;
- Repealing section 24(1) of the Railway Byelaws 2005, which states that *“Any person who breaches any of these Byelaws commits an offence and, with the exception of Byelaw 17, may be liable for each such offence to a penalty not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.”*

2. The Department of Transport, supported by the ORR, should develop a national policy framework, and supporting guidance, that sets out a graduated set of actions in response to fare evasion, including :

- Formal warnings and No Further Action should be used for first-time incidents and minor breaches of terms and conditions and where there are mitigating circumstances (for example, rail disruption). The ORR recommended creating a centralised database to record incidents to enable inspectors to identify repeat evasion.
- More serious cases of evasion should result in a penalty fare notice. The ORR recommended implementing an escalating system of surcharges, adjusted to the circumstances.⁴⁸
- Unpaid penalty fare notices should be pursued through a county court judgment (CCJ), bringing rail operators in line with standard debt recovery practices. This is an appropriate response to these cases, though we acknowledge concerns about the impact of CCJ processes on individuals facing financial hardship or other vulnerabilities. Therefore, decriminalisation must be accompanied by implementing the set of reforms developed by the debt advice sector that promote fairness and minimise harm for these groups. In addition, when unpaid fare notices are pursued through the county court, this process should not be conducted under the parking penalty charge notice system, which operates more severe and harmful enforcement practices, such as the use of private bailiffs.

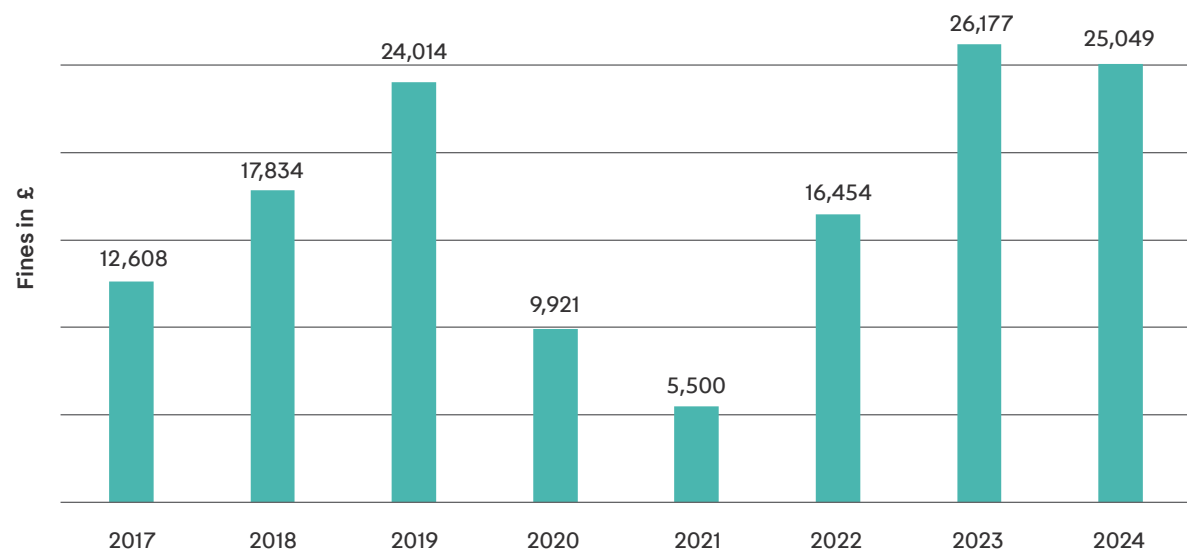
4. Decriminalise offences explicitly linked to poverty and social deprivation

In the sections above, we have argued in favour of changing how processes and systems can be made to work better, to avoid cases unnecessarily coming to court. There are, however, three specific categories of offence that we argue do not require any justice system intervention, and that should go further and be decriminalised.

