



Her Majesty's  
Inspectorate of  
Probation

**HM Inspectorate of Probation**  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre,  
1 Bridge Street West, Manchester M3 3FX  
[enquiries.HMIProb@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries.HMIProb@hmiprobation.gov.uk)  
[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation)

19 August 2022

**To: Sarah Chand, Regional Probation Director**

**cc:**

**Glyn Holland, Regional SPOC**

**Dr Jo Farrar, Chief Executive/Second Permanent Secretary HMPPS**

**Sonia Flynn, Executive Director Chief Probation Officer & Women**

**Ian Blakeman, Executive Director Performance, HMPPS**

**Tajinder Singh Matharu, Head of Assurance, Risk Management & Governance,  
HMPPS Operational & System Assurance Group,**

**Amy Rees, Director General of Probation Wales and Youth**

**Marc Baker, Chief Operating Officer, HM Inspectorate of Probation**

**Simi Badachha, Head of Probation Inspection Programme**

**Shellie Adams, Lead Inspector**

**Stephen Doust, Operations Officer (Inspections)**

Dear Sarah,

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

We have now completed the inspection of Birmingham North, East and Solihull, Staffordshire and Stoke, and Warwickshire Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) in your region and would like to take this opportunity to share with you our overall findings and our key observations and areas for improvement at a regional level.

### **Regional observations:**

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

#### **Leadership**

The unification of probation services in June last year (2021) brought together the former West Midlands National Probation Service (NPS), Staffordshire and West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and Warwickshire and West Mercia CRC staff. Over the last two years, probation services have been required to implement various exceptional delivery models because of Covid-19, and services are continuing to recover from the challenges of the pandemic. It is against this backdrop that your service has been inspected.

At a regional level the senior operational leadership team have established a clear vision for West Midlands region, and this integrates national objectives with regional and local delivery outcomes. You are working hard to implement the target operating model (TOM) in a measured and timely way, whilst maintaining focus on business-as-usual service delivery. Whilst much of this demonstrates solid foundations upon which to build, the

overall objective of delivering quality sentence management is yet to be seen consistently in practice.

### **Key strengths:**

- The organisational vision not only prioritises the delivery of a high-performing service which supports lasting, sustainable change for people on probation, it also includes a commitment to empowering staff and harnessing partnership links to make a real difference to local communities. This vision and strategy are outlined in the regional delivery plan and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS's) regional reducing reoffending plan, both of which acknowledge central HMPPS priorities and detail how these will be delivered on a regional basis.
- In working towards the overall ambition of being a high-performing region, a regional priority is promoting quality in the delivery of services. Whilst this quality is yet to be realised in delivery within sentence management, this message appears to have been understood, with 43 out of 58 respondents to our regional staff questionnaire saying that quality and adherence to the evidence base was prioritised 'always' or 'most of the time'. This was largely replicated in staff questionnaire responses across all three PDUs inspected.
- There are well-established governance arrangements in place to translate the vision and strategy into practice. This includes PDU and function heads feeding into the operational leadership team and accounting for their progress against the regional delivery plan, reducing reoffending plans and the equalities road map. This accountability is further demonstrated through PDU deputy heads' attendance at the sentence management delivery group.
- The implementation of change is managed, where possible, via the regional activities map. This allows for all required tasks to be delivered across the region in a considered and sequenced way, according to competing priorities. It is evident that, in part, this is to safeguard against overloading staff with both information and change, which is a proactive approach to project management. In response to our regional staff questionnaire, 35 out of 58 respondents stated that they thought change was communicated and implemented effectively, suggesting there is still work to do in improving how change is managed.
- The End State Achievement Board was established within West Midlands region to track progress against TOM implementation and Covid-19 recovery. This provides a forum for review and evaluation of activity. All core activity, including sentence management delivery, prisons, interventions, commissioned rehabilitation services (CRS), courts and established business-as-usual groups feed into this board. This ensures oversight against all key objectives and informs national implementation rating. There is clear evidence of current progress against these objectives and where potential gaps and risks exist there are appropriate actions being taken in mitigation.
- West Midlands' leaders have demonstrated strong links, at both PDU and senior leadership level, with strategic partners. The Probation Service – West Midlands region has a seat at, and chairs, a number of collaborative boards, including the regional commissioning board, regional safeguarding task and finish group, Midlands drug and alcohol commissioners joint meeting, regional collaboration forum, regional disproportionality committee and the regional Integrated Offender Management steering group. There is a history of co-commissioning services with partners, and whilst there have been some barriers to commissioning services in the first year of

unification, there is a commitment to building upon these relationships to further enhance positive outcomes going forward.

