



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

West Kent PDU

Probation Service – Kent, Surrey and Sussex region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2022

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice, and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government, and speak independently.

Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual’s identity.

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Foreword

This is the third Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) inspection under our new programme of inspections and the first to be conducted in England. Our new programme of work inspects the newly formed probation regions and PDUs following the unification of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) into a single probation service across England and Wales. Our methodology now incorporates a direct link between our findings for the leadership and management of the service and what we find in the inspection of cases; the ratings for case supervision directly impact on the ratings we award for leadership and for service provision.

The unification of services across England took place in June 2021. Case samples for this inspection were taken from those that started supervision in July and August 2021 and it is recognised that work to embed the new unified Probation Service operating model in Kent, Surrey and Sussex is ongoing. We continue to see significant impacts from the Covid pandemic on all aspects of probation delivery as well.

Disappointingly, we found there was a lack of clearly defined vision and strategy at a leadership level in West Kent PDU. Both senior and middle managers stated their work was reactive rather than having the time and space to apply a strategic approach. There were also chronic staff shortages, with an effective vacancy rate of 30 per cent of the total workforce across sentence management functions, when long-term sickness, and maternity leave as well as unfilled vacancies are taken into consideration¹. This contributed to a sense of the PDU being in 'survival mode'. In turn, this negatively impacts on staff and service delivery. Probation practitioners and middle managers are working above agreed workload limits, with no plan for how this will be addressed in the longer term. This is unsustainable, and recruitment and retention of staff must be a priority issue for this PDU to address.

We rated the quality of sentence management as 'Inadequate' across all our standards. While there are positive multi-agency working relationships with a pan-Kent central safeguarding hub, basic domestic abuse checks are not routinely undertaken, as seen in many of our inspections. Where child safeguarding information is shared by other agencies, this is not routinely followed up or addressed. There was a lack of coordinated assessment, planning, implementation, and review across cases as a whole. Early outcomes were poor and the management of risk of harm was sufficient in only a quarter of the cases we inspected. People on probation are not being seen at a frequency that would support real change or manage risk. These are real shortfalls that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

To address these failings there must be a clear and well understood prioritised plan. Probation practitioners and managers need to know what to focus on. Our inspection highlighted risk management as the most concerning aspect of practice. This needs to be the starting point, keeping people safe.

There are examples of good multi-agency work with both women on probation and those subject to the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway, via co-located services. This is to be commended and may be a model upon which to build.

¹ West Kent PDU staffing data – January 2022.

Feedback from people on probation as part of this inspection was largely positive, and that gives some recognition to practitioners working in exceptionally turbulent times.

On the basis of both poor organisational and operational delivery, we have had no other option than to rate West Kent PDU as 'Inadequate' overall. Undoubtedly the PDU managers and practitioners will be disappointed with our findings. Support from both a national and regional level will be required to improve the quality of service and keep the community, people on probation and probation practitioners safe. We hope to see better when we return.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

West Kent PDU

Score **1/27**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Inadequate



1.3 Services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work

Inadequate



2.2 Assessment

Inadequate



2.3 Planning

Inadequate



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Inadequate



Recommendations

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made a number of recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of probation services.²

West Kent PDU should:

1. ensure all cases are accurately risk assessed and allocated to the correct grade of probation practitioner
2. apply a strategic approach to which cases, and which functions of sentence management, are prioritised, while there are chronic staffing shortages
3. ensure priorities are clearly communicated and understood by probation practitioners and middle managers
4. ensure case supervision is available to all probation practitioners
5. ensure sentence management staff receive the training they need in order to fulfil their roles effectively.

Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) probation region should:

6. ensure that staffing and workload management data, as reported to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), accurately reflects true vacancy rates and practitioners' workloads
7. determine the priority of intervention delivery, allocate resource accordingly, and communicate expectations clearly to probation practitioners
8. prioritise quality assurance of sentence management
9. support senior and middle managers to manage and prioritise both their individual, and their team's, workload across the PDU
10. offer additional administrative resource to expedite outstanding reasonable adjustment requests.

HMPPS should:

11. support KSS probation region to recruit and retain staff as a matter of urgency
12. support KSS probation region to expedite the vetting of newly joining staff as a matter of urgency.

² Progress against previous inspection recommendations for the relevant CRC or NPS division are included in annexe one.

Background

West Kent PDU

Kent, Surrey, Sussex Probation Region is newly created following the national unification of the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) in June 2021, now operating as The Probation Service. The former KSS CRC was identified as one of the higher performing CRCs in previous inspections, although certain factors, unique to the new KSS region, have created some challenges in the unification process. These include the former KSS CRC using a different assessment and recording system, 'My Solution Assessment System', (M-SAT) to The Probation Service.

KSS region is made up of five PDUs: East Kent, West Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex. Prior to unification Kent was managed as a single area; however, since June 2021 it has been managed as two separate entities, although access to some services remain pan-Kent.

West Kent PDU comprises five offices, two in Maidstone – Galleon House and College Road, Joynes House in Gravesend, Garden Road in Tunbridge Wells and New Road in Chatham. There are three prisons in the locality, which includes one female estate. There is an approved premises within Maidstone which is identified as a Psychologically Informed Planned Environment unit, and the PDU serves one Crown Court and three magistrate's courts. It falls within Kent Police area.

West Kent PDU is the largest of the five PDUs measured by caseload, with 27 per cent of KSS region's total caseload. West Kent PDU held 4,030 cases as at January 2022; this included 1,153 people in custody and 2,877 people on probation in the community.

The head of West Kent PDU is the regional lead for courts and there are a number of stakeholder and partnership arrangements in place. West Kent PDU is routinely represented at the following:

- Kent Criminal Justice Board
- Kent and Medway Reducing Reoffending Board
- Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit
- Kent Substance Misuse Alliance
- Kent and Medway Women's Forum.

Since the point of unification, HMPPS has commissioned a number of services to be delivered across West Kent PDU to support the resettlement and rehabilitation of people on probation (commissioned rehabilitation services – CRS). These include:

- Accommodation support – provided by Interventions Alliance (Seetec)
- Education, employment and training – provided by Interventions Alliance (Seetec)
- Personal wellbeing (males on probation only) – provided by Interventions Alliance (Seetec)
- Women services – Advance Charity.

1. Organisational delivery

While there was evidence of strong working relationships at a local level with sentencers and the judiciary, built in part on the confidence sentencers had in local service provision for women, there are many areas of organisational delivery that are a cause for concern. There is a lack of strategic drive across West Kent Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) and this has significantly impacted on staff, outcomes for people on probation and the communities the PDU serves. Caseloads and workload demands are excessively high, recruitment and retention of staff is low, and absences from work due to sickness are high. While staff have the technology to do the job, what they do not have is time, adequate support or a clear plan to manage in these challenging circumstances.

Poor leadership across the PDU impacts negatively on the ability to deliver a high quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation. Probation practitioners and middle managers are not empowered to do their jobs well due to insufficient staff numbers, unmanageable caseloads, and ineffective management oversight. Whilst core training has been rolled out on a regional basis as part of the unification of services, we saw gaps in practitioners' skill sets and knowledge when inspecting cases. There is limited assurance activity. Much work is going unchecked and the quality of case supervision is ineffective.

Across domain two case supervision standards – assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviews – less than half of the cases we looked at were satisfactory. Many practitioners are trying their best, in exceptionally difficult circumstances. This, however, is not delivering safe and effective management of people on probation. Many practitioners acknowledged and understood this, telling us that they knew they were not managing everything that needed to be covered and there was a real fear that gaps in case supervision would mean that risk of harm issues would be missed and this would result in tragic outcomes. Worryingly, not all practitioners were able to identify these gaps in their practice.

