



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

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To:

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cc:

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Dear Steve,

Many thanks for the cooperation we received from you and your staff during the recent review of Probation Service – East of England region.

We have now completed the inspection of the Essex North and Northamptonshire Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) in your region and would like to take this opportunity to share with you our overall observations.

Regional observations:

At a regional level, we have identified the following key strengths and areas for improvement:

Leadership

The last 12 months have not been without challenge. The creation of a new probation region in June last year brought together former National Probation Service staff and Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, and Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BeNCH) Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) staff. Over the last two years, probation services have been required to implement various exceptional delivery models as a result of Covid-19, and services are continuing to recover from the challenges of the pandemic.

Your vision and strategy prioritise the delivery of a high-quality service, outlined in the regional business plan and the reducing reoffending and social inclusion plan. We saw a focus on social inclusion, principles of desistance and a commitment to understanding the experience of people on probation at a strategic level. We saw good use of the Regional Outcomes and Innovations Fund (ROIF), which has been used to identify gaps in services, build upon the strength of existing models and meet the diverse needs of people on probation. Examples include the Tackling Trauma in Disguise programme for young black men and Tic Box theatre productions which explore racist behaviour. In response to our

staff questionnaire, three-quarters of regional staff said that quality and adherence to the evidence base was prioritised 'always' or 'most of the time'.

The engaging people on probation (EPoP) action plan is comprehensive. The plan was signed off in October 2021 and PDUs are at different stages of implementation. There is an enthusiasm among many senior leaders to take the plan forward, to incorporate the views of people on probation in the vision and strategy, although this is not yet embedded.

Governance arrangements and delivery plans are in place to translate the vision and strategy into practice. The recently established Quality Matters Boards provide structure and promote staff ownership of quality improvement plans at a regional and local level. The impact of this work is yet to translate into quality case management, particularly in relation to keeping people safe.

Business risks are understood. The most significant risk is around staffing and recruitment, which has the potential to impact on sentence management, resettlement and the delivery of programmes, unpaid work and structured interventions. Continuity of service delivery has been maintained throughout the pandemic, and exceptional delivery models and recovery plans have been implemented. As restrictions have eased, messages around service priorities are not understood consistently across the two PDUs we inspected. The region has used a range of methods to engage with staff, largely remotely because of social restrictions. Despite regular all-staff briefings, weekly newsletters and recorded Microsoft Teams presentations, only 48 per cent of regional staff felt that change was communicated and implemented effectively.

The senior leadership team is strong and committed to take the vision of the organisation forward to promote quality in practice, in partnership with stakeholders. There appear to be strong links, at senior leadership level, with strategic partners including the probation regional partnership forum and the regional empowering women operational group, which promotes joint commissioning opportunities. Engagement with the judiciary to keep them informed of service development is positive, with regional sentences events, newsletters and magistrates' training.

Key strengths

Strategic plans are clear and reviewed regularly to take the organisation forward. Business risks are understood and there are appropriate regional measures in place to mitigate against them.

- Plans are in place for the region to recover from the pandemic, which, if implemented effectively, should support improvements in service delivery.
- Partnership arrangements are established and support the development of service provision through co-commissioning opportunities. Funding, including the ROIF, is being used to meet the diverse needs of people on probation, including the Tackling Trauma in Disguise programme for black men, Tic Box theatre productions to share learning around anti-racist behaviour and a new initiative for people on probation with neurodiversity needs.
- The region is committed to delivering high-quality services, supported by the quality Matters structure and the performance and quality team. The messages around quality as an organisational priority are landing with staff, with three-quarters of regional staff responding positively when asked whether quality and adherence to the evidence base was prioritised.

Areas for improvement

- Messages around the prioritisation of quality are understood by staff, although this is not translating into frontline practice.
- The standard of case management requires attention, particularly in relation to keeping people safe.