- The region has invested in a strategic lead for courts, outside of the TOM model, whilst encouraging the continuation of local relationships via PDU heads' engagement with sentencers. There is weekly engagement with the judiciary at a regional level and evidence of clear communication in respect to the changes to service provision in the lead up to unification. Training has been delivered to magistrates and legal advisors to increase understanding of the Probation Service. Data from the Probation Service Judicial Survey 2022 indicated that 68 per cent of survey respondents were satisfied with probation services within West Midlands overall.
- The leadership team has made a commitment to tackling discrimination and exclusion and improving outcomes for both staff and people on probation, which involves being actively involved with the Office of the West Midlands Police Crime Commissioner's Disproportionality Committee. The region facilitates a tackling discrimination council and a diversities, equalities and inclusion board. Each PDU and function is held to account in delivering against the equalities roadmap, and there has been investment regionally, with senior probation officer (SPO) leads for both women and race equality. Staff are encouraged to engage with you in monthly 'let's talk' events to discuss how the region is tackling discrimination and to share experiences and difficult conversations in an open and safe forum. There is an active and well-established staff mentoring scheme, Promoting Inclusion Staff Mentoring to empower individuals to develop their skills and abilities to progress, and we saw that in positive action within the PDUs inspected.
- Reoffending dashboard data is routinely collated and used to inform commissioning of services going forward, with needs relating to accommodation, finance and alcohol use identified as priorities. The region is planning investment into neurodiversity services, to support probation practitioners in increasing their understanding, and in directly working with people on probation. This contract is only just going out to tender and it will be interesting to see how this work stream develops, with the intended objective of improving people on probation's engagement and compliance with their sentence.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- Whilst it is acknowledged that the messaging to staff in the first year of service delivery has been about quality sentence management, this has yet to be evidenced as being achieved in the supervision of cases. There are self-assessment quality assurance processes in place across some PDUs but the outcomes and themes from these are not routinely collated or analysed, meaning at this point in time it is difficult for the region to articulate what the quality picture looks like across West Midlands. External audit processes and inspection are relied upon to demonstrate current progress. There is a regional quality improvement plan, launched April 2022, against which progress will be monitored; however, at the point of inspection this was only in the first quarter of delivery.
- The region is under-resourced across Quality Development Officer (QDO) grades, having only four full-time equivalent officers out of a target number of 13 across the region. Until recently, QDOs continued to work largely across both East and West Midlands regions, mirroring pre-unification arrangements. There were no QDO posts transferred from CRCs at the point of unification within the region. The current complement of QDOs has been used to implement specific training to address

previous shortfalls found in risk assessment, risk management and sentence planning. Whilst this training has been delivered to over 300 staff to date, there has been no systematic measurement or analysis to evidence if the training has had any impact on quality.

- The previous Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC model for engaging people on probation has been retained, and a comprehensive piece of work has been completed to integrate other strands of the pre-unification lived experience strategy. At this point the numbers on the peer mentor pathway remain low and the model is not embedded across all PDUs. We were advised of practitioners accessing peer mentors, specifically in the pre-release space via third-party providers; however, it is evident that there remains work to be done to bring both the engaging people on probation strategy and pathways to full fruition. It's encouraging that people on probation engagement forums are held within both the women's approved premises and the offender personality disorder pathway; however, again this needs to be evidenced on a wider scale going forward.
- There has been limited use of the Regional Outcomes and Innovations Fund (ROIF) in the initial 12 months since unification. It is understood that in part this is due to the complexities associated with competitive processes to commission services on a larger scale than the more accessible small tenders. It is acknowledged that equality monitoring data has only recently been developed. Going forward we would hope to see further analysis of gaps in services and the fund being used to improve opportunities and outcomes for the diverse needs of people on probation.
- Regional activities mapping is a useful tool in planning large-scale activities. There is a risk however, that task and finish activities lack a follow-up assessment and impact review. This was evidenced in the Birmingham North, East and Solihull PDU which was subject to a wholesale realignment in January 2022, without a follow-up review of subsequent impact.

## Staff

When we announced our inspection in March 2022, data indicated an overall staff vacancy rate of eight per cent. At that time there were no vacancies recorded across senior probation officer grades, a seven per cent vacancy rate for probation officer grades and 37 per cent for probation services officers. On a regional basis the most significant gap was within the performance and quality team, with a vacancy rate of 45 per cent.

