# Manchester man faces five years in jail before trial amid UK court backlog crisis



William Plastow, a 34-year-old from Manchester, is currently facing a deeply troubling predicament: he has been confined for 21 months without trial due to charges stemming from a protest against an Israeli arms manufacturer, Elbit Systems. This situation has drawn public outcry, particularly from his mother, Jane Plastow, who has described it as "outrageous." She fears for her son’s mental well-being, a sentiment echoed by both his partner and advocates of civil rights who see his lengthy pre-trial detention as emblematic of systemic flaws within the UK’s criminal justice system.

Plastow is part of a group known as the “Filton 18,” which participated in a protest at a factory in Bristol last August. He faces serious charges, including criminal damage and aggravated burglary. Despite being granted a trial date set for April 2026, the prolonged wait has raised questions not only about the legal process but also about the mental health implications for those like Plastow, who have faced extraordinary time in remand. According to his mother, he has even written about experiencing suicidal thoughts during this period, highlighting the profound distress that such prolonged incarceration can cause.

Custody time limits in England and Wales, intended to safeguard defendants from excessive pre-trial detention, stipulate that individuals should not remain in custody for more than six months without being brought to trial. However, under current circumstances, due to unprecedented backlogs in the court system—largely attributed to record-level delays and a shortage of barristers—Plastow will endure the equivalent of a five-year sentence before facing a jury. The backlog of cases in Crown Courts has surged to nearly 68,000, a situation exacerbated by budget constraints, prison overcrowding, and recent strikes among legal professionals. Reports indicate that the government’s target to reduce this backlog to 53,000 by 2025 is considered laudable yet ultimately unachievable, raising concerns among legal experts about the erosion of justice.

The impact of this backlog is not merely statistical; it translates into harrowing human stories, such as that of Plastow. His mother has attempted to secure his release by offering a £50,000 surety, offering to have him live with her under strict conditions, including eliminating internet access and subjecting him to police supervision. Yet, a judge ruled against granting bail, citing concerns that he poses a risk of further offending. Jane Plastow argues that the conditions for proving such a risk are fundamentally flawed, stating, “What you’re being required to prove is a negative – well, you can never prove the negative, can you?” This perspective resonates with many who are concerned about the balance of justice and individual rights.

Concerns about mental health and treatment within custody are echoing through the community. Valentina Tschismarov, Plastow's partner, voiced her distress at witnessing his deterioration, describing him as "distant" and "broken down" following the denial of his bail application. This situation raises broader questions about how the legal system supports— or fails to support—individuals caught within its complexities, especially those who are being punished without conviction.

The Filton 18 protests initially resulted in arrests under the Terrorism Act, a charge that was later dropped. However, the implications of such measures continue to reverberate through discussions concerning civil liberties in the UK. Critics have argued that this heavy-handed approach to protest is indicative of a chilling effect on democratic engagement. The Crown Prosecution Service has mentioned a "terrorism connection," which adds another layer of complexity and urgency to the ongoing dialogue about the limits placed on lawful protest.

The Ministry of Justice and the Judicial Office have indicated that they cannot comment on individual cases, leaving families like the Plastows to navigate an opaque system that seems increasingly disconnected from the realities of its constituents. As delays continue and the legal system grapples with logistical challenges, the plight of William Plastow serves as a poignant reminder of the fragile balance between maintaining public order and protecting individual rights.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/e1118f5d-8333-4261-be24-e8372191953e), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/7fc3cd0a-65c8-493a-9aa0-cce0c38b679e)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/cps-fails-to-implement-custody-time-limit-recommendations/), [[7]](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmjust/264/report.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial), [[6]](https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/cps-fails-to-implement-custody-time-limit-recommendations/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/custody-time-limits)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/08/its-outrageous-says-mother-of-uk-israel-protest-accused-as-he-faces-21-months-in-jail-before-trial> - The Guardian article discusses the case of William Plastow, a 34-year-old from Manchester, who, along with 17 others, is accused of participating in a protest against an Elbit Systems factory near Bristol in August 2024. Plastow faces charges including criminal damage, violent disorder, and aggravated burglary. Despite being granted a trial date in April 2026, he has been held in custody for 21 months, exceeding the standard six-month custody time limit. His mother, Jane Plastow, expresses concern over the prolonged detention and its impact on his mental health.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/e1118f5d-8333-4261-be24-e8372191953e> - An article from the Financial Times highlights the severe delays in the English criminal justice system, with court backlogs reaching record levels. Snaresbrook Crown Court, for instance, is scheduling trials for 2026, even for high-priority cases. The backlog of outstanding Crown Court cases has doubled to nearly 68,000 by the end of 2023. Contributing factors include budget cuts, a shortage of barristers, and prison overcrowding. The government's inability to anticipate rises in sexual offence prosecutions and adapt to post-pandemic conditions has exacerbated these delays.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/7fc3cd0a-65c8-493a-9aa0-cce0c38b679e> - This Financial Times article reports that the UK's National Audit Office (NAO) has deemed the government's target to reduce the backlog of Crown Court cases to 53,000 by 2025 as unachievable. By the end of 2023, the backlog had reached 67,573 cases, with victims and defendants often waiting nearly two years for trial outcomes. Factors such as a barristers' strike, complexities in rape cases, and logistical issues in transporting prisoners have contributed to these delays. The NAO criticises the lack of adequate investment in the criminal justice system, leading to prison overcrowding.
5. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/custody-time-limits> - The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) provides guidance on Custody Time Limits (CTLs), which are safeguards ensuring that defendants are not held in custody for longer than necessary before trial. The CPS outlines the principles of CTLs, including the requirement for the prosecution to act with all due diligence and expedition. The guidance also details the conditions under which CTLs can be extended and the responsibilities of the prosecution in managing these time limits effectively.
6. <https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/news/cps-fails-to-implement-custody-time-limit-recommendations/> - A report from the HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) reveals that the CPS has failed to implement best practices around custody time limit case management. Despite previous recommendations, inspectors found that only 15% of case progression logs were fully completed, and only 35% of cases recorded details of actions taken at the 28-day review on their case management systems. The Chief Inspector calls for immediate review and implementation of the recommendations to ensure effective management of custody time limit cases.
7. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmjust/264/report.html> - The Justice Committee's report discusses the role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system, focusing on Custody Time Limits (CTLs). It highlights that, as of September 2022, 4,582 people—almost a third of the remand population—had been held beyond the initial six-month limit. The report expresses concern over the increasing number of individuals held on remand for extended periods and recommends a review of the legal framework for CTLs to ensure they are effective in preventing prolonged pre-trial detention.