Staff

Staffing is a significant long-standing challenge in the East of England, and one which impacts on service delivery across many functions, including sentence management, interventions, courts and resettlement. The Essex North PDU inspection report articulates the staffing challenges faced by the region and I draw upon this:

'HM Inspectorate of Probation have commented on the challenges of recruitment in the East of England for many years. Indeed, we previously noted that "This division has significant staff shortages. This is a long-standing issue in the division, exacerbated by its close proximity to London ... this should be a recruitment priority for the Ministry of Justice" (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019). In an area with low unemployment, and a range of competitive employment options, there is little to indicate that vacancies, across PSO and administrative grades in particular, are going to be recruited to quickly. Current recruitment processes are lengthy, incurring significant delays for security vetting. In addition, budgetary rules provide little flexibility or innovation in addressing recruitment and retention issues. Faced with these recurring challenges, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) must look to address these issues effectively to enable a sustainable solution. (HM Inspectorate of Probation – An inspection of Essex North PDU, East of England region, May 2022).

The East of England Probation Service is working to promote itself as an attractive employer through social media platforms, engaging with communities (colleges, universities and the Department for Work and Pensions), and a focus on the staff wellbeing offer. The solution to recruitment challenges does not entirely sit within the gift of the region and leaders are working with the national workforce planning team to take this forward. Regional attrition rates for all staff in the region are at 11 per cent. Essex North has a higher attrition rate (11.9 per cent) than Northamptonshire PDU (five per cent), and the attraction of London salary weighting cannot be discounted as a serious consideration for staff in the south of the region. It is encouraging that the region takes a considered, risk-assessed approach to making conditional offers of employment for staff awaiting security clearance, to address the delays around staff vetting. Regional workforce planning boards are established to oversee resource decisions and prioritise filling vacancies critical to service delivery, but there is no one function with an excess of staff.

When we announced our inspection in January 2022, the data provided by the region showed an overall staff vacancy rate of eight per cent, with 17 per cent vacancies across senior probation officers (SPOs) and 40 per cent for probation services officers (PSOs), offset to a degree by Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) learners and probation officer numbers exceeding target staffing figures. In March 2022, target staffing figures for 2022/2023 increased the overall target for all staff across the region from 1,700 to 1,900. The shortfall of PSOs is recognised as the biggest area of concern, followed by case administrators, SPOs and senior administrators. In addition, the performance and quality team has been operating with a 50 per cent quality development officer (QDO) vacancy rate since unification, although three QDOs were joining the team in the week following our regional fieldwork (April 2022), to move closer to their target of 11 QDOs.

The increased target staffing figures are promising and appear to recognise the investment required to deliver high-quality probation services, although recruitment challenges to fill the increased vacancies remain. The investment in PQiP learners is promising, and as of January 2022 there were 162 learners undertaking the probation officer (PO) qualification programme, although this takes 18 months to complete, so it will be some time before additional resources are realised.

When we announced our inspection in January 2022, the data you provided averaged a caseload of 35 for POs and 55 for PSOs. This equated to a workload management tool average of 110 and 94 per cent, respectively. Across the region, of those who responded to our questionnaire, 57 per cent of staff said that their workload was 'not at all' or 'not so' manageable and 90 per cent believed that staffing levels were insufficient. There are staffing pressures in the resettlement function, compounded by the opening of HM Prison Five Wells, in February 2022. As of January 2022, the regional resettlement vacancy rate was at 26 per cent, although since then revised target staffing figures have been made available to the region, and vacancy rates have increased. Staffing and recruitment have been long-standing issues in the East of England region and senior leaders recognise the impact that this has on the delivery of probation services and staff wellbeing. However, there is a commitment to manage with the resources they have, while working towards target staffing figures utilising regional and national workforce planning boards and recruitment campaigns.

The East of England unification learning and development checklist provides a comprehensive overview of staff training required to support the transition to a unified service. The expectation is that line managers monitor staff training in supervision and track their progress to inform the appropriate allocation of cases. As of January 2022, mandatory training completion rates were as follows: adult safeguarding: 68 per cent, child safeguarding: 72 per cent, domestic abuse: 70 per cent, prevent: 65 per cent. Of those regional staff who responded to our survey, 73 per cent said that they had sufficient access to in-service training. The region has taken a stance to maintain continuity of probation practitioner, and while this may delay the end-state move to mixed caseloads, it is positive to see that consistency for people on probation is being considered.