Strengths:

- The work of West Kent PDU is highly regarded by sentencers and there was evidence of strong and positive relationships with the judiciary.
- Women-specific services are well established and well regarded, offering a range of interventions in a safe, enabling environment and a real alternative to short-term prison sentences.
- The Offender Personality Disorder Pathway is well established and co-located within probation services. Probation practitioners engage with the lead psychologist to discuss both cases and professional wellbeing.
- Feedback as part of HM Inspectorate of Probation's survey with people on probation was largely positive about the service they receive from the PDU.
- There are progression pathways for staff promotion which is actively encouraged, including routes in to the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP).

Areas for improvement:

- Lack of clearly defined vision and strategy at leadership level across West Kent PDU.
- The majority of senior and middle managers' work remains reactive, rather than planned or having an opportunity to apply a strategic approach, due to chronic staffing shortages. There is a sense of the PDU being in 'survival mode'.
- Lack of planning for known events (that is, further loss of staff and increase in service demand).
- Current prioritising probation plans are not clearly understood by probation practitioners who are delivering services.
- The majority of probation practitioners are consistently working above 110 per cent on the workload management tool. Mixed caseloads³ are yet to be realised and many cases are inappropriately allocated to individuals without the capabilities to manage them.
- There is a lack of structured supervision for probation practitioners, with managers only starting to implement supervision meetings the month prior to inspection.

1.1. Leadership



The leadership of the PDU enables delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation.

Inadequate

In making a judgement about leadership, we take into account the answers to the following three questions together with the results of our review of cases against the domain two standards. A key element of leadership is the ability to deliver results in practice. We therefore apply a rule which means that if the results from each area of the domain two standard are rated as inadequate or requires improvement, then the rating against the leadership standard can only be rated inadequate or requires improvement. In this inspection the results from each area of domain two standards were rated 'Inadequate'; this, alongside the disappointing performance against domain one standards, has resulted in an overall rating for leadership of 'Inadequate'.

Do the vision and strategy of the PDU leadership team drive effectively the delivery of high-quality services for all people on probation?

There is no vision or strategy which is communicated to staff or stakeholders in a consistent and meaningful way. Information provided for this inspection states:

³ Mixed caseloads – the process of transitioning 'legacy' Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) and National Probation Service (NPS) cases to the unified model for supervision, with all probation practitioners having completed training to hold such cases regardless of their 'legacy' employment and previous caseload.

"West Kent PDU's vision is for a united and cohesive team that draws on all the skills, knowledge and experience of legacy organisations and newly recruited staff, to deliver the best service possible as we work towards the TOM [target operating model]."

This is not communicated or promoted across the PDU. Staff, including senior managers, were unable to tell us what the vision for the PDU was. A high-level 'plan on a page', based on Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) region's business strategy, is promoted across the organisation. However, staff neither have a local delivery plan to demonstrate or measure how they are contributing to this wider organisational aspiration nor are they able to vocalise their contribution. As a consequence, staff were unable to articulate what the shared objectives for the PDU were. Given the unified service remains in its infancy at this point, a simple statement of intent, which unites legacy staff in one overall delivery aim, would be beneficial.

There is evidence that being able to suggest positive changes to contribute to improving services is a feature of the culture within West Kent PDU and is actively promoted. Positively, in the probation practitioner survey, 24 out of 35 respondents indicated that the organisation promoted openness, constructive challenge and ideas. Staff are encouraged to use their initiative in developing ways of working; but in part this fills the gaps created from a lack of managerial oversight and leadership, as one person told us:

"There has been a lack of management across offices up to this point and a lack of guidance, so staff have been doing what they want to manage their work. There are just no staff out there, if there was it would all run a lot more smoothly."

Probation practitioners and middle managers are finding their own way to negotiate the challenges they face, and we found there was a lack of clear direction from the senior manager level. There is a subsequent negative impact on overall service delivery, as reflected in the management of cases.

Are potential risks to service delivery anticipated and planned for in advance?

Recruitment to posts within the KSS region is a significant problem which predates the unification of services. There are ongoing recruitment issues across all grades of staff at a PDU level within West Kent. This reflects, in part, insufficient support on a national level to confirm target staffing numbers during the period of unification, coupled with inconsistent application of the market forces supplement to attract and retain staff in the local area.

The time from appointment to being able to commence employment is also creating a significant barrier to recruitment. Recent best efforts show it has taken five months from the closing date for applications to the in-role commencement date for administrative and probation services officer roles, due to the vetting process. This is not attractive to potential employees and there is a huge risk of recruited staff choosing to accept alternative employment due to the significant delays. Being able to recruit on conditional contracts may help speed this up, but this is yet to be evidenced.

Examples were shared of local supermarkets offering higher rates of pay to probation administrative roles, as well as other government organisations, namely UK Border Force, being able to recruit and start people in post with much shorter turnaround times, making them a more attractive employer. Ongoing recruitment difficulties

significantly exacerbate the operational risks to probation service delivery and the core business of keeping people safe. There is evidence of issues relating to staffing and workload being escalated to the Head of Operations on a regional basis, but limited evidence thereafter of mitigations put in place to manage the ongoing shortage at a local level.

Senior probation officers (SPOs) are operating in offices that lack adequate SPO resource and face additional challenges of probation practitioner sickness and vacancies. A few are also carrying an active community caseload themselves – in one example 40 cases which was due to increase again – as well as trying to manage a staff team. There were examples of SPOs knowing that they have staff leaving imminently but no staff to allocate cases to and no guidance having been received from senior leaders about how to manage that situation. There was a lack of pre-planning, even for known events. This included a planned ramping up of court activity by HM Court and Tribunal Service within West Kent, with no current plan of how this will be resourced to ensure coverage by The Probation Service. Managers advised that the majority of their work remains reactive, rather than planned or strategic.

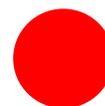
Does the PDU ensure the delivery model meets effectively the needs of all people on probation?

There is no local delivery plan for West Kent PDU. Practitioners and middle managers did not feel that the nationally driven prioritising probation plans were clear. There were different interpretations of how both managers and practitioners should manage workload. There was little evidence of PDU staff being clear what they were accountable for delivering, due to working in what they told us was 'crisis':

“When you are in survival mode, day in and day out, the future is not something you have the capacity to consider.”

The modelling for the range of interventions, and likely demand, has been hampered by the divergent assessment processes pre-unification. While criminogenic need data can be pulled from legacy NPS systems, there has been no similar function in the legacy CRC assessment system, M-SAT. As a consequence, there are significant gaps in understanding what the current needs profile of people on probation looks like across both the KSS region and West Kent PDU. There has been no obvious work done locally to address this gap in knowledge and consequently current provisions are poorly informed in terms of likely flow or demand. Outside of those services commissioned specifically for women or those on the personality disorder pathway, there were no other commissioned services targeting specific protected characteristic or diverse need, and practitioners reflected that there were gaps, specifically for foreign national offenders.

1.2. Staff



Staff are enabled to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation.

Inadequate

A key element of staffing is whether staff within the PDU are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation.

Being empowered to deliver a high-quality service includes having sufficient staffing numbers, manageable caseloads, practitioners with the right skill set and training to confidently and safely manage cases, effective management oversight and sufficient attention being paid to staff engagement. For West Kent PDU, we have assessed this not to be the case which has resulted in a rating for staffing of 'Inadequate'.

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following four questions.

Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation?

Accurate staffing figures have been difficult to obtain; data held by West Kent PDU indicate that sentence management functions are 30 per cent down on the target staffing numbers as of January 2022 when vacancies, long-term sickness and loans out are incorporated.

The current vacancy rate for middle managers in sentence management, shows that staffing levels are under resourced by 53 per cent when long-term sickness and loans out of the PDU are considered (compared to an 'official' SPO vacancy rate of 31 per cent). This was evident in discussion with both middle managers and probation practitioners, with most offices holding SPO vacancies. Some SPOs told us that they were supervising up to 22 members of staff, had an active community caseload of their own, and a lead function on specific pieces of work, including integrated offender management. This situation is unsustainable.