Difficulties with both recruitment and retention have been a constant challenge over the last 12 months. This was exacerbated by incorrect staff target figures at the point of unification. The recording of workforce planning and workload management data at a local and national level remains a cause of both frustration and concern. Despite your best efforts, the workforce data for West Midlands recorded nationally is often incorrect and requires remedial action outside of your gift.

## Key strengths:

- A regional resource planning committee has been established to oversee resource decisions and prioritisation. The workforce plan on a page is impressive and delivery against this plan would see West Midlands region being able to deliver key functions confidently, although at this point there remain significant gaps in staffing numbers, specifically across administration, PSO and PO grades. There is a commitment to filling vacancies critical to service delivery, and much work has been done via both

recruitment activities and the regional staff movement framework to promote equitable workloads and promote stabilisation post-unification.

- Where risks to service delivery have become unacceptable, difficult decisions have been made and staff moves have been facilitated to ensure continued service delivery. This was evident at the point of the regional review, with staff moves being facilitated into Coventry PDU, a current red site on the prioritising probation framework. This created additional pressures across other PDUs and it is recognised there is little flex left across the region, but credit should be given for the efforts to maintain service delivery in adverse conditions.
- The region continues to navigate the problems created through an initial misalignment of target staffing figures and finance at the point of unification. This includes balancing regional control over which vacancies to fill and responding to national direction. This has come at the cost to West Midlands region being able to establish the staffing complement it would like in some of the regional roles, for example prioritising practice tutor assessor roles over QDO recruitment. However, this has been approached pragmatically with a view to the longer-term vision of developing a high-performing region.
- To date much of the recruitment activity has been led on a regional basis; however, increasingly control is being relinquished to PDUs to promote targeted recruitment. Work is underway to promote West Midlands region as an attractive employer through social media platforms and engaging with communities (colleges, universities and the Department for Work and Pensions) to encourage a diverse workforce. Two posts, specifically for applicants with lived experience, are currently being recruited and you told us increasing the number of staff with lived experience is a commitment you intend to take forward.
- The investment in Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) learners is promising, and as of May 2022 there were 174 learners undertaking the PO qualification programme. Whilst it will take time for this investment to be realised, in terms of qualified officers coming through, positive case management was evidenced within PDU inspections by learners and this gives reason for optimism.
- Notwithstanding ongoing vacancies and a high workload, there was evidence of unified administrative teams across the PDUs and a real drive by those officers to work cohesively and constructively to embed new ways of working. These officers tended to spend more time in the office than other grades of staff, and it is suggested that this, at least in part, will have enhanced the collaborative way in which they are working. It is recognised that there has now been a national steer to ensure an increased office presence of all staff, not least probation practitioners. There was evidence of this being actively supported by senior leaders, with clear communication about the expectations of all staff and managers over the forthcoming six months.
- There was a considered approach taken in the implementation of short-term sentence teams, although these remain at differing stages of implementation across the region. Enhanced through-the-gate services were maintained until January 2022 and then staff were given the option of maintaining their roles within prison or coming out to community functions.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- On a national basis the increased target staffing figures are encouraging and recognise the investment required to deliver high-quality probation services. Central

workforce planning figures held by national HQ, however, do not routinely reflect the figures held within the region. Accurate monthly vacancy figures are submitted by both PDUs and the region; however, these are then not reflected in the data returns received from the central HQ workforce planning unit. This misalignment in recording has been evidenced by recent internal HMPPS operational assurance processes and, whilst not in the gift of the region to rectify, is of significant concern and requires recognition and urgent attention.