Administrative staff are under-resourced, and many described being overwhelmed by the volume of work they are required to undertake. Induction and training for case administrators largely rely on buddying and shadowing opportunities, and while we recognise the benefits to this approach, more experienced case administrators do not have the capacity to offer this support. For case administrators based in displaced 'admin hubs', there is limited resource available to support their learning at the point of need. This impacts on flexibility across the case administrator group to cover the broad range of tasks required of their role.

There is a strategy in place to promote the safety and wellbeing of staff, and joint senior management meetings with trade unions have a focus on these issues. Of those who responded to our survey, 74 per cent of staff said that sufficient attention was paid to their safety, although only 56 per cent said that sufficient attention was paid to their welfare. Wellbeing champions are in place and a staff wellbeing group meets bimonthly. Workloads are commonly cited as a factor impacting on staff wellbeing and while vacancies remain, it is likely that some staff will continue to feel that their wellbeing is not prioritised.

Strengths

- Staffing challenges are understood and there are clear workforce planning arrangements in place to oversee resource decisions to fill vacancies in areas of priority need.
- Human resources, workforce planning and a regional dedicated recruitment team are working with national workforce planning to promote the region as an attractive employer and increase recruitment campaigns in local communities.
- The region has taken an approach to maintain continuity for people on probation and minimise the transfer of cases between probation practitioners.

Areas for development

- Vacancy rates are high and new target staffing figures increase the gap between target staffing levels and staff currently in post.
- Recruitment remains a challenge and there are staff shortages across the region, impacting on the delivery of high-quality services and staff wellbeing.
- Further work is required to ensure that all staff working with people on probation are sufficiently equipped to manage mixed caseloads, which include those assessed as presenting a high risk of serious harm.
- Learning and development for case administrators, SPOs and established practitioners requires more attention.

Services and interventions

The East of England was the first region for data migration post-unification, and the needs of the caseload, including protected characteristics, are understood. Analysis is broken down by PDU to inform decision-making about service provision at a local level. The probation equality monitoring tool provides regional data, which is used to inform commissioning decisions.

A proportion of the ROIF has been allocated to PDU heads to respond to gaps in service provision and we saw examples of this being used in Northamptonshire. It was encouraging to see innovative approaches to commission services for black, Asian, and minority ethnic people on probation, women and those with neurodiversity needs. This is supported by the contract management team, which helps PDU heads navigate their way through commissioning processes.

The East of England is one of five pilot areas to participate in a new Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS 3), funded by the Ministry of Justice. This was launched in July 2021 to provide enhanced accommodation support for prison leavers, providing accommodation for up to 12 weeks. Data provided by the region demonstrates a positive impact of this pilot; in November 2021, 373 of the 462 cases released from custody had positive outcomes through accommodation being provided through the scheme.

Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) are in place across four pathways: education, training and employment (ETE); personal wellbeing; accommodation; and women's services. Accommodation and services for women are oversubscribed and data provided by the region demonstrated that, in January 2022, less than 50 per cent of women had started an intervention with St Giles Wise and 13 per cent had started an intervention with Advance Women's Services. Interventions Alliance provides accommodation services, and in January 2022 they were operating at a start rate of 19 per cent. The demand for accommodation and women's services does not correlate with what is available, an issue not unique to the

East of England. Despite regional communications and briefings to staff to outline the services offered by CRS providers, their role is not consistently understood. Regional briefings and communications have outlined what CRS providers offer, and while it is broadly understood that Interventions Alliance provides tenancy support rather than accommodation itself, practitioners expressed frustration that they are not seeing accommodation outcomes for those they refer. Where there are delays for people on probation starting interventions, the reasons for this were not always known by practitioners and there was a lack of clarity about how to expedite referrals for those requiring immediate intervention.