Regional evidence in advance, provided by the national data team, indicated that the PDU was operating with vacancy rates of four per cent for probation officers (POs) and five per cent for probation service officers (PSOs). This is not in line with the repeated comments from managers of being understaffed and does not correlate with figures provided by the PDU. The urgent provision of accurate vacancy data is paramount to understand the staffing crisis and the level of necessary recruitment. Administration staff are also under-resourced; however, there is an active campaign for recruitment and a clear plan is in place to address this.

Workload management tools indicated POs were working at 132.7 per cent capacity on average, with PSOs at a lower level of 106.3 per cent. There are some probation practitioners working at significantly higher rates than this and there are concerns over the accuracy of the workload management tool when additional work is being covered within offices but not specifically allocated to officers, for example when covering for sickness absences. When probation practitioners were asked whether their workload was manageable, the majority reported they considered it either 'not so manageable' (7 out of 29) or 'not at all manageable' (16 out of 29). We were told:

"When people were looking like they were stressed, they could have been put on lighter duties... instead they were given more cases and went off sick and we could have seen this coming."

Sickness levels are high. Average working days lost are 14.8 per staff member per year, and recorded sickness has escalated during the period November 2021 to the end of January 2022. Staff report being in 'crisis' and 'haemorrhaging staff' through sickness and people leaving. Within the year 2021, attrition rates for all staff were recorded at 15 per cent across the PDU. Given the complexities of staffing numbers at the point of unification, including several CRC staff choosing not to transfer into

The Probation Service, it is unclear how reliable this figure is. When asked how staff are coping, we were told:

"I don't know if staff are coping... There is a lot of goodwill in teams which is the only thing that is holding us together."

On a regional basis, data indicates that there is an average of 10.5 leavers per month from KSS region, with 9.5 of these being resignations. This is an untenable position.

Do the skills and profile of staff support the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation?

The representation of black, Asian and minority ethnic officers across West Kent is higher than the average recorded across the KSS region, with 18 per cent of POs identifying as black, Asian or minority ethnic (regional average eight per cent), and 13 per cent of PSOs (11 per cent regionally). The demographic of people on probation across West Kent shows that 13.7 per cent identify as from black, Asian or ethnic minority groups, indicating that the workforce is representative of those they supervise. Approximately 80 per cent of both POs and PSOs are female, in comparison to only 12.1 per cent of the overall caseload being female. Just over half of the current caseload within West Kent PDU identify as having a disability, in comparison to approximately 25 per cent of probation practitioners. There is no available protected characteristic information available for middle manager (SPO), grades.

Mandatory training⁴ to progress the transition to mixed caseloads for all staff members is behind target within West Kent PDU. As of December 2021, 48 per cent of POs, and 53 per cent of PSOs had completed the required training to move to mixed caseloads. The move to a more blended caseload is happening to some degree, through allocation of new cases post sentence. There has however, been no 'stocktake' of cases from either legacy organisation to ensure they are allocated to an appropriate probation practitioner, and the balance of mixed caseloads is yet to be achieved.

POs, and some SPOs, are holding cases that could be allocated to PSOs. Conversely, from case inspection, it was evident that some cases are allocated to staff who do not have sufficient experience or knowledge to robustly manage the case. Of most concern was evidence that probation practitioners did not always realise that there were gaps in the management of the cases being inspected, and 98 per cent of probation practitioners interviewed considered that they had the right skills and knowledge to manage the case being inspected. In some instances, practitioners were able to identify where the gaps were and knew they were not able to manage the person on probation to the degree required; however, this was not always the case. Both scenarios, for different reasons, pose significant concerns about effective case supervision and appropriate risk management.

PQiP learners are co-assigned cases; however, in reality, they are taking overall responsibility for the cases, in instances where the co-assigned, qualified member of staff is off work due to sickness. It is also noted that PQiP learners are completing

⁴ Mandatory training includes – risk assessments, multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs), working with individuals who commit sexual offences, parole reports, recalls and oral hearings.

court reports, which is outside of their usual remit. Court staff advised that there is no way they could meet report deadlines without this additional support. There is very much a culture of 'all hands on deck'.

There was clear evidence of staff being supported to apply for promotion opportunities and this has resulted in successful promotions across all grades of staff, as well as temporary staff having their contracts confirmed as permanent, equating to 20 staff in total. This does, however, create vacancies, and recruiting new staff into the organisation remains problematic, with the most recent PO campaign attracting no applicants. In HM Inspectorate of Probation's survey, 28 out of 29 of probation practitioners who responded indicated that they did not think staffing levels were sufficient.

Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?

In focus groups, and individual case inspection interviews, some staff advised they had not had supervision for over two years (legacy NPS) and others had not had supervision since transition. Within the probation practitioner survey, 14 out of 29 of staff said they received regular supervision, with 15 out of 29 probation practitioners indicating this enhanced the quality of work they completed with people on probation. Middle managers had started to receive supervision the month prior to us inspecting the PDU and had forthcoming dates for monthly supervision thereafter. Supervision of administration staff appears to be better organised and actioned on a regular basis.

While some case discussion does happen in response to changes in risk and need within the case, we considered management oversight to be insufficient, ineffective or absent in 89 per cent of cases inspected. Clinical support is being offered by the regional offender personality disorder psychologist. Probation practitioners advised that they were able to explore and reflect on cases within that forum openly. This also extended to being able to also explore personal and professional wellbeing which staff reported as supporting their resilience.

The induction plans for PSOs joining the service include mandatory training and the Gateway to Practice, requiring SPO sign off when competency is demonstrated. The full depth of learning and understanding from such an approach, given the quality of case management evidenced in this inspection, is concerning.

Whilst there is a regional quality and development team in place, they too are under-resourced, currently operating with only 2.8 full-time equivalent officers, against a target operating model figure of seven. There is a lack of audit activity and therefore the quality of work undertaken is not routinely scrutinised. In addition, understanding the impact and effectiveness of training is also restricted. Even if this audit activity was available to SPOs, the opportunity to explore this in any depth with probation practitioners, when you have line management responsibility for over 20 staff, is likely to be limited.

At this point there has been no gap analysis of existing staff training needs, and no evidence this would be a piece of work that is prioritised. Quality assurance of the Offender Assessment System (OASys) is due to recommence in the coming weeks by SPOs and there is an intention to cascade training where themes are identified in response to this activity, although again, given the current lack of resources, this may not be a realistic proposition.

Do managers pay sufficient attention to staff engagement?

The staff groups were largely positive about the teams they worked in. This included new staff members with little experience. There was an obvious sense of support for each other and goodwill to ensure services continued to be provided to the best of their ability. We were, however, largely unsighted on how CRC legacy staff have considered the transition and how well the new teams are developing.

In response to whether exceptional work was recognised and rewarded, 9 out of 29 of probation practitioners surveyed said this was practised 'always' or 'most of the time', with the remaining 20 out of 29 indicating 'not that often' or 'never'.

There was some evidence of staff wellbeing being a priority for management and there have been various efforts to engage and support staff. There is a newly appointed 'Head of Happiness'. Again, this is an additional role to the appointee's main function and this seems to be a feature of many single point of contact (SPOC) roles, placing extra demands on already overworked staff. Innovative ways of supporting staff continue to be sought and this builds on a very proactive wellbeing lead who has recently left the PDU on promotion. That said, 15 out of 29 respondents to the probation practitioner survey indicated that they did not feel their wellbeing was a priority, suggesting that the current levels of staff morale are overestimated and there is a disconnect between senior managers and frontline staff.

In HM Inspectorate of Probation's practitioner survey, seven out of 29 probation practitioners indicated they required reasonable adjustments, but these were only evidenced as being completed in three instances. Managers advised that accessing equipment was difficult and time consuming. There are outstanding reasonable adjustments that are restricting staff's ability to return to work, or their ability to work to their full potential. This is both putting these practitioners at a disadvantage, and restricting the efficiency of much needed staff, and this needs to be subject to urgent attention.