- Based on data from January to December 2021, the attrition rate for all staff in the region was seven per cent. Regionally provided data via the West Midlands Retention Dashboard indicated that the most significant reason for leaving was resignation, and the highest number of leavers, recorded in full-time equivalent posts, were for band 3 grades, followed by band 4 grades. Highest leaving rates were for staff with 5-10 years' service. It is disappointing to see that people with experience are choosing to leave, and in the longer term this will impact on the sharing of knowledge and soft skills that is gained only through such experience.
- The most significant business risk is around recruitment and retention. The region is proactively trying to recruit staff, but retention data indicates that staff are leaving at a greater rate than are being recruited. Whilst there has been a drive to understand the reasons for leaving the service, the retention dashboard indicates that only three per cent of leavers had completed an exit interview over the last 12 months and work needs to be done by the regional HR lead to improve this.
- When we announced our inspection in March 2022, the data you provided showed average caseloads of 37.2 for POs and 45 for PSOs. This equated to a workload management tool average of 115 and 89 per cent, respectively. Practitioners across all PDUs inspected indicated that in the majority, they felt their workload was not manageable and staffing levels were insufficient. However, the caseload figures provided do not suggest this should be the case. What this data does not take into account, however, are the additional pressures created by high staff absence levels and the overall levels of change experienced over the last 12 months.
- On a regional basis, of those who responded to our questionnaire, 33 out of 58 said that their workload was 'very' or 'quite' manageable, although conversely only 10 out of 58 believed that staffing levels were sufficient.
- The learning and development tracker provides an overview of completion rates of mandatory training. As of April 2022, the completion rates for PSO grades was 64 per cent and 55 per cent across PO grades. There were significant variations across PDUs and completion of this training, alongside other demands, remains an ongoing task.
- As of May 2022, mandatory training completion rates were as follows: adult safeguarding: 73 per cent; child safeguarding: 76 per cent; domestic abuse: 73 per cent; prevent: 67 per cent. Given these relatively high completion rates, alongside additional in-house training regarding risk assessment and risk management by the QDO resource, it is disappointing that the management of risk in those cases inspected across the three PDUs was not of higher quality. This again reflects that whilst the limited QDO resource is being utilised to deliver training, there remains a case for ensuring that this is balanced with sufficient quality assurance activity to measure impact and outcomes.

## Services and interventions

Whilst we saw pockets of good practice during inspection, the implementation and delivery of sentence management did not score well across all three PDUs. Partnership working for the purposes of sharing information is strong but not utilised to its full benefit. Unpaid work teams are working hard to address backlogs accumulated during the Covid-19 period and are committed to improving from this difficult starting position. Accredited programme delivery is not currently delivering high numbers of successful completions. Structured intervention provision has been hampered by staffing issues and competing demands. Consequently, probation practitioners have not been encouraged to actively refer into this provision and delivery across the region remains low. CRS provision is established but not well utilised. All of this contributes to the picture we saw of poor implementation and delivery.

Commissioning of additional services to address specific identified needs across West Midlands region has been slow to materialise. In part, this has been impacted by civil service rules regarding tendering and contract management, which have made executing timely and consistent service provision difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

### Key strengths:

- When inspecting Warwickshire PDU, we were particularly impressed with the co-location of agencies via justice centres. This led to the appropriate sharing of both safeguarding and domestic abuse information in a timely way to inform both pre-sentence reports and initial assessments. This is where we saw service delivery at its best, in terms of managing risk in the early stages of sentencing; unfortunately, this was not then capitalised upon through the full duration of the sentence.
- It is recognised that the justice centre delivery model is not viable across all PDUs due to the number of police forces and local authorities with which the region engages. That said, we saw evidence of trail-blazing activities to enhance the sharing of safeguarding information across some local authorities, which in turn has led to a commitment by all to ensure this information is available and shared to improve risk assessment and management. This remains in its early stages, but there is a commitment to taking this forward with partners and the outcomes will be of interest in future inspections. Similar work is also being completed with police colleagues and West Midlands region has funded administration posts to increase the timeliness of domestic abuse checks across some PDUs. This again represents a promising foundation upon which to build.
- Accommodation for people on probation is an ongoing area of need for many across West Midlands region. Following unification, CRS for accommodation tenancy support have been provided by NACRO, although this has not been without issues. Prior to unification, a dedicated PSO resource was allocated to improve accommodation outcomes. This resource has continued to be funded and forms part of the referral pathways that probation practitioners have when supporting their cases with accommodation issues. We saw evidence of an extensive business case for investing heavily in accommodation providers; however, the available resource in terms of bed space for people on probation fell short of what was required to meet demand and these commissioned services have not been taken forward into the next financial year. Whilst this outcome is disappointing, it is recognised that this was not for the want of trying, and in part these services have supported an average rate of accommodation on release of 80 per cent. Community Accommodation Services Tier 3, funded by the Ministry of Justice, are due for roll out within the region by the end

of 2022 and probation practitioners are encouraged to make use of all other options that remain available whilst waiting for this new provision.