Backlogs in the delivery of unpaid work and accredited programmes are a challenge for probation services as they recover from the impact of Covid-19. For unpaid work in the East of England, this is exacerbated by an increase in unpaid work requirements being made at sentence and a vacancy rate of 50 supervisors. In March 2022, there was a six per cent increase in unpaid work requirements being made at court, compared with March 2021. The region is extending the use of independent work projects, for people on probation to work independently at home making products for charities – for example, shawls for domestic abuse charities and ‘twiddle muffs’ for dementia patients. The Shaw Trust is involved in pre-placement sessions to promote access to ETE through unpaid work, where appropriate. There are plans to reduce the backlog, although this is not without challenge. In April 2022, the region was delivering between 110 per cent and 127 per cent of pre-Covid-19 unpaid work hours, although in order to start reducing the backlog, they forecast that this will need to increase to 280 per cent.

Similarly, social restrictions during the pandemic have impacted on the ability to deliver accredited programmes, and the region has plans to increase its capacity to deliver programme requirements, prioritising sex offender and domestic abuse programmes. At the announcement of our inspection in January 2022, the region had a completion rate of 58 per cent for those sentenced to a sex offender programme and a 35 per cent completion rate for non-sex offender programmes. Of those sentenced to a sex offender programme, 76 per cent had yet to start, with 71 per cent waiting to start a non-sex offender programme. Peer mentors are in place to support compliance and ‘surgeries’ are being delivered in PDUs by interventions staff, to advise practitioners of the options available when requirements cannot be delivered. During our fieldwork week in April 2022, inspectors were informed that 395 people on probation sentenced to complete an accredited programme have not completed this requirement. Some have been instructed to attend a programme but not yet started because of non-compliance, although we were not sighted on the proportion of individuals who fall into this category. They will be offered a structured intervention or an approved toolkit as an alternative, although there are questions about the capacity to deliver and quality assure this work.

Accredited programmes have 34 vacancies across the region and recruitment campaigns are under way. Regional ‘in-house’ training for programme facilitators was recently replaced with national training, delivered remotely. The impact of this, in terms of responsivity to learning styles and the quality and availability of training to meet the national uplift in vacancy rates, is not known.

The extent to which the resettlement model has been implemented is variable, largely determined by the staff available to resource the prison offender manager (POM) role. The model is understood and a hybrid approach has been adopted, with resettlement teams embedded in some establishments and others operating an in-reach function. Plans to introduce the short sentence function in two pilot areas are progressing steadily, although the rollout for HM Prison Bedfordshire which was initially planned for June 2022 has been delayed until later this summer because of staffing issues. The extension of resettlement provision to unconvicted prisoners will undoubtedly increase resource pressures for

resettlement and CRS providers. The region is acutely aware of these challenges, and when we announced our inspection on 14 January 2022, resettlement teams were operating with a 26 per cent vacancy rate. The successful implementation of the resettlement model is crucial to support early planning for a prisoner's release and their effective risk management in the community.

Strengths

- Analysis captures the needs of people on probation, and is broken down by PDU. The analysis of the needs of women is particularly comprehensive, again provided at PDU level, shared with CRS providers and used to inform service delivery.
- Relationships with other partners are established, and opportunities for commissioning are used appropriately to meet the diverse needs of people on probation and supported by the regional commissioning team.
- The CAS 3 pilot has been implemented and promising results have been evidenced for those released from prison.
- Plans to reduce waiting lists and backlogs for unpaid work include the use of 70 peer mentors across the region to encourage people on probation to comply with these requirements.
- ETE and personal wellbeing services are being delivered by CRS providers.

Areas for development

- Waiting lists and backlogs for unpaid work remain and plans to address this cannot provide an immediate solution to this issue. This will take time, not helped by staff vacancies during a period when delivery needs to be ramped up and unpaid work requirements imposed at court are increasing. It is to the credit of the region that it is delivering an increased rate of unpaid work hours. However, there is some way to go to achieve delivery at the level required to see the backlog reduce.
- Likewise, plans to reduce waiting lists and backlogs for accredited programmes will take time before they achieve results. The region has a pool of facilitators, who were previously able to train new programme facilitators. This training is now delivered centrally, which may impact on how quickly new facilitators are trained and able to start delivering programmes.
- Structured interventions and approved toolkits are delivered as an alternative to accredited programmes, although there are questions about the capacity of probation staff to deliver and quality assure this work.
- Resettlement provision is not yet fully embedded, and the introduction of short sentence functions and the extension of resettlement provision to unconvicted prisoners place additional pressures on a staff group which is already under-resourced.
- CRS for women and accommodation are oversubscribed, resulting in waiting lists and backlogs for people on probation waiting to start an intervention with providers.