Criminalisation of parents for truancy

In England and Wales, local authorities have several powers to enforce school attendance through legal action, in cases where it is considered that “*initial intervention and pastoral support*” has not been successful.⁴⁹ One course of action councils can decide to pursue is to issue parents with an FPN fine. The initial fine is set at £80 and rises to £120 if not paid within 21 days.⁵⁰ If the parents do not pay, they can be prosecuted in court, and if found guilty, they receive a criminal record and a larger financial penalty.⁵¹

Court fines given for the offence of truancy



Source: Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales 2024

Campaigners and academics have long identified a lack of evidence supporting the use of legal and financial sanctions to reduce school absences. Several studies have shown that punitive measures may even have the opposite effect, and decrease attendance levels.⁵² One study that found a positive improvement in attendance noted that this only occurred in the short term, suggesting that the underlying issues had not been resolved.⁵³

The multiple issues that are experienced by the families of children who are struggling to engage in education is well evidenced. They are associated with unmet need, social disadvantage and behavioural problems,⁵⁴ and include poverty, bullying, social services contact and children with caring responsibilities.⁵⁵ Poor mental health and special educational needs and disability are notably prevalent in this cohort of children.⁵⁶ Fines and prosecution are an ineffective approach, as they do not provide families with the help to address these challenges, which present real barriers to their children attending school.⁵⁷ This is demonstrated by parents in one study describing how it felt impossible to force “fearful and panicky” children, who were struggling with their mental health, into school.⁵⁸

There is a greater need for a different, more problem-solving, approach to school absenteeism given the increasing rate that families are encountering social disadvantage. Rising child poverty, deepened by the cost of living crisis, means that these issues are often more acute, and faced by a greater number of families. It is estimated that 30% of children in England and Wales are living below the poverty line and do not have their basic needs met.⁵⁹ At the same time, vital support services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and support for SEND, have suffered from long-term underfunding, and are struggling to meet the growing demand. This means that more families are in need of help, and have fewer places to turn for it.

These developments, in combination with new challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, have led to schools across the country facing an attendance crisis. Since 2020, the number of children missing school has risen dramatically. In the 2022/23 academic year, an estimated 32 million days of learning were lost through unauthorised absence and suspension, compared to 19 million days in the last complete year before the pandemic.⁶⁰ Persistent absence is currently estimated to affect more than one in five pupils.⁶¹

As the number of children who are missing school has increased, so has the number of financial penalties. In total, 487,000 FPN fines were issued to parents for unauthorised absences in 2023/24, a 22% increase from the previous year.⁶² This suggests that while the issue is growing more entrenched, local authorities are doubling down on the use of punitive measures. This approach is misaligned with the evidence base and fails to give families the support they need, instead punishing them for the challenges they are experiencing.

Recommendations

- We recommend that the **Government decriminalises the offence of truancy** by amending the Education Act 1996 to remove the criminal offence of truancy.
- We support the recommendations made by the charity Advance, which has called for the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which is currently being scrutinised by Parliament, to be used to fund and embed support services for children and their families.⁶³
- The Institute for Public Policy Reform has identified a number of actions the Government could consider to ease the schools attendance crisis. These include: increasing funding for whole school inclusion; directing this funding towards underserved schools and incentives for teacher recruitment and retention; developing a plan to improve access to children's mental health and speech and language support; and introducing a governance strategy to unite and monitor currently fragmented services for families.⁶⁴
- Learning can be taken from international examples, in particular countries that take a child-welfare, rather than a criminal justice, approach. For example, in Denmark, social services lead the response to children who persistently miss school, and they can apply non-criminal measures involving the care of the child. These are very rarely taken and are intended as a last resort.⁶⁵

Criminalisation of sex workers

In England and Wales, the sale and purchase of sexual services between two consenting adults in a private space has never been criminalised. However, several related activities are criminal offences, particularly where they occur in public spaces. It is currently illegal, for instance, to manage a brothel, advertise sexual services and buy or sell sex in public.⁶⁶ Our review of court sentencing data in phase I noted that although these offences are prosecuted in very small numbers, when these cases reach court, a fine is the most common sentencing outcome.⁶⁷

We have collated police and court outcomes data to understand how the four remaining offences criminalising sex work activity have been enforced over the last eight years. Our findings show that:^j