- There is a strong operational lead driving forward the resettlement model, not least ensuring that as many pre-release services are accessed in a timely manner to support people on probation released into the community. They have a clear understanding of the benefits that engaging with the third sector and CRS brings and are driving this forward through early identification of issues and promoting referrals into appropriate pre-release services.
- As previously indicated, the enhanced through-the-gate model was maintained in the West Midlands until January this year. Since then they have been incorporated into a pre-release service in all local resettlement prisons, as well as HM Prison (HMP) Swinfen Hall and HMP Stafford, with an enhanced service within the women's estate at HMP Drake Hall.
- Short-term sentence teams are currently being established across West Midlands region, with each PDU responsible for standing these up in line with three specific phases, with a target date of September 2022 for implementation. There is a clear strategic direction supporting the establishment of these teams, although the challenge to stand up new teams whilst recruitment and retention is problematic is not underestimated.
- It is a credit to the West Midlands region that the lead SPO for women has been fundamental in the development of a toolkit for women which has now been rolled-out nationally. It is also recognised that, just at the point of this regional review, the region was successful in bidding for a problem-solving court for women to be established at Birmingham magistrates' court. This is a joint venture with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the courts, and other agencies. The impact of this will be interesting to see going forward.
- Standalone unpaid work function teams have been established, operating on a regional basis. This is relatively new and still being embedded, however there is a clear strategic directive for how this will work going forward. Passionate and committed heads of operations are leading on unpaid work and they demonstrated a real desire to both establish and maintain a high-performing, high-quality approach to service delivery. This included innovative ways of working, for instance establishing a community hub for unpaid work delivery in Walsall.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- Caseload data is gathered regarding protected characteristics, summary of reoffending, criminogenic need, acquisitive crime cohorts, sentence tracking and equality monitoring to highlight areas of disproportionality. With the exception of re-offending data, at the time of inspection there was limited evidence of how this information was then being analysed and used to inform decision-making about service provision at a local level or commissioning at a regional level.
- Pre-unification, NPS West Midlands had commissioned several providers with a specific aim of improving outcomes for people on probation from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. This included both training and support for staff, as well as direct services for people on probation. Training was offered to both legacy NPS and CRC staff pre-unification, and services continued after unification. A review of these commissioned services was completed by the HMPPS evidence-based practice team, at West Midlands region's request. At the point of this review however, six out of the seven commissioned services, with responsibility for direct work with people



on probation, had not commenced and therefore there was little by way of analysis of impact. Where there were positive outcomes identified, you were unable to renew funding due to the ceiling of £10,000 expenditure with any one organisation, without triggering a fully competitive process. At this point there remain limited commissioned services in operation to support the specific needs of black, Asian and ethnic minority groups.

- Three events were commissioned across the region to support local services to showcase their work and increase understanding for practitioners in regard to what services are available locally to support the needs of people on probation. This has not however been without some limitations, given restrictions on referrals into services that are not funded by the region. Access into such services is therefore reliant upon self-referral by people on probation, and again, the impact at this point is not evidenced.
- It is recognised that expenditure of ROIF monies in line with your initial allocation was planned, prioritising accommodation services. Additional monies were then made available, but you were not able to spend these given the timescales required by procurement regulations. It is hoped going forward that additional services, to meet specific identified needs, will be commissioned pro-actively to improve outcomes and become embedded in practice.
- CRS are in place across four pathways: education, training and employment (ETE); personal wellbeing; accommodation; and women's services. NACRO provides accommodation services. This was the most heavily referred to service and the demand for accommodation support does not correlate with what is available. Data for March 2021 to April 2022 indicated they were operating at a start rate of only 28 per cent of referrals – a frustration to both the provider and probation practitioners. Inappropriate or incomplete referrals were cited, as well as a lack of tangible outcomes (that is, in securing accommodation) as a barrier to improved start rates, and confidence of probation practitioners in the service.
- Despite regional communications and all staff access to information outlining the services offered by CRS providers, their role is not consistently understood. Regional briefings have outlined what CRS providers offer, and how to make referrals into the services, but referrals to accommodation, personal wellbeing and ETE provision remain lower than anticipated. There seems to be a resistance by probation practitioners to utilising the services available and this resistance needs to be understood. This has significantly impacted on PDU case inspection findings, where inspectors found very little intervention being delivered.
- CRS women's provision is delivered across the West Midlands region but specialist women-specific probation teams across the region are limited. Women-specific teams operate across the Black Country, including co-location in women centres, but are yet to be realised across the region as a whole and there is limited detail about what this will look like within sentence management. The region is awaiting the refresh of the women's strategy nationally; however, they have in post a part-time strategic lead to take forward this work, supported by an SPO. Whilst data is collated regarding sentencing and outcomes for women, there has been no specific analysis of this to date. This is an area to be addressed going forward.
- Backlogs in the delivery of unpaid work are a challenge for probation services nationally as they recover from the impact of Covid-19. As a region you are acutely aware of this and are engaging in both regional and national activity to deal with outstanding unpaid work requirements, imposed by courts both pre, and during

the pandemic. To date the multiple application process for court extensions to unpaid orders has dealt with just under 550 cases, with a further 360 cases to be heard. Of those left to be heard, 150 have had to be delayed due to Birmingham magistrates' court being closed since June 2022 for health and safety reasons. In addition to this there remains a further 600 individual applications to be processed. In total it is estimated that this will lead to an increase of 200,000 hours of unpaid work to be delivered. Recruitment to increase supervisor capacity is underway, but the challenge this increase in hours will represent is not underestimated.