Information and facilities

The core quality management framework (CQMF) sets out priorities for quality improvement across the region. This is comprehensive and while it is driven by the head of performance and quality, structures are in place regionally and at PDU level to support this work. The recently established regional and local Quality Matters boards promote ownership and buy in to the quality agenda across staff from a range of roles and grades, to take forward the

priorities in PDUs and other functions. The Quality Matters boards, while in their infancy, provide a good foundation to improve and build on sound probation practice. Based on what many senior leaders and staff told us, there is a clear message which permeates throughout the region, recognising performance and quality as complementary. This is communicated by senior leaders through staff events, newsletters and Microsoft Teams using a range of methods to engage with staff. Responses to our regional staff survey indicate that this message is landing (three-quarters of regional staff felt that quality and adherence to the evidence base was prioritised 'always' or 'most of the time').

Further work is required to translate this understanding into practice, particularly in relation to keeping people safe, as evidenced by case inspection findings in the PDUs. The role of SPOs in the CQMF relies on their capacity to implement the touch point model and the impact and effectiveness of management oversight when it takes place. In both Essex North and Northamptonshire PDUs, management oversight was effective in too few cases. SPOs and the performance and quality team play a critical role in undertaking assurance activities set out in the CQMF. We saw some positive examples of 'themed' quality assurance work being undertaken by quality development officers, an example being the frequency and effectiveness of the POM to community offender manager handover, and key findings were shared with staff.

Performance and management information is available to all staff via a portal on Microsoft Teams, with access permissions set by role. We were encouraged to hear many staff speak about the achievement of performance measures within the context of the experience of people on probation. Communications from the performance and quality team and senior leaders, including talking heads of 'what quality means to me' promote this culture.

The region has embraced remote technology, through necessity, during the pandemic. The limitations to remote staff engagement are recognised by senior leaders and there has been an appetite to return to face-to-face engagement as social restrictions have eased. Despite the often-creative methods of engagement used to communicate with staff, this is not the only source of information available to practitioners; national policy and guidance documents are available on EQuIP and weekly updates are also circulated via email. In our PDU inspections, many staff commented on the volume and frequency of information they receive, which often focuses on what they are required to do, rather than how.

Regional guidance documents have been circulated and briefings have been delivered around the approved practitioner toolkits, CRS provision and structured interventions. Refer and monitor tool guidance has been circulated as a recorded demonstration on Microsoft Teams for practitioners to access at the point of need. Senior leaders recognise the difficulties in monitoring levels of engagement with remote communication, and that staff often prioritise workload above learning and development.

Strengths

- A variety of different methods of communication are used to relay messages to staff, which take into account different learning styles.
- Communication around performance and quality are presented in a way which demonstrates how they link together and complement one another.
- Quality Matters boards provide a structure from region to PDU and other functions (unpaid work and accredited programmes, for example), to cascade and monitor progress against quality improvement plans.

Areas for development

- Further work is required to ensure that key messages are consistently cascaded and understood by staff across the region, and that this translates into quality in practice.

Statutory victim work

We looked at 10 statutory victim cases and interviewed the strategic lead for victims work in the East of England region. Of the 10 cases we reviewed, four received their sentence three years or less prior to our fieldwork. We reviewed case records to look at whether initial contact with victims encourages engagement with the victim contact scheme, whether information and communication exchange supports the safety of victims, and if pre-release contact allows victims to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release.

Initial contact with victims, following the person on probation's sentence, was timely and appropriately personalised, although it did not always outline clearly what action they can take if the person on probation makes unwanted contact with them. Communication exchange to support victim safety was appropriate in all relevant cases, which included information exchange between victim liaison officers (VLOs) and practitioners managing the case. Contact with victims prior to the prisoner's release allowed victims to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release in the cases where we would expect this to be seen.