1.3. Services



A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, supporting a tailored and responsive service for all people on probation.

Inadequate

In making a judgement about services, we take into account both the answers to the following three questions and also the rating given to implementation and delivery in the domain two cases reviews. Services has been rated 'Inadequate' because the range and quality of services do not support a tailored and responsive service for all people on probation, and all of the ratings in our domain two case reviews were also 'Inadequate'.

Are the right volume, range and quality of services in place to meet the needs of people on probation?

Characteristics of inspected cases⁵

Proportion of caseload who are female	15%
Proportion of inspected cases who are black, Asian or minority ethnic	15%
Proportion of inspected cases with a disability	49%
Proportion of inspected cases where inspectors identified drug misuse problems	48%
Proportion of inspected cases where inspectors identified alcohol misuse problems	38%
Number of accredited programme requirements for individuals convicted of a sexual offence that have not commenced ⁶	32
Number of accredited programme requirements that have not commenced, other than for individuals convicted of a sexual offence	158
Average waiting time before commencing a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement	10.5 weeks
Proportion of unpaid work requirements with hours outstanding beyond 12 months	36%

Are the right volume, range and quality of services in place to meet the needs of people on probation?

As previously indicated, the modelling for the range of interventions, and likely demand, were not fully known at the point of unification due to divergent assessment systems of the two legacy organisations. There are significant gaps in understanding what the current needs profile of people on probation looks like across the KSS region and West Kent PDU. Work at a national level, to address this gap in knowledge, has not been successful. Consequently, current provisions are poorly informed in terms of likely flow or demand, and CRS providers for accommodation support and women services have already indicated they are oversubscribed and are implementing waiting lists.

⁵ HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection data.

⁶ Data supplied by The Probation Service.

Disappointingly, the implementation and delivery of services to support each person on probation's desistance and risk management was not evidenced in the majority of cases. While diversity and protected characteristic recording is high across the vast majority of cases, there was no information received which demonstrated that access to key services by differing demographics or subsequent outcomes was being monitored.

Commissioned rehabilitation services

Commissioned rehabilitation services (CRS) have commenced delivery in the PDU post-unification. Three out of the four services are provided by Interventions Alliance. This is part of the Seetec group which previously ran the KSS CRC and have experience of delivering in this region. They currently offer accommodation support to maintain tenancies; education, training and employment (ETE) support; and male-only personal wellbeing interventions. Advance Charity lead on the provision of women's services.

There have been briefing events about the newly commissioned rehabilitation services (CRS); however, CRS providers advised that they felt probation practitioners had not had the time or space to fully access or understand the learning that was disseminated. Referrals were poorly completed and there was often misunderstanding about the type of services they could provide. Probation practitioners reported that the refer and monitor function, by which CRS interventions are accessed, was helpful and was working well. This does however rely on probation practitioners actioning alerts when new information is received or required, specifically relating to improving the level of detail in referral forms or in response to non-attendance by people on probation, and this was not always happening in practice. Where referrals were made and actioned appropriately however, people on probation told us they had real benefits:

"My Probation Officer has put me in touch with a careers woman, she has sorted me with food bank vouchers, she has put me forward for courses like getting my HGV and forklift licence. These are things I wouldn't have known about without my Probation Officer."

Alongside CRS interventions, West Kent PDU is also utilising the community accommodation service tier 3 provision (CAS3), following homelessness prevention work during the initial waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. This service allocates short-term accommodation for those who would otherwise be homeless. Up to the end of January 2022 a total of 109 people on probation had been referred into the scheme, and 56 of those had secured short-term accommodation with the project. Probation practitioners were largely positive about this as a resource, although it placed additional demands on those offices where the accommodation was provided as they were required to caretake cases transferred to them. Again, there appeared to be a lack of strategic oversight in how this was being managed. In addition, the PDU had also invested in supported accommodation provision provided by Pathways to Independence Accommodation Services, although referral figures to this service were not received.

Accredited programmes and rehabilitation activity requirement

The delivery of accredited programmes has been significantly impacted as a consequence of both Covid-19 and ongoing staff shortages across West Kent PDU. The PDU's data indicates that 70 per cent of individuals convicted of a sexual offence are still waiting to commence their accredited programme, 89 per cent of all other individuals who are subject to requirements to complete an accredited programme as part of their sentence are also still waiting to commence the intervention.

Probation practitioners were not aware of any plan in place to address the backlog of accredited interventions. They advised they were not given anticipated start dates and there was no evidence of a schedule for when programmes were due to commence or be completed.

Encouragingly, successful intervention completion rates for cases terminating in the previous 12 months which did manage to start a programme, are relatively high for those convicted of sexual offences at 70 per cent. Disappointingly, this falls to 24 per cent for all other programme requirements. We were advised Building Better Relationships is currently being prioritised for delivery.

Where accredited programmes are not suitable, structured interventions can be used as an alternative and these are currently being rolled out. Sentencers however advised they had not seen many of those structured interventions listed as sentencing options when they received a recent judicial brochure of interventions available, suggesting these are not routinely being recommended in courts. There are regular engagement events with the courts and sentencers advised that they felt well informed about the current state of service provision.

Community payback

As of January 2022, there were 1,071 cases with unpaid work requirements in operation across West Kent PDU. Of those requirements, 36 per cent have hours outstanding beyond 12 months. Unpaid work staff shortages, and lack of workable projects as a consequence, have contributed to this figure. The PDU is utilising 'independent work projects', meaning work can be undertaken in an individual's own home to complete specific pieces of work, that was really helpful to ensure completion of hours during national lockdowns. Up to 30 per cent of unpaid work hours can also be completed via ETE provision, although we saw little evidence of this being applied during inspection.

Resettlement

Through the Gate contracts have been terminated since the unification of services, with staff transferring into the unified Probation Service, and now form part of KSS's pre-release teams within local, reception and resettlement prisons. There are no current short sentence teams in place in West Kent PDU, although referral into CRS provisions can be actioned pre-release, as well as support via pre-release teams in some establishments. There is a target plan for implementing short sentence teams in West Kent PDU by June 2022.

A proportionate level of contact between the probation practitioner and the person on probation, in the lead up to release, was only evidenced in 38 per cent of cases. Key resettlement or desistance needs were considered in less than half the cases pre-release. Delivery of services to reduce reoffending, and support desistance were woefully insufficient for post-release cases (10 per cent), although it was better in community cases, this is still below an acceptable level (38 per cent). Key

risk-of-harm needs were only addressed in 35 per cent of the cases inspected pre-release and reflects current difficulties in pre-release provision. While the involvement of other agencies in managing risk of harm was better evidenced in post-release cases, this was still far from satisfactory and demonstrated in only 19 per cent of cases. Given the staffing difficulties and high workload demands across the PDU it is disappointing, although possibly not surprising, that pre-release work is not happening in the majority of cases.

Are relationships with providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services to people on probation?

West Kent PDU has the benefit of being served by a multi-agency central referral unit where initial domestic abuse and child safeguarding checks can be made, with embedded probation services staff within the unit. In spite of this, disappointingly, pre-sentence checks were low and only evidenced in 13 per cent of cases. Interestingly, there were six cases with domestic abuse as part of the index offence, but still only three checks were made pre-sentence. Child safeguarding checks were higher at 43 per cent. Inspection of cases found that even when initial domestic abuse and safeguarding checks had been undertaken there was often a lack of follow up or further information sharing.

There are women-specific services in place, and this includes local forums and the provision of two breakfast clubs, with a third planned. These are well regarded and sentencers were clear that the provision available is used as an alternative to short-term prison sentences for women. These facilities are used for the supervision of women who present a high risk of serious harm, as well as women convicted of sexual offences, in a safe space. Women can access support in respect to emotional wellbeing and support with daily living skills through the provision, as well as domestic abuse services. The local women's prison facilitates attendance for those women coming up to release via temporary licence, for agreed sessions once a week. This builds social inclusion and supports resettlement, and we considered the breakfast clubs as demonstrating innovative ways of working.