- “Offence by Prostitute” makes selling sexual services in public a criminal act, and has not been used since 2022. Fines and cautions have been the most common outcomes of this offence, though in very small numbers. It has significantly declined in use since 2021.
- The offence of “Brothel Keeping” criminalises the management of a brothel.^k This offence has been used in such low numbers that it is nearly defunct. No more than six people per year have been charged with this offence since 2017. These prosecutions have resulted in various sentences, including the imposition of immediate custody.
- “Aiding etc. Offence by Prostitute” criminalises the buying of sexual services in public places, as well as the intention to buy sexual services where exploitation is occurring. It is not possible to separate out these offences within the data. The use of this offence has been in decline since 2017, falling from 193 occasions in 2017 to 32 in 2024. The most common outcomes have been a fine and a conditional discharge.
- Soliciting for prostitution criminalises selling sexual services in a public place, and while technically still on the statute books, just three people have been charged with it since 2017, most recently in 2023. We believe that these behaviours are now covered under the anti-social behaviour offence group, which includes “persistent soliciting for the purposes of prostitution”. This offence category also criminalises “advertisements relating to prostitution”. It is not possible to pull out specific data on the use of these specific offences.

Our analysis shows that while these offences remain in legislation, in practice very few numbers follow through to a criminal case. The decline in enforcement could reflect a de-prioritisation from police forces, or the changing nature of sex work, which increasingly occurs out of the public realm, in online spaces.

The near-defunct status of these offences signals their outdated nature, a remnant of Victorian morality laws that remain on the statute books. It is time this legislation is repealed and our laws are brought into the 21st century, as the Government has done by committing to repeal the 1824 Vagrancy Act (see below). A 2025 Amnesty International poll found public appetite for this progress: 61% of adults believe it should not be a crime for two or more sex workers to work together.⁶⁸

While enforcement numbers are currently low, the harms caused by criminalisation are well evidenced. The threat of prosecution creates barriers to safe working environments, pushing sex workers into riskier conditions, limiting access to services, and discouraging them from reporting abuse for fear of legal consequences.⁶⁹ Studies have also highlighted how criminalisation, and particularly the imposition of fines, exacerbates the economic conditions driving some people into sex work in the first place, and perpetuating a cycle of working to repay the debts.⁷⁰

Therefore, repealing these laws is necessary to remove the possibility of prosecution. Low enforcement today does not preclude future increases, for example if policing priorities change, or if the greater numbers of people who are turning to sex work as a result of pressures caused by the cost of living crisis become caught in the net.⁷¹

j A fifth offence exists – “Exploitation of a Prostitute” – which prohibits coercing someone into selling sexual services, which we have not included in our analysis.

k The broad legal definition of a brothel means that women selling sexual services from the same household have been prosecuted under this offence. CPS guidance states “Premises only become a brothel when more than one woman uses premises for the purposes of prostitution, either simultaneously or one at a time (Stevens v Christy [1987] Cr. App. R. 249, DC)”. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/prostitution-and-exploitation-prostitution>

Recommendations

We recommend that:

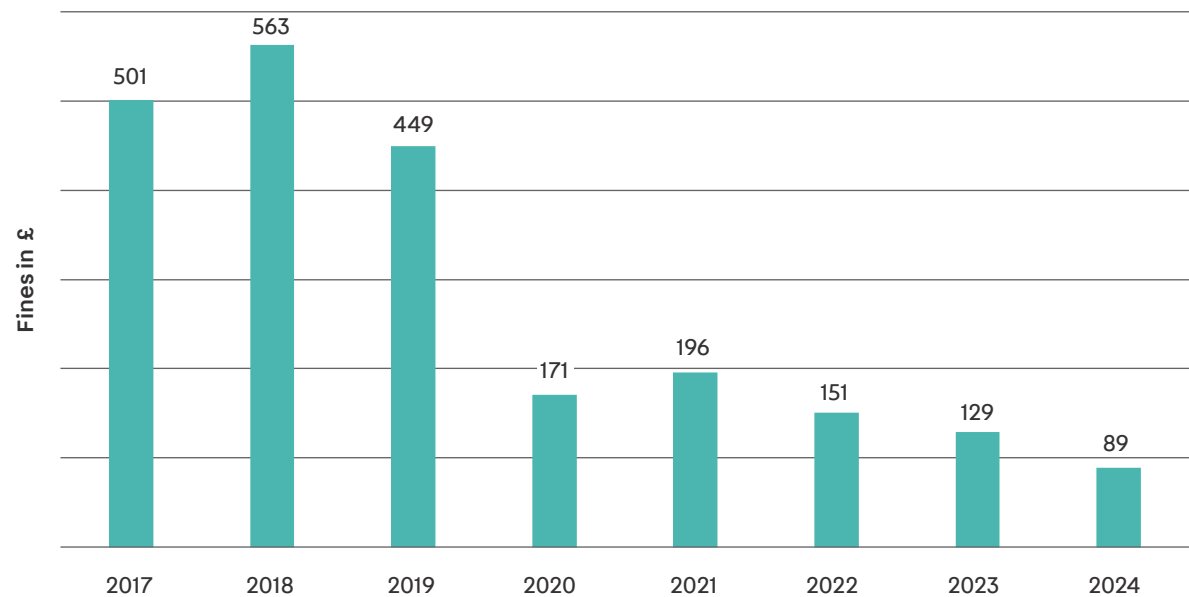
The Government fully decriminalises sex work by:

- Repealing the laws that prohibit soliciting, brothel keeping and kerb crawling. Coercing a person through intimidation, grooming or violence into any sexual act, commercial or not, should remain illegal. The relevant legislation is spread over several Acts, with the most recent significant changes made via the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Criminalisation of homelessness

In June 2025, the Government announced its intention to repeal the 1824 Vagrancy Act. For two hundred years, this act has criminalised behaviours heavily associated with street homelessness such as begging and rough sleeping.⁷² Research shows that the use of these powers is an active part of police response to homelessness, even though the number of cases reaching court is small.⁷³ In 2024, 169 people were prosecuted under section 3 of the Act – “persistent begging” – half of which resulted in a fine.⁷⁴

Fines given for the offence of begging



Source: Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales 2024

Repealing the Vagrancy Act is a significant milestone in the modernisation of outdated legislation that criminalises people for rough sleeping. While this is a positive step, we are concerned that new and existing police powers will continue to penalise and restrict behaviours associated with homelessness. In parallel with the repeal of the Vagrancy Act, the Government is introducing a new offence, “arranging or facilitating begging for gain and trespassing with intent to commit a criminal offence”.⁷⁵ It is unclear how the police will be trained to identify “real” begging from the activities of organised criminal gangs, without drawing vulnerable people into the justice system for the very offence that is being repealed on the grounds of being unjust.

In addition, existing behavioural control orders mean that the police will retain the ability to use the threat of criminal consequences to restrict and control people experiencing homelessness. These civil orders allow the police and local authorities to respond to incidents of ASB, and to place restrictions on an individual’s behaviour, or require them to engage with services. Breach of an order is a criminal offence and can result in a fine, or between two and five years’ imprisonment. Research shows that these orders are already disproportionately used against vulnerable individuals, particularly those who are street homeless.⁷⁶ This approach does not get to the root causes of homelessness and pushes people further from the help they

need.⁷⁷ Research suggests that restrictions can limit access to vital support services, such as food banks and drug treatment.⁷⁸

We are concerned that in the vacuum of the Vagrancy Act, the police will increasingly use ASB orders to move on individuals who are rough sleeping. The Government is actively encouraging this practice by revising the accompanying guidance to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to promote their use “*where begging is deemed to meet the threshold for anti-social behaviour*”.

The former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner described the repeal of the Vagrancy Act as an end to “*injustice towards some of the most vulnerable in society, who deserve dignity and support*”.⁷⁹ Yet the same Government, committed to tougher enforcement of ASB, is introducing a new class of civil order – Respect Orders – to help the police in this enforcement, which is likely to be used to target the very same people.⁸⁰ Repealing the Act cannot simply be symbolic. The Government must also reform the police powers that replicate a punitive approach to homelessness under the guise of ASB enforcement.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Indicates what kind of **safeguards will be introduced to ensure that the new offence of “arranging or facilitating begging for gain” will not penalise homeless people** engaging in begging who have no link to serious and organised crime.
- **Retracts the revision of the statutory guidance** associated with the 2014 ASB Act to “encourage the use of its powers where begging is deemed to meet the threshold for anti-social behaviour” and in its place inserts research highlighting the impact of civil orders on vulnerable groups, as well as creating guidance for police officers to signpost homeless people to housing support.
- **Pauses the introduction of Respect Orders** by withdrawing Clause 1 of the Crime and Policing Bill.
- **Improves the implementation of existing civil behaviour orders** set out in the 2014 Act. These should be subjected to a full evaluation, with the outcome used to inform decisions on where best to direct resources to reduce ASB.
- **Invests in research to better understand which interventions effectively reduce ASB**, including those the Government is already committed to, to develop the growing evidence base on reducing ASB that emphasises preventative, problem-solving and community-focused interventions.