The management of statutory victim contact work is overseen by the regional head of public protection. There are 18 VLOs and two SPOs in the regional team who work alongside sentence management. Target staffing figures have recently increased to just over 22 VLOs and five SPOs, to resource the expansion of the victim contact scheme to include domestic abuse and stalking victims by the end of the year. Currently, there is no workforce management tool for VLOs, and caseloads sit between 250 and 350 cases. Managers use supervision to monitor the capacity of individual VLOs and allocate tasks to those with specific skills (for example, producing exclusion zone maps) to maximise capacity across the team.

Regional training has been delivered by the victim contact SPOs, supported by volunteer VLOs, to outline the role and purpose of the victim contact scheme. This has been delivered to SPOs and practitioners in sentence management to encourage collaborative working and communication to promote victim safety. The regional training package has been shared centrally to inform national e-learning. There is a strong emphasis and enthusiasm in the regional victim contact scheme to promote victim safety and to support those in sentence management to achieve this. However, there is more work required to improve the focus on broader victim issues to keep people safe, as demonstrated by our PDU inspection findings.

Feedback from victims about the quality of the service they receive is now collated centrally and does not always filter down to the region, which can dilute learning and development across the team. Regionally, there is a culture which recognises and rewards the work of those providing services to victims, although there is a disconnect between collated national feedback and that which is specific to the East of England.

Strengths

- Statutory victim work is a regional function, and victim liaison officers and managers have a presence in local sentence management teams to promote victim safety in core probation practice.

- Regional training has been delivered to sentence management teams to promote the role of the victim contact scheme and this has been shared nationally to inform e-learning.
- Initial contact with victims was timely and appropriate in the small sample of cases we inspected.

Areas for development

- Initial contact with victims does not routinely explain what actions they can take if the person on probation makes unwanted contact with them.
- More focus is required on mandatory training expectations for all grades of staff, to promote the safety of potential and identified victims.

Learning from Serious Further Offence (SFO) investigations

The SFO and complaints investigation team works under the auspices of the head of performance and quality. The team includes 2.5 full time equivalent complaints investigators, 5.5 SFO reviewers, one case administrator and one band 6 manager. SFO reviews are quality assured by the band 6 manager, then shared with the head of performance and quality, and head of service. The region is implementing the 'human factors' approach to reviewing practice in cases where SFOs have occurred. This ensures a focus on all of the following: 'offender factors', 'staff and team factors', 'task and technology factors', 'work environment', 'organisational and management factors' and 'institutional context', presented in a 'fishbone analysis' to cover practice across all six areas.

The East of England region is a pilot area for the human factors approach to SFO reviews, and the investigations team completed training between November 2021 and February 2022. This approach should provide a more holistic understanding when deficiencies in practice are observed, and holds the appropriate level of the organisation to account to drive improvements and change. Nationally, there has been a tendency to focus reviews and recommendations on practice at operational level and this approach may go some way to responding to the recommendation made in our thematic inspection of the SFO investigation and review process: '*SFO reviews should include an analysis of any systemic or procedural factors in relation to probation practice and decision-making*'. (HM Inspectorate of Probation – *A thematic inspection of the Serious Further Offences (SFO) investigation and review process, May 2020*).

We look forward to the findings from the evaluation of this pilot.

Action plans are discussed at accountability and learning panels, attended by senior regional leaders, and learning is shared with middle managers, to cascade to practitioners. Reviewing managers attend team meetings, are visible in offices and have each been assigned a PDU and function – for example, victims and interventions – to bring SFO learning routinely into teams and dispel myths and fears around the SFO review process.

Of the 23 SFOs received between January 2021 and January 2022, three were rated as 'Outstanding', nine as 'Good', 11 as 'Requires improvement' and none as 'Inadequate'. Insufficient quality and frequency of management oversight was identified as a common theme for practice improvement, which was reflected in many of the cases we reviewed during our inspections. This is an area that requires attention to support the effective implementation of the CQMF.