There has been an overall pause in volunteering and mentoring roles across the PDU while the priorities of unification are embedded. The breakfast clubs actively encourage full engagement by those who attend. This includes peer support and encouraging attendees to take responsibility in the running of the groups. The Offender Personality Disorder Pathway is well established and is co-located within Maidstone's College Road Probation Office, offering access to equally well embedded services.

Practitioners advised that MAPPA level two meetings were regularly chaired by police due to a lack of middle managers within West Kent PDU and practitioners therefore lack management support within such arenas. Only a small number of cases inspected were subject to either drug or alcohol related treatment. These services are provided by the national health and social care charity Change, Grow, Live, and Turning Point. It is apparent that if people on probation fail to attend for appointments, they are given little grace before being removed from treatment and services. This was not always followed up with enforcement action and the overall impact of access to such services is not known.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all people on probation.

Requires improvement

In making a judgement about information and facilities, we take into account the answers to the following four questions. We have assessed that information and facilities insufficiently support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all people on probation and have therefore rated this as 'Requires improvement'.

Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

There is limited quality development officer resource to ensure the timely and appropriate sharing of learning. While there are mandatory training requirements for the purpose of unification, sharing and prioritising wider learning at this point is not being achieved routinely. However, 22 out of 29 probation practitioners told us they felt learning was shared either 'always' or 'most of the time'.

Throughout the inspection, evidence was provided of ongoing performance monitoring and some limited audit activity, however there was little evidence of analysis of outcomes to drive improvements in service delivery.

There are now regional performance and quality leads assigned to each PDU. They report on a weekly basis current performance levels and look at areas of concern that require immediate attention. This only commenced in the month prior to inspection, and the impact is yet to be evidenced. Performance and management information is mainly driven by regional activity, which is cascaded to senior leaders and middle managers within West Kent PDU, including at monthly leadership meetings and weekly manager meetings to monitor performance data.

Serious further offence reviews are coordinated from a regional perspective and it was considered that this approach is not working at this point, in terms of sharing learning:

"...they previously had shared learning across Kent and tracked this. It has changed now, and it is a regional approach. It is removed from the PDU. So, it is not working at the moment – not had the attention it needs, as just trying to do the day job."

Do the policies and guidance in place enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

Probation practitioners are directed to policy and guidance documents via Equip, as well as routine bulletins being circulated by both the region and on a local basis. Both practitioners and managers told us that they felt at the point of overload with information and that they did not have the capacity to absorb information in the way and frequency with which it is being currently cascaded.

Do the premises and offices enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

West Kent PDU operates across five offices. Staff from both legacy NPS and CRC are co-located in three out of the five premises, with an intention to co-locate the remaining two teams in Maidstone later this year. There are current building works in the Chatham office, but this is being managed in a way which ensures continued service delivery from the site. Smart working funding has been used to improve Maidstone's College Road site and an application has been approved via this fund for the Tunbridge Wells site, although it is acknowledged the office itself is in need of more expensive refurbishment work, which is currently unfunded. Of those probation practitioners who completed our survey, 20 out of 29 agreed premises and offices supported the delivery of appropriate work and the effective engagement of people on probation, and 22 out of 29 said they felt that sufficient attention was paid to staff safety.

Do the information and communication technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

All staff have access to laptops and work telephones to enable flexible working and implement the current blended approach to sentence management, although Wifi is not available across a number of the offices and this does cause difficulties for some staff. ICT is used to adapt to changing demands on the service and has allowed the covering of office telephone systems over lunchtime periods to ensure a continuous service for people on probation and stakeholders.

The transition of CRC legacy staff has included the need to train staff on both NDelius and OASys to align data recording and assessment systems. This is now complete in terms of training, although it is appreciated that this will take time to embed fully and the quality and impact of the training is yet to be assessed at a local level.

Feedback from people on probation

Engagement with people on probation has not been formally undertaken within West Kent since November 2021 as previous local contracts with engagement facilitators were wound down and new national contracts onboarded. There was no evidence of planned engagement with people on probation within West Kent PDU at the point of inspection although the regional strategy for engaging people on probation was due for launch in February 2022.

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 95 people on probation as part of this inspection. In general, individuals said they viewed their probation practitioner positively, but would like more face-to-face contact, and that signposting on to other services was dependent upon having a 'good' PO. Within the people on probation survey completed as part of this inspection, 86 per cent indicated that their opinions had been sought by The Probation Service, although not all felt they would be heard:

"No, I don't have a say in how probation service is run, anyone who thinks they do is kidding themselves. Doing this survey is good but I only did this because my experience is good, if it had been bad I wouldn't have bothered."

Survey responses by those people on probation spoken to as part of this inspection were, however, generally positive. The majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (94 per cent in total) that they have been able to contact probation services when required. A further 91 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed they had been able to see their probation practitioner at a good time, although some reported having had several changes of probation practitioner and this was replicated in the inspection of cases, as this person on probation explains:

“I am now on my fifth Probation Officer since my release in July 2020 which is not good, although I'm not the only one and I know PO's also hate the fact this happens. In terms of my relationships though, they've always been good...”

The majority of respondents, 90 per cent, said they felt safe accessing probation premises, and 99 per cent agreed they had been able to have conversations with their officers in private when required. The majority of respondents indicated they were happy with the support they received from The Probation Service.

Diversity and inclusion

There is an active diversity champion within West Kent PDU who links in with a number of diversity SPOCs to share knowledge and practice. This includes attendance at leaders' meetings and there was evidence of analysis of experience and learning from both within the organisation and externally. While there is also an equalities roadmap, it is less obvious what this is trying to achieve.

At a local level there was evidence of some thought being given to the diverse needs of staff, with a new mothers' room and prayer room both having been created since unification. That said, this appeared a reactive measure, rather than a planned and considered attempt to address diverse needs of the workforce.

There is evidence of equality impact plans being available for current refurbishment projects and consideration of individual needs for the purposes of ensuring accessibility for all. It is of note though that the equality analysis relates to members of (possibly then) current staff, rather than objectively planning with diversity awareness in mind for both staff and people on probation, in the longer term. It is also a concern that reasonable adjustments appear slow to be actioned and resolved on an individual basis and addressing this would support the inclusion and wellbeing of staff all round.

While diversity information is held in 91.7 per cent of cases, there is no evidence of active use of data to inform service provision. The needs of people on probation are largely unknown due to differing assessment platforms at the point of unification, and this remains to be addressed.

2. Court work and case supervision

We inspected 52 community sentence cases and 21 post-release supervision cases, which commenced in a two-week period over July and August 2021. We inspected 23 relevant court reports arising from those cases, written by staff in West Kent Probation Delivery Unit (PDU). We examined the quality of assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing in each case. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of engaging the person on probation and addressing issues relevant to offending and desistance. The quality of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory. We also inspected the outcomes achieved for people on probation, and while not rated, we provide data on these results.

Staff are known to be working above agreed workload management levels, and managers are too few in number, with an ever-increasing span of responsibilities. Case management is suffering as a consequence and people on probation are not being routinely managed in a robust and safe way.

Across all elements of assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, as well as review, questions relating to engaging the person on probation were almost always scored highest, although unfortunately, this was still only evident in approximately half of all cases. There was insufficient attention paid to reducing reoffending and supporting the person on probation's desistance; this was only evidenced in just over a third of the cases inspected. The lowest scoring area of work was that focusing on risk of serious harm. This was evidenced as being sufficient in only a quarter of cases. As a consequence, all of these standards have been rated as 'Inadequate'.

There were low numbers of cases eligible for multi-agency public protection arrangements in the sample that we inspected (nine cases in total), and they were all being managed at level one, meaning no additional multi-agency management. There was only one case subject to integrated offender management. Due to the low numbers, no additional analysis has been completed against these two cohorts.

