



The Witness Support Unit is Currently based at Maindee Police Station, Newport. The telephone Number is 01633 245334. The Witness Co ordinator is Sergeant Gillian Cook. Below are some of the commonly asked questions in relation to attending Court. Please ring the Unit if you have any concerns.

I have been asked to give evidence at court and I am worried about what to expect. What will I have to do?

Magistrates' Court

Most criminal trials take place in a Magistrates' Court and if the defendant pleads guilty you will not usually be required to attend court and give evidence.

If the defendant pleads not guilty, you may be asked to appear at court as a witness. We appreciate that you might find it a worrying experience and we will give you every support possible. There are also many voluntary agencies who may be able to offer help and support during this traumatic time ie. Victim Support.

The Witness Support Unit will initially contact you advising you that the case is going to be heard in court. They will notify you of the trial date and venue and any concerns you have about going to court, ie. Transport, childcare, employment or expenses, will be addressed at this stage.

The Witness Support Unit is there to meet your needs and will aim to resolve any problems you may have in attending court by making suitable arrangements on your behalf. They will then re-contact you to let you know what arrangements have been made. However, there may be times when it is necessary to ask a representative from another organisation (eg. The

Crown Prosecution Service or Victim Support) to contact you directly. This will only be done after we have spoken to you.

If you are very concerned about the procedure at court, it may be a good idea to arrange to visit the court before the day of the trial. The Witness Support Unit can arrange this for you.

Do I need to bring anything with me to Court?

You should take any correspondence or papers that you may need with you. It would be helpful to take any letter received from the Witness Support Unit with you. This correspondence will state the name of the defendant, date and time of hearing.

Can I ask a friend to come with me?

Yes, you can ask a friend or relative to go with you to keep you company. However, they will not be able to claim expenses such as travel costs, unless the Court agrees that it is vital they are there; for example to look after your child, or if you have a disability. For more information check with the Witness Support Unit.

I have difficulty understanding English. Can I get help?

If you have difficulty speaking or reading English and think you will need an Interpreter to assist you at Court, please contact the Witness Support Unit (the person who sent you the details of the Court case). They will arrange for an Interpreter to be present at Court to assist you. The Crown Prosecution Service will pay for the Interpreters' fees.

At Court

When you arrive at Court, you will be met by a representative of the Witness Service (a branch of Victim Support that supports witnesses at court) and taken to a waiting area for prosecution witnesses. The Witness Service are there to offer emotional support and to advise you on the court procedure. However, they will be unable to discuss details of the particular case in which you are involved or the evidence that you will give. You should not discuss the case with other witnesses that you meet, or that are known to you, before the trial has been concluded.

Whilst you are waiting to give evidence, a representative of the Crown Prosecution Service (who prosecute cases on behalf of the police) should make themselves known to you. You will be given the opportunity to read through the statement that you gave to the police in order to refresh your memory.

You will then be called into the courtroom to give evidence before the Magistrates. You will be asked to take an oath to tell the truth, according to your particular religion. If you have no religious faith, you will be asked to 'affirm' i.e. promise to tell the truth.

You will be asked questions regarding your statement, firstly by the Crown Prosecution Service representative and then by a solicitor representing the defendant. At Magistrates Court, the Magistrates, Or Court Clerk may ask you questions at any stage of the proceedings. In Crown Court The Judge may also ask you questions.

I am frightened of bumping into the defendant or a member of their family. Can I sit away from the Court room?

If you feel uncomfortable about the prospect of sitting outside the Courtroom, the Witness Service can arrange several options to assist you.

- Arrangements can be made for you to enter the Court via a separate entrance.
- You can be put on “standby” at home. (stay at home and wait for a telephone call to request your presence at Court.)
- You can be provided with a Pager or mobile telephone. This will allow you to wait in the vicinity of the Court (for example at a local café) prior to being called to give evidence.
- You can sit in a private waiting area.

Crown Court

More serious cases are usually sent to the Crown Court and will be heard in front of a Judge and jury if the offender denies the offence. If the defendant pleads guilty, once again you will not be required to attend court and give evidence.

Witnesses in Crown Court matters will usually be contacted directly by the Crown Prosecution Service, who have their own team for dealing with witnesses, which offers a similar service to that provided by Gwent Police Witness Support Unit.

When will I be able to leave the Court?

Do not leave the Court until you are told you are no longer needed. If you have an important reason why you need to leave early, You must tell the Court Usher before the Case starts.

After you have finished giving evidence, you may be told you are free to leave, but you can stay and listen to the rest of the case if you want to.

Will I be entitled to travelling expenses or a claim for loss of earnings?

You can claim expenses for travelling to and from the Court and there is an allowance for meals and loss of wages. You will be given a claim form at the Court. In exceptional circumstances of hardship, there may be a possibility of providing you with expenses prior to the case, or a bus pass. Please indicate any concerns you have regarding travel to the Witness Support Unit, when they contact you initially.

I am worried that my Employer may not release me from my place of work, or that I will lose my job if I take time off.

Your employers are obliged to give you time off to attend a Court Case if you are a witness. The Witness Support Unit will write to your employers explaining that you have to attend Court if you have any concerns.

What if I can't get someone to look after my children, or I am the sole Carer for a relative who is ill or has a disability?

The Witness Support Unit will be able to give a list of Registered Nurseries and Carers who will assist you. For example you can arrange to place your child in a Nursery at short notice, or arrange for emergency care for someone for up to eight days.

I have heard something about special support for vulnerable or intimidated Witnesses?

The Criminal justice System has made special provision for witnesses who come into the following categories:

- Child Witnesses

- Those who have mental or physical disabilities.
- Victims of sexual, domestic or racially motivated crime.

- Witnesses who may be subject of Intimidation.

The Witness Support Unit will fully discuss the “ Special Measures” available in these cases with the Witnesses. However, an example of these provisions could be;

- Screens around the Witness Box

- Live Television Links

- Removal of wigs and gowns in Child Witness Cases.

What happens after the Case is Over?

The Witness Support Unit will notify you of the result of the Case. They will put you in contact with Victim Support if you have not already requested this. There are also a number of agencies who may provide with with advice afterwards and you will be given contact telephone numbers. Finally you will be thanked for your valuable contribution in the Case , and any other concerns addressed.