

The People

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Third of crimes never get to court

EXCLUSIVE THIRD OF CASES NEVER GET TO COURT

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Nearly a third of crimes tackled by police last year NEVER got to court.

New figures reveal that out of 550,000 cases leading to arrests, 160,000 were dropped.

Cops blame a new moneysaving system which stops custody sergeants deciding whether to charge.

Instead they have to hand responsibility to an official prosecutor which causes MORE scrapped cases and MORE paperwork. Steve Evans of the Police Federation representing rank-and-file officers said: "It's the poor victim who loses out.

"We have to abandon cases which we think should go to court and take up ones we know are going to be dropped."

Lib Dem Home Affairs spokesman Chris Huhne said: "The big increase in rejected cases suggests police are less effective or crown prosecutors more picky." The new system - known as statutory charging - was introduced in 2006. It was predicted 20,000 cases would be dropped saving £6.5 million.

But EIGHT TIMES that number were dumped last year. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claims bringing the Crown Prosecution Service in early saves time and money. She told MPs: "This enables those cases that are evidentially weak to be stopped there and then. Under previous arrangements they would have entered the court system."

But Tories say preparing extra paperwork for the CPS wastes a million hours of police time a year. A source said: "We propose to abolish statutory charging and restore charging discretion to the sergeant for all cases tried in magistrates' courts."

Cops must tell people more about ongoing investigations, says the Commons Home Affairs Committee. But it wants to BAN off-the-record briefings to journalists.