A note on decriminalisation of TV licence non-payment

The non-payment of a TV licence is an additional offence that has a compelling case for decriminalisation. Individuals who fail to pay the licence fee often face criminal prosecution and receive a fine. Research has shown how women, people on low income and those experiencing vulnerabilities are disproportionately impacted by enforcement. Where non-payment is related to poverty and debt, a financial sanction makes the individual less able to pay their licence in future, while the threat of imprisonment is not a proportionate response. This is supported by the fact that the enforcement of TV licence fees through the criminal justice system is an outlier compared to other forms of public debt, such as council tax, which is treated as a civil matter.

Despite the strong case for decriminalisation, we have chosen not to include the enforcement of TV licence payment within the scope of this report. A Government consultation in 2020 summarised in detail the arguments in favour of decriminalisation and addressed a range of alternative approaches, including broader questions about how the BBC should be funded in the future. In addition, the Government has recently committed to reviewing the TV licence system when the current funding arrangement expires in 2027. We hope that policymakers will use this opportunity to revisit the evidence and give serious consideration to the case for decriminalising this offence.

Quantifying impact

We have explored what the changes under our four sets of recommendations would deliver in terms of reduced work for the courts. Unfortunately, as section 2 on FPNs makes clear, we do not have sufficient data to enable us to include an estimate of the impact of the changes we suggest on the criminal court caseload.

In terms of OOCRs, we have identified five offences that could be dealt with out of court far more often: theft, criminal damage, drug possession, public order offences, and crimes against society. In our estimate, by raising the proportion of the above offences that are dealt with by an OOCR to the 2015 level, 15,500 court cases would be removed from the system each year.⁸¹

Should the changes we propose to rail fare evasion and the decriminalisation of offences associated with poverty be implemented, we estimate this would remove a further 44,000 cases from the court caseload each year.⁸²

Conclusion

Criminal court fines are a much used and, in many cases, appropriate and proportionate response to offending. Our 2024 research, however, showed that their non-payment is a real issue and strongly indicated that a significant part of that non-payment problem stems from their imposition on people who can't pay (rather than won't pay). Too many people are being funnelled into court for the lowest-level offences, often repeatedly, receiving fines they cannot pay. This is, in many ways, a reflection of a system that does not know what else to do. Magistrates themselves told us they lack appropriate alternatives.

Many of these non-payment cases involve behaviours better understood, and more effectively addressed, as manifestations of poverty and unmet need. Whether it is someone not paying a fixed penalty fine for littering, shoplifting to feed themselves, or engaging in sex work, there are clear opportunities for earlier and more proportionate interventions. As this report makes clear, a combination of responses, including the use of existing processes to resolve criminal offences out of court and civil remedies for rail fare evasion, offer ways of better resolving these cases without the need for major reforms. Likewise, small but targeted changes to the enforcement of FPNs could stem the flow of cases entering the courts that barely meet the threshold for a justice intervention. The fact that half of FPN fines are not paid, disproportionately in poorer communities, demonstrates the need for a new approach that focuses on making contact with individuals, identifying need and resolving issues before they escalate.

Lastly, there is a set of offences that are criminalised by outdated or unnecessary laws, which serve no public interest and disproportionately target vulnerable populations, and which therefore should be decriminalised altogether. In recommending these options, we nevertheless recognise that these issues may still require a social policy response; however, it remains the case that criminalisation and penalisation of this behaviour, largely through the system of court fines, is not an effective, efficient or, at times, fair method of enforcement. Moreover, while progress is being made in repealing the legislation criminalising homelessness through the Vagrancy Act 1824, legislators and civic society must be alert to the use of civil powers that are increasingly being used in place of criminal sanctions to “address” social problems such as homelessness.

We hope this report and our recommendations set out part of the roadmap towards ensuring that only the cases that need to be in court reach that stage. Moreover, we hope that by adopting these measures, policymakers can build a fairer and more effective fines system that does not disproportionately impact those in our society struggling with poverty and destitution.

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