- The use of ETE as part of unpaid work orders has yet to be fully utilised and remains an area for development across West Midlands region. Whilst it is recognised that there are several resources available to you, not least those provided via CRS ETE providers and co-financing organisation (CFO3) provisions, take up remains low and needs to be addressed.
- Successful completion rates for accredited programmes, at the point of inspection announcement, were low. The completion rates for sexual offending accredited programmes in the previous 12 months was recorded as 27 per cent. Disappointingly this was even lower for general offending accredited programmes, at 17 per cent, although we note the challenges and limitations in completing accredited programmes within Covid-19 restrictions. When these numbers were explored with the strategic lead for programmes there remained some confusion with regard to the numbers of requirements imposed, those waiting to commence, and actual commencements. Data at the point of the inspection's announcement indicated approximately 62 per cent of all cases requiring an accredited programme intervention were yet to commence. Going forward, we would expect to see a greater degree of management oversight from the regional programmes team regarding how these interventions are progressed.

## **Information and facilities**

Improved strategic relationships have been demonstrated following the recent joint targeted area inspection within Solihull and you engage with partners well on a regional basis for the purposes of information sharing. The model of co-location with partners is a particular strength. There has been significant investment in your own estates over the last 12 months and refurbishment has been welcomed, although some deficits in accessibility remain. OneNote and Microsoft Teams are both used effectively for the storing and dissemination of policy, practice guidance and performance and quality information. Whilst we saw evidence of the collation of data across a number of dashboards, the analysis and review of this information to drive activity has yet to be delivered.

## **Key strengths:**

- Strategic relationships with partner agencies to facilitate information sharing are positive, particularly in co-located justice centres, although there remains work to be done to translate this information sharing into routine risk assessment and risk management practice.
- Business risks are understood. This is evidenced both at a regional and PDU level, with appropriate business continuity plans in place. You have a strong and well established team across corporate services, health and safety, and the business strategy change functions. These working relationships pre-date unification and it is evident that this has placed leaders in a good position to bring together teams

from both legacy organisations, and ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to facilitate this.

- There has been a drive on improving the estates and infrastructure, with a total investment of £7 million pounds. This has seen improvement works being planned or completed across 20 out of 22 offices within the region. This is of benefit to both staff and people on probation.
- The West Midlands regional business plan identifies practice quality as a key regional objective for the year. A quality improvement plan is in place which outlines key areas of activity that will be undertaken regionally, although performance against this ongoing plan is yet to be evidenced. It is informed by the business plan, TOM and the national performance & quality strategy.
- There is a dedicated OneNote resource, informed by policy, research and findings from audit and inspection activity, to support probation practitioners in developing their practice knowledge. Information is presented in a variety of formats, including audio video briefings, written guidance and more accessible 'top tips' one-page documents, and covers a range of priority topics to enhance service delivery. Alongside this there is also a 'My Community' page which supports practitioners in understanding what is available locally, and a 'Quality Matters' page promotes effective practice development.

#### **Key areas for improvement:**

- Investment in estates has been recognised as a positive across the region as a whole, although concerns remain in regard to suitable office access within Birmingham North, East and Solihull. Whilst you continue to pursue the actions required to improve access, we understand that the solutions are outside of your control.
- Performance and management dashboards are available via Microsoft Teams and provide core data sets on both a PDU and regional basis. There were clear indications that the emphasis remains on quality rather than driving a target culture, although an acknowledgement that at some point performance will need to become a driver for activity. The measurement of quality is not particularly well defined, with wider HMPPS audit and inspection activity being cited. Self-assessment quality assurance processes are being used in some PDUs, although this was not always resulting in any type of collective understanding or learning across themes. The move to the regional case audit tool will enable reports to be run to better understand themes.
- There are clear processes for performance and quality input into several meeting structures, including operational leadership team meetings, head of operations and heads of PDU meetings, although the content across each of these meetings appears to differ, depending on the particular focus in time. PDU deputy heads lead on performance and quality within their PDUs/functional lead areas and in turn they support SPOs to deliver quality work within their area. As we have seen from the case inspection outcomes in the three PDUs we inspected, this remains an area for improvement. Further work is required to translate what quality means in practice, particularly in relation to keeping people safe, as evidenced by case inspection findings in the PDUs.
- Whilst there is now a comprehensive suite of data collection tools and dashboards, we did not see evidence of how this was being analysed to drive service improvements at either a PDU or regional level.