Observations from PDUs:

Overall ratings from inspected PDUs:

Essex North: 'Inadequate'

Northamptonshire: 'Requires improvement'

The capacity to deliver high-quality probation services across both PDUs has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and significant staff shortages, most notably in Essex North PDU. At the time of our inspections, the unified Probation Service was less than 12 months old. PDUs were implementing a significant change programme to unify the delivery of services, bringing together cultures, processes and practices between the previous East of England region, Norfolk and Suffolk, Essex and BeNCH CRCs.

Regionally, there are strong foundations in place to drive improvement of quality in practice and we were impressed with the enthusiasm and energy among many senior leaders to take this forward. How this is received and implemented at PDU level was not consistent, and while Northamptonshire is in a more stable position than Essex North, there was a lack of clarity among staff in both PDUs about what to prioritise in practice.

While we saw examples of good practice and innovation to meet the diverse needs of people on probation, further work is required to embed quality core probation work in practice. Structures are in place to support this work through the performance and quality team and Quality Matters boards, both regionally and locally. The impact of this work relies heavily on middle managers assuring and developing the work of practitioners, and the capacity of middle managers to do so. We saw some good practice in our case inspections, particularly in the work undertaken by practitioners to engage with people on probation, although across both PDUs the focus on keeping people safe was lacking in too many cases.

The region understands the challenges it faces, and appropriate plans are in place to take the service forward.

Our recommendations are set out in Annexe 1, including some recommendations directed to leaders at regional and national level. I look forward to receiving your regional action plan in due course, outlining your response to our recommendations. I wish you and all your staff well in undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely



Justin Russell

Chief Inspector of Probation

Annexe 1 – Recommendations

Set out below are the recommendations arising from the inspection of PDUs in this region.

Essex North PDU should:

1. ensure that priorities are communicated clearly to, and understood by, probation practitioners and middle managers
2. ensure that all new senior probation officers (SPOs) receive the appropriate support and training to enable them to manage their teams and caseloads effectively
3. ensure that pre-sentence domestic abuse and safeguarding checks are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning and risk management
4. ensure that all administrative staff receive the training they need in order to complete the full range of duties following unification.

The Probation Service – East of England region should:

5. support senior and middle managers to manage and prioritise both their individual and team workloads across the PDU
6. prioritise quality assurance of current case supervision.

HMPPS should:

7. in conjunction with the region, review the provision of services delivered by commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) providers by ensuring that these are adequately resourced for the volume of referrals being made
8. support East of England region to recruit and retain staff
9. expedite the vetting of staff as a matter of urgency.

Northamptonshire PDU should:

1. ensure that staff have the relevant training to use risk and safeguarding information, obtained from key stakeholders, to inform assessments, plans and the delivery of the sentence appropriately, to improve victim safety
2. ensure that senior probation officers have access to adequate induction and training to prepare them for, and develop them in, their roles
3. ensure that priorities are communicated clearly to, and understood by, probation practitioners
4. ensure that all administrative staff receive the training they need in order to complete the full range of duties following unification
5. implement the regional engaging people on probation strategy, to promote their involvement in service delivery.

East of England region should:

6. ensure that management information in relation to CRS is made available at PDU level, so that waiting times and backlogs are understood.

HM Prison and Probation Service should:











7. review how accurately the workload measurement tool reflects workloads in the Probation Service following unification
8. consider how SPO workloads are measured, including the impact and effectiveness of the touch point management oversight expectations
9. ensure that CRS providers are adequately resourced for the volume of referrals being made
10. review refer and monitor processes, to promote effective information exchange between CRS providers and practitioners.

Annexe 2 – PDU ratings

Set out below are the ratings of the PDUs in this region. More detail about the reasons for the ratings is available in the PDU reports, which are published on our website:

<https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/>

Ratings

Essex North 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	

Ratings

Northamptonshire PDU

Score **9/ 27**

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work

Outstanding



2.2 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.3 Planning

Requires improvement



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Requires improvement

