

## **Bar Council news release**

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### **Bar Council calls for ‘whole system review’ of criminal justice system through Royal Commission**

The Bar Council has submitted written evidence to the Public Accounts Committee’s inquiry update on reducing the backlog in Criminal Courts. Our submission sets out how criminal justice is in a parlous position due to reductions in funding across the system over the last decade of austerity. This has led to structural problems by reference to the insufficient numbers of courts, court staff, judiciary and advocates needed to resolve criminal cases, making it impossible to tackle the crisis of the backlog now at unprecedented levels (over 67,000 cases awaiting trial in the Crown Court).

**Bar Council Chair Sam Townend KC said:** “The Bar Council is calling for a ‘whole system’ review of criminal justice through a Royal Commission. Our submission shows that the existing criminal justice policy is now at a ‘dead end’ and substantial change and investment are needed to reduce the backlog. The status quo has a detrimental impact on victims, attrition of witnesses, and innocent defendants are left for years languishing with the charges oppressively held over their heads. The guilty are not being dealt with and the public has lost confidence in a system that is just not working.

“The operational measures recently adopted, such as Operation Early Dawn and 70-day early release show how changes can lead to adverse and unexpected consequences when dealing with such a complex system. The criminal justice system can no longer operate in crisis mode, lurching from one emergency measure to another, week after week. Sticking plasters will not cut it, a wholesale policy refresh and investment in the whole justice system is needed now.”

## Areas for improvement the Bar Council has identified:

- Early legal advice
- Early guilty pleas
- Prison transportation and interpretation services
- The use of remote hearings
- Judicial recruitment
- Community resolution
- Scheduling and listing
- Recruitment and support for legal aid professionals
- Targeting assistance to specific areas and court centres

**ENDS**

## Notes to editors

- Read our full submission: <https://www.barcouncil.org.uk/static/a9bb4f4a-be75-4e31-993bf68acfd2ed7/Bar-Council-Submission-Inquiry-update-on-reducing-the-backlog-in-criminal-courts-May-2024.pdf>
- For more information on the inquiry: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8371/update-on-reducing-the-backlog-in-criminal-courts/publications/>
- The Bar Council represents nearly 18,000 practising barristers in England and Wales. It promotes:
  - The Bar's high-quality specialist advocacy and advisory services.
  - Fair access to justice for all.
  - The highest standards of ethics, equality, and diversity across the profession.
  - The development of business opportunities for barristers at home and abroad.
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