Key data

Case supervision

Strengths:

- There was evidence of information sharing with child safeguarding teams at the initial point of assessment in 71 per cent of cases.
- Flexibility to enable the individual to successfully complete their sentence was evident in 69 per cent of cases.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a failure to draw on all available information in the majority of cases at the point of assessment.
- Risk of serious harm was either incorrectly assessed or missing in 26 per cent of our sample overall.

- Routine checks in regard to domestic abuse were not seen in enough cases, and even where either domestic abuse or child safeguarding information was known, this was often not followed up or accounted for in the management of the sentence.
- Sufficiently well-coordinated risk management with other agencies was only evidenced in 12 per cent of the cases inspected.
- Home visits in 64 per cent of cases would have been appropriate to support the effective management of risk; these were not completed.
- Enforcement action, when required, was only taken in just over half of the cases we inspected.
- There was a lack of focus on prioritising those factors most pertinent to addressing offending and managing the risk of serious harm.
- People on probation were not routinely seen at a frequency required to manage them sufficiently.

2.1 Court work



The pre-sentence information and advice provided to court supports its decision-making.

Inadequate

Our rating for court work is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against the key question:

Key question	Score
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?⁷	26%

West Kent PDU are rated as 'Inadequate' for court work on the basis that only 26 per cent of reports inspected were found to meet the standard of being sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, to support the court's decision-making.

While there was clear evidence that the individual was meaningfully involved in the preparation of the report, and their views considered, in the majority of cases this was not then translated into an analytical and personalised report for the court. An appropriate proposal was made to court in 61 per cent of the reports inspected and there was a sufficient record of the advice given to court in the majority of cases. This included consideration of the individual's diversity and personal circumstances in the reasonable majority of cases.

The likelihood of reoffending was considered in the reasonable majority of reports (68 per cent); however, factors relating to risk of harm were only evidenced in a minority of the reports inspected (43 per cent) indicating that risk of reoffending

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band.

is more routinely considered than the risk of harm. This was reflective of how we saw sentences managed as a whole. The assessment of risk of serious harm is also pertinent to considering the impact of the offence on the known or identifiable victims. This analysis was only evident in 35 per cent of applicable cases. Of the reports inspected, only 13 per cent (three out of 23 reports) drew sufficiently on available sources of information, including child safeguarding and domestic abuse information.

West Kent PDU has the benefit of access to a multi-agency central referral unit, based in Kent County Council which includes police, social services and embedded probation services staff. We were told that checks were made via this unit to support the preparation of risk-informed reports, including contingency arrangements for if and when the schedule in court is such that making the requests on the day would be difficult. Unfortunately, this has not been evidenced in the reports inspected. Domestic abuse checks were only undertaken in three cases, prior to the report being presented to court. Even where checks were made, these were only returned in one case, post-sentence. In the other two evidenced checks were either not returned, or were not recorded on probation systems. No enquiry was made in 87 per cent of cases, even though 26 per cent of reports related to an index offence of domestic violence.

Child safeguarding checks were made more routinely where required, but not in all applicable cases. Of the 23 reports inspected, child safeguarding checks would have been suitable to inform 91 per cent of the reports. However, checks were only conducted for 43 per cent of reports, with information being received back in 26 per cent of the cases pre-sentence. Given the additional resource of the central referral unit, which is not seen in many regions we inspect, this is disappointing and suggests that processes to ensure the timely sharing of information are not working and as a consequence reports are not robust in their assessment of risk.

Without access and consideration of all risk information pertinent to the case it is difficult to say with confidence that the reports we inspected accurately reflected the best advice to the courts. It was stated in focus groups with court teams that probation practitioners in these teams were *"just about surviving"*. There was acknowledgement that while there were usually just enough officers to service the courts, the additional demands being made due to Nightingale courts, and ongoing recruitment and retention issues, meant that there was no scope for anything outside of the basic provision to provide reports to court, and even then there was a weekly backlog of reports required. This will undoubtedly be impacting on the quality of service being delivered, as reflected in our inspection findings.

2.2. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the person on probation.

Inadequate

Our rating⁸ for assessment is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	53%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	41%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	27%

West Kent PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for assessment as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 27 per cent. Concerningly, this lowest score relates to whether there was sufficient focus on keeping other people safe, with this only being demonstrated in the minority of cases, regardless of sentence type.

Cases for inspection were taken from a sample within the first eight weeks following transition to the unified probation service. From the point of unification, all cases should have their initial assessments completed on the Offender Management System (OASys), although it is feasible that some of the cases will have had ongoing relevant assessments previously completed via legacy Kent, Surrey and Sussex community rehabilitation companies' systems (M-SAT). Regardless of the origin of the assessment, our standards and the expected quality of work remains the same; although it is acknowledged that the OASys system will be a new way of working for many practitioners.

Initial assessment of a case is the starting point for establishing appropriate interventions and support to promote desistance and ensure the onward robust and effective management of risk of serious harm. It underpins the sentence as a whole and is the starting point for any constructive working relationship between the person on probation and those entrusted with their supervision. Timely completion of initial assessments presented real challenges for the PDU during the initial stage of unification and as a consequence, a specific piece of work, to clear these backlogs in the community, was allocated to a dedicated agency resource. While we do not collate information in regard to who completed the initial assessment it is safe to assume that given the turnover of staff and the agency team, not all assessments will have been completed by the practitioner who then retained that case, or who had previous knowledge of the person on probation.

In terms of assessment, while not evident in enough cases, there was demonstration of sufficient focus on engaging the person on probation in just over half of all cases. Where we saw this delivered well there was evidence that the practitioner had analysed the motivation and readiness of the person on probation to engage and comply, as well as giving appropriate consideration to diversity issues and protected characteristics that might impact on their ability to engage and comply. These cases also showed meaningful engagement of the person on probation in the assessment process.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

Overall, the assessment of factors linked to offending and desistance was only sufficient in 41 per cent of cases. There was analysis of offending-related behaviour in a minority of cases and identification of strengths and protective factors was seen in too few cases. It was considered that assessment sufficiently drew on available sources of information in only a third of cases. Assessments were not sufficient to ensure a solid foundation upon which to manage the person on probation.

As indicated, the lowest scores attributed to the quality of assessment relate to the focus on the risk of serious harm. Repeatedly we saw instances where cases were assessed as low risk of serious harm, when this should have been medium. There were incomplete risk assessments in 13 per cent of cases overall and this creates serious questions in regard to the management of those individuals.

Domestic abuse checks were only undertaken in 40 per cent of cases overall. Child safeguarding checks were more likely to be undertaken where required, which was demonstrated in 71 per cent of cases. In comparison to the assessment of factors linked to offending and desistance, assessment of risk of serious harm sufficiently drew on available sources of information in less than a quarter of cases. This is particularly disappointing given the central safeguarding unit resource available in West Kent. Specific concerns relating to victims were not routinely analysed.

The lack of detail and sources of information used to inform the assessment means there could not be confidence that all risk factors, linked to both reoffending and harm, were known or understood and this is reflected in the overall 'Inadequate' rating.

2.3. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the person on probation.

Inadequate

Our rating⁹ for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	41%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	42%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	27%

Planning is built upon the bedrock of sound assessment. West Kent PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for planning as the lowest score for the key questions was 27 per

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

cent; The lowest score relates to the sufficient focus on keeping other people safe, with this only being demonstrated in the minority of cases.

Overall, the quality of work demonstrated within the planning part of sentence management was mainly of a lower standard than that within assessment. The application of exceptional delivery models during the pandemic is likely to have reduced the availability of services to include within plans, and the frequency with which individuals could be seen. Even taking this into consideration, planning was poor overall.

Consideration of offending-related factors and prioritisation of those that were assessed as most critical to reducing reoffending was only evidenced in a third of cases. Plans which set out those services and interventions most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance were evidenced in only 42 per cent of cases. This is not sufficient. In the majority of cases the most pertinent factors linked to reoffending were not actively being addressed.