- In all three PDUs inspected, management oversight was effective in too few cases. SPOs and the performance and quality team play a critical role in undertaking assurance activities. It is recognised that there is a limited QDO resource to support this work, and that is undoubtably impacting on how improving quality is currently being delivered.

## **Statutory victim work**

We looked at 13 statutory victim cases and interviewed the strategic lead for victims work in West Midlands region. We reviewed case records to look at: whether initial contact with victims encouraged engagement with the victim contact scheme; whether information and communication exchange supported the safety of victims; and if pre-release contact allowed victims to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release. Of the 13 cases we reviewed, eight related to offenders who had received their sentence three years or less prior to our fieldwork.

### **Key strengths:**

- Initial contact with victims, following the person on probation's sentence, was timely and appropriately personalised in all cases, although two of the eight cases reviewed did not receive adequate advice about other available sources of support or have it clearly outlined what action they could take if the person on probation made unwanted contact with them. It was considered that the initial contact with victims encouraged engagement in seven out of the eight cases.
- Overall communication exchange to support victim safety was appropriate in seven out of the eight cases, which included information exchange between victim liaison officers (VLOs) and probation 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. There was also evidence of all victims being supported to make victim personal statements in parole applications where this was applicable.
- Views expressed by the victim were treated appropriately and in all applicable cases contact with the victim allowed them to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release.
- 'No-contact requirements' were imposed in all cases where this was considered necessary, although the victims were not always advised of these conditions. It is recognised however that the no-contact requirements imposed may not relate directly to the victims involved.
- Funding has been secured, via ROIF, to run focus groups with domestic abuse and hate crime victims to improve the understanding of what is required in supporting the victims of specifically targeted offences. These have yet to be facilitated but offer an opportunity for proactive engagement going forward.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- Inspectors were unable to ascertain any contribution made by the VLOs into the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), although there was assurance by the strategic lead for both victims and MAPPA that VLO attendance and contributions into these arrangements were standard procedure and therefore this may relate more to a recording issue.

- The management of statutory victim contact work within West Midlands region is overseen by the regional head of public protection. There are five VLO teams established across the region, overseen by two SPOs. There are 18.7 full-time equivalent VLOs, supported by five administration officers. Target staffing figures have recently increased and there remains a shortfall of 8.6 VLOs and 4.5 administration officers.
- Currently, there is no workforce management tool for VLOs, and caseloads average 300 cases. Allocation of new cases takes into account the level of active involvement required, with it being acknowledged that some cases will only require an annual contact letter.

## Learning from serious further offence investigations

Serious further offence (SFO) investigations are completed across West Midlands region by the SFO team, directly reporting to the head of performance and quality. This was one of the functions that remained shared across East and West Midlands post-unification, although we are advised this has now been segmented into respective regions, and recent recruitment has increased the number of SFO reviewers in West Midlands region from three full-time equivalent reviewers to five, supported by one administrator.

The deputy head of the serious further offending team quality assures the SFO reviews before submission to the central team. At the point of unification, there was an initial increase in SFOs requiring review (due to a transfer of legacy CRC reviews), without the full target complement of reviewers. As a consequence, SFO learning has been impacted and there has been limited opportunity to deliver briefings to staff on a wider scale, although the SFO team have continued to deliver a specific input with learners on the PQiP programme.

Middle managers have been briefed on the SFO framework, and SFO 'single point of contact' officers liaise with PDUs, interventions, courts, prisons and victim teams directly to ensure any specific learning points are shared. The ethos within West Midlands region is to encourage SFO reviews to be approached as a learning opportunity, and not to be viewed as a negative process. This was reflected previously in our thematic inspection of the SFO investigation and review process, and this seems to have continued:

*'Most areas recognised that the SFO review process raised anxieties for staff. The West Midlands NPS division SFO review team were especially conscious of this. They developed a concerted approach involving team briefings and improved interview technique. Although this has not dispelled all the fears of operational staff, it has increased the understanding that learning is part of the process, and this was evident during our inspection'.*

(HM Inspectorate of Probation – A thematic inspection of the Serious Further Offences (SFO) investigation and review process, May 2020).