Plans to address risk of harm factors were also insufficient in the majority of cases. Protecting the public is a key objective of The Probation Service's work. Good risk management includes prioritising those factors most pertinent to addressing risk, setting constructive and/or restrictive interventions to manage risk, working with other agencies and ensuring effective contingency arrangements are in place to manage the risks identified. There was little evidence to demonstrate this was happening in too many of the cases inspected.

2.4. Implementation and delivery



High-quality well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging the person on probation. **Inadequate**

Our rating¹⁰ for implementation and delivery is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	47%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	29%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	21%

West Kent PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery of the sentence as the lowest score for the key questions was 21 per cent, which relates

¹⁰ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

to the percentage of cases where inspectors judged there to be sufficient focus on keeping other safe.

While engagement with the person on probation, in the implementation and delivery of the sentence, attracted higher scores, this was still only satisfactory for less than half of the cases we inspected. In 65 per cent of cases, the person on probation had had two or more probation practitioners assigned to their case, making continuity difficult to achieve. That said, there was evidence of working in a way which enabled the individual to complete their sentence, including flexibility to take account of personal circumstances in over two thirds of cases. This, however, may be at the expense of managing the sentence robustly, with enforcement action only being evidenced in just over half of cases when required (56 per cent).

The implementation and delivery of services to address offending-related factors or manage the risk of harm was not sufficient in the majority of cases. We found that requirements of the sentence were started promptly in too few cases.

While there was access to services via commissioned rehabilitation services (CRCs), and multi-agency work promoted for higher risk cases, the sufficiently coordinated involvement of other agencies was only evidenced in just above one fifth of cases. Many cases had long delays before commencing any type of intervention. This reflected the lack of intervention delivery and oversubscription of commissioned services.

Just two fifths of people on probation were seen at a frequency that we assessed as sufficient to manage the risk of harm presented. Many had their frequency of reporting reduced before changes in assessed risk of serious harm was evidenced and absences were insufficiently followed up. Insufficient attention was given to protecting actual and potential victims, a key part of the work of probation services.

While there were pockets of good practice, the involvement of other agencies in managing risk of harm was demonstrated in only 12 per cent of cases. Home visits were only undertaken in 10 per cent of cases inspected, despite it being considered that this would have been appropriate to assist in the management of risk of serious harm in a further 64 per cent of cases. Whilst Covid-19 and exceptional delivery models will have impacted on contact levels, overall, the majority of cases we inspected were not being seen at a frequency, or engaged with in a sufficient way, to manage risk or promote change.

2.5. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the person on probation. **Inadequate**

Our rating¹¹ for reviewing is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

¹¹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	54%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	39%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	24%

Our standard for the quality of reviewing takes into account progress against set objectives, as well as the process for reassessing what is required to manage the sentence at periods of significant change. West Kent PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for reviewing as the lowest score for one of the key questions was 24 per cent, which relates to whether reviewing sufficiently focused on keeping other people safe. As with all the other case management standards, the lowest scores related to the sufficiency of focus on keeping other people safe, with this being demonstrated in only a minority of cases.

Reviews which engaged the person on probation and considered compliance and engagement levels were evident in just over half of the cases inspected. Where this was done well, there was evidence that compliance and engagement levels had been considered, including any barriers to engagement, with the person on probation being meaningfully engaged in reviewing their progress. Unfortunately, this was seen in too few cases.

Most reviews failed to identify and address changes in factors linked to offending behaviour, with this being evidenced in just under a third of cases. Reviewing was not consistently informed by input from other agencies who are working with the individual. Reviewing that sufficiently focused on supporting the individual's desistance was only evidenced in 39 per cent of cases. This demonstrates a lack of focus on progressing an individual through their sentence and ensuring adequate oversight of lifestyle and behaviours linked to offending.

Changes to risk of harm were not properly addressed through the reviewing process across all cases. This is of grave concern where there is an escalation in risk. There was a lack of use of information from others involved in managing the risk of harm, and others close to, or indeed the individual themselves, were not routinely involved in the review of risk of harm factors. Written reviews of risk of serious harm were only evidenced in 24 per cent of cases overall. This follows the trend of poorly informed and evidenced management of people on probation.

2.6. Outcomes

Early outcomes are positive, demonstrating reasonable progress for the person on probation.

Outcomes	Percentage 'Yes'
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Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	27%
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We do not currently rate the outcomes standard but provide this data for information and benchmarking purposes only. Given the disappointingly inadequate ratings across all aspects of case supervision, it is unsurprising that we found a low level of reasonable progress being made against key early outcomes by people on probation in this PDU. As domain two data has indicated, while there has been a degree of engagement demonstrated with people on probation, the overall focus on addressing factors linked to reoffending, supporting desistance and managing the risk of serious harm have all fell well short of what is required to support individuals towards change.

We saw repeatedly that the level of contact between practitioners and their cases was insufficient, and engagement with other organisations and services was lacking. While there may be reasons for this, including the difficulties created by the Covid-19 pandemic, not enough has been done to manage sentences adequately. Of the cases we inspected, 16 per cent were assessed as having made some improvements in those factors most closely linked to offending. This included improvements in thinking and behaviour, family relationships, motivation to change and employment. Conversely, 19 per cent of those cases inspected were either charged or convicted of new offences since starting their order or licence.

Services being accessed via the CRSs were a welcome additional resource for probation practitioners; however, we were told that both women's services and accommodation support provision were already significantly over-subscribed, and this was impacting on the delivery of the provision. We repeatedly saw examples where referrals had been made but insufficiently followed up to ensure that the services were being delivered. CRS providers told us that initial referrals were often lacking in detail, and reliant on up-to-date assessments, which meant they could not be actioned until this was addressed. Probation practitioners told us they do not have capacity to complete pieces of work in a timely way, and thus referrals are often caught in this loop.

In-house options via core risk reduction programmes and structured interventions are not being delivered in a consistent or timely way. This is impacting on the ability to address offending behaviours and demonstrate change. While there are now approved 'toolkits' for use on a one-to-one basis to explore and address some factors relating to reoffending and risk of harm, again, these are not being used in a consistent or timely way. The average time to commence rehabilitation activity requirements is 10.5 weeks. This is too long.

Annexe one – Progress against previous recommendations

HM Inspectorate of Probation has made recommendations for the previous Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) divisions, arising from core and thematic inspections. Since the unification of the probation service, we have expected The Probation Service to continue to implement these recommendations. Below are our findings from the inspection of West Kent PDU in respect of the relevant recommendations. **All recommendations are taken from:** *HMIP ACTION PLAN 2021: Kent, Surrey, Sussex Probation Service. An Action Plan summarising key remaining activity within Kent, Surrey, Sussex Probation Service, in response to HMI Probation recommendations made to East of England NPS (September 2019) and Kent, Surrey & Sussex CRC (June 2019)*¹².

Recommendation:

Kent, Surrey, Sussex (KSS) Probation Service will complete mandatory risk assessment refresher training for all operational staff as a key element of continuing professional development.

Inspection findings:

While unification has required mandatory training including risk assessment, child protection and safeguarding and domestic abuse awareness, this has not translated into the quality of risk assessments – **Some progress**

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will make sure that management oversight and supervision is consistent and effective in supporting responsible officers to manage public protection and safeguarding concerns.

Inspection findings:

Case supervision is not routinely happening, and management oversight was insufficient, ineffective or absent in 89 per cent of cases inspected – **No progress**

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will reassure itself that the range of interventions, both accredited and non-accredited, are consistently available and are being provided to individuals subject to supervision to keep actual and potential victims safe.

Inspection findings:

There are significant delays in commencing both accredited and structured interventions, with waiting lists in operation for newly commissioned rehabilitative services – **No progress**

¹² HM Inspectorate of Probation Action Plan 2021, [Kent, Surrey, Sussex Probation Service, An Action Plan.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will ensure that actions are taken to protect victims in all cases, including those assessed as medium risk of serious harm.

Inspection findings:

There was insufficient focus on keeping actual and potential victims safe throughout the implementation and delivery of the sentence – **No progress**

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will improve the quality of assessment, planning, service delivery and reviewing to help keep actual and potential victims safe.

Inspection findings:

Focusing sufficiently on keeping others safe was scored lowest against all key questions across assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, as well as review – **No progress**

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will review the quality assurance processes for same-day reports.

Inspection findings:

There was no evidence presented of quality assurance activity being undertaken in respect of same-day reports. Given the concerning standard of all other aspects of sentence management it is not considered that this remains a priority at this time – **No progress**

Recommendation:

KSS Probation Service will enhance the delivery and coordination of resettlement activity provided to those released from custody.

Inspection findings:

There is no ongoing Through the Gate provision, although referrals to commissioned services can be made for pre-release support for cases and pre-release teams are operating in some establishments. Short sentence teams are yet to be set up in the community – **No progress**

Annexe two – Staffing and workload data

Data in this section is largely provided by The Probation Service. We cannot confirm its reliability, although where possible it has been verified using internal workforce planning information.

Key staffing data¹³

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent (FTE))	231
Total number of senior probation officers (SPOs)	14
Total number of probation officers (POs) (FTE)	70
Total number of probation services officers (PSOs) (FTE)	89
Vacancy rate (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total staff headcount) ¹⁴	0%
Vacancy rate of SPO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required SPO posts)	31%
Vacancy rate of PO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required PO posts)	4%
Vacancy rate of PSO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required PSO posts)	5%
Sickness absence rate (average days lost in previous 12 months for all staff) ¹⁵	14.8%
Staff attrition (percentage of all staff leaving in 12-month period)	15%
Staff attrition SPO grade only (percentage of all SPO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period) ¹⁶	-
Staff attrition PO grade only (percentage of all PO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period)	6%
Staff attrition PSO grade only (percentage of all PSO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period)	22%

¹³ Data supplied by The Probation Service.

¹⁴ Data supplied by The Probation Service centrally, does not correlate with data provided by West Kent Probation Delivery Unit (PDU).

¹⁵ Data from West Kent PDU – February 2022.

¹⁶ Unable to calculate due to average number of staff in post being below 30.

Caseload and workload data¹³

Average caseload per PO (FTE)	42
Average caseload per PSO (FTE)	52
Workload management tool average per PO	132.7%
WMT average per PSO	106.3%

Inspection workload data¹⁷

Proportion of POs (or equivalent) in this PDU describing workload as unmanageable	93%
Proportion of PSOs (or equivalent) in this PDU describing workload as unmanageable	77%

¹⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection data.

Annexe three – Inspection data

In this section, questions marked * do not apply in unpaid work only cases, and questions marked ** do not apply in every case. Only the positive answers are reported in these tables, which do not include cases where the question is not applicable.

2.1 Court work	% "Yes"
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?¹⁸	
Does the information and advice draw sufficiently on available sources of information including child safeguarding and domestic abuse information?	13%
Is the individual meaningfully involved in the preparation of the report, and are their views considered?	83%
Does the advice consider factors related to the likelihood of reoffending?	68%
Does the advice consider factors related to risk of harm? **	43%
Does the advice consider the individual's motivation and readiness to change?	52%
Does the advice consider the individual's diversity and personal circumstances?	74%
Does the advice consider the impact of the offence on known or identifiable victims?	35%
Is an appropriate proposal made to court? **	61%
Is there a sufficient record of the advice given, and the reasons for it?	83%

¹⁸ This question is only answered where the PDU has prepared a court report in the 12 month period before the inspection fieldwork.

2.2. Assessment	% "Yes"
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	
Does assessment analyse the motivation and readiness of the person on probation to engage and comply with the sentence?	52%
Does assessment analyse the protected characteristics of the individual and consider the impact these have on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery?	47%
Does assessment analyse the personal circumstances of the individual, and consider the impact these have on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery?	51%
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	59%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	
Does assessment identify and analyse offending-related factors?	47%
Does assessment identify the strengths and protective factors of the person on probation? **	58%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information?	33%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	25%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	23%
Does assessment analyse any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims? **	26%

2.3. Planning	% "Yes"
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	48%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity factors of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance? **	38%
Does planning take sufficient account of the personal circumstances of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance? **	51%
Does planning take sufficient account of the readiness and motivation of the person on probation to change which may affect engagement and compliance?	44%
Does planning set out how all the requirements of the sentence or licence/post-sentence supervision will be delivered within the available timescales?	48%
Does planning set a level, pattern and type of contact sufficient to engage the individual and to support the effectiveness of specific interventions?	52%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	
Does planning sufficiently reflect offending-related factors and prioritise those which are most critical? *	33%
Does planning build on the individual's strengths and protective factors, utilising potential sources of support? **	37%
Does planning set out the services most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance?	42%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does planning sufficiently address risk of harm factors and prioritise those which are most critical? **	23%
Does planning set out the necessary constructive and/or restrictive interventions to manage the risk of harm? **	26%
Does planning make appropriate links to the work of other agencies involved with the person on probation and any multi-agency plans? **	22%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified? **	16%

2.4 Implementation and delivery	% "Yes"
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	
Do the requirements of the sentence start promptly, or at an appropriate time?	58%
Is sufficient focus given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation, taking into account their diversity needs?	53%
Are sufficient efforts made to enable the individual to complete their sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances?	69%
Are risks of non-compliance identified and addressed in a timely fashion to reduce the need for enforcement actions? **	36%
Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate? **	37%
Are sufficient efforts made to re-engage the individual after enforcement actions or recall? **	30%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	
Are the delivered services those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	30%
Wherever possible, does the delivery of services build upon the individual's strengths and enhance protective factors? **	42%
Is the involvement of other organisations in the delivery of services sufficiently well-coordinated? * **	21%
Are key individuals in the life of the person on probation engaged where appropriate to support their desistance? * **	18%
Is the level and nature of contact sufficient to reduce reoffending and support desistance?	41%
Are local services engaged to support and sustain desistance during the sentence and beyond? * **	22%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	
Is the level and nature of contact offered sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm? **	41%
Is sufficient attention given to protecting actual and potential victims? **	14%
Is the involvement of other agencies in managing and minimising the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated? * **	12%
Are key individuals in the life of the person on probation engaged where appropriate to support the effective management of risk of harm? * **	14%
Are home visits undertaken where necessary to support the effective management of risk of harm? * **	10%

Prompts relevant to post-custody cases only:	
Did the community offender manager ensure a proportionate level of contact with the prisoner before release?	13%
Did the community offender manager address the key resettlement or desistance needs before release?	13%
Did the community offender manager address key risk of harm needs before release?	11%

2.5 Reviewing	% "Yes"
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	
Does reviewing consider compliance and engagement levels and any relevant barriers, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? **	47%
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement?	52%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of actions to implement the sentence? **	33%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	
Does reviewing identify and address changes in factors linked to offending behaviour, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? *	30%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building on the strengths and enhancing the protective factors of the person on probation? **	42%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies working with the person on probation? **	22%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of the progress towards desistance? **	30%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does reviewing identify and address changes in factors related to risk of harm, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? **	13%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm? **	13%
Is the person on probation (and, where appropriate, are key individuals in their life) meaningfully involved in reviewing the risk of harm? * **	15%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of the management of the risk of harm? **	24%

2.6 Outcomes	% "Yes"
Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	
Have there been improvements in those factors most closely linked to offending both in developing strengths and addressing needs?	16%
Has there been a reduction in factors most closely related to risk of harm to others? **	8%
Has there been a reduction in offending?	14%

Annexe four – Web links

Further information about the methodology used to conduct this inspection is available on our website, using the following link:

[Our work \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website, using the following link:

[Glossary \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)