During the review period March 2021 to March 2022, a total of 16 SFO reviews were completed and 15 were quality assured. Of these reviews, four were rated as 'outstanding', eight as 'good', and three as 'requires improvement'. Insufficient quality and frequency of management oversight, insufficient and inconsistent enforcement action, quality of Offender Assessment System assessments and insufficient evidence of professional curiosity were identified as common themes for practice improvement, which was reflected in many of the cases we reviewed during our inspections.

## Summary

In our PDU inspections, we rated Birmingham North, East and Solihull 'Inadequate', Staffordshire and Stoke 'Inadequate' and Warwickshire 'Requires improvement'. In all we saw good evidence of leaders and staff wanting to do their best. However, the quality of probation service delivery needs regional and national oversight to enable staff to undertake the role to the standard required to keep people safe. Staff need to understand what quality case management looks like and to understand the key priorities against which they need to deliver. They also need to make the most of the available interventions to address the needs of people on probation and manage risk of harm. We are seeing an increasingly new workforce in post. To ensure staff are confident in their roles, they need experienced and available middle managers to provide reflective oversight to enable learning and understanding of what it means to be professionally curious, in order to manage risk of harm and keep others safe.

Our recommendations from the inspected PDUs are set out in Annexe one. I look forward to receiving your regional action plan in due course, to respond to our recommendations. I wish you and all your staff well in undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely

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

## **Annexe one – Recommendations**

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

### **Birmingham North, East and Solihull PDU should:**

1. urgently review the quality of practice in all cases affected by the structural alignment
2. improve the quality of work to assess, plan, manage and review risk of harm
3. improve the effectiveness of management oversight and quality assurance of all casework
4. ensure that all operational staff undertake safeguarding and domestic abuse training
5. improve the quality of sentence management for women.

### **The Probation Service – West Midlands region should:**

6. ensure that management information in relation to CRS referrals is available for PDU managers and analysed effectively to increase the use of available services
7. ensure that smarter working arrangements support effective communication and professional development.

### **HMPPS should:**

8. review the refer and monitor processes between CRS providers and probation practitioners to improve and expedite information exchange and access to services.

### **Staffordshire and Stoke PDU should:**

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan, manage and review risk of harm
2. improve the effectiveness of management oversight and quality assurance of all casework
3. engage with people on probation to inform service delivery
4. improve local arrangements to monitor and analyse performance data regarding equality and diversity, and identify any identifiable disproportionality
5. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided and accessed in all cases.

### **The Probation Service – West Midlands region should:**

6. ensure that management information in relation to CRS referrals is available for PDU managers and analysed effectively to increase the use of available services
7. ensure that smarter working arrangements support effective communication and professional development.

**Warwickshire PDU should:**

1. ensure existing information sharing arrangements are utilised fully to support the overall management of risk
2. improve the quality of work to assess, plan, manage and review risk of harm
3. improve the effectiveness of management oversight and quality assurance of all casework
4. enhance understanding by probation practitioners of how CRS provision supports their work with people on probation.

**The Probation Service – West Midlands region should:**

5. ensure that smarter working arrangements support the delivery of quality probation practice
6. routinely share and analyse CRS referral data to support PDU delivery and engagement
7. review the availability of reporting facilities within the Rugby area.











**HMPPS should:**

8. review the current arrangements for CRS providers to access probation case management systems
9. review, refer and monitor processes to promote effective information exchange between CRS providers and probation practitioners.



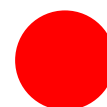
## Annexe two – PDU ratings

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:

<b>Birmingham North, East and Solihull PDU</b>		Score	<b>2/27</b>
Fieldwork took place in June 2022			
<b>Overall rating</b>		<b>Inadequate</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>			
1.1	Leadership	Inadequate	
1.2	Staff	Requires improvement	
1.3	Services	Inadequate	
1.4	Information and facilities	Requires improvement	
<b>2. Court work and case supervision</b>			
2.1	Court work	Inadequate	
2.2	Assessment	Inadequate	
2.3	Planning	Inadequate	
2.4	Implementation and delivery	Inadequate	
2.5	Reviewing	Inadequate	

**Overall rating**

**Inadequate**



**1. Organisational delivery**

1.1 Leadership

**Inadequate**



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

**Inadequate**



2.2 Assessment

**Inadequate**



2.3 Planning

**Inadequate**



2.4 Implementation and delivery

**Inadequate**



2.5 Reviewing

**Inadequate**



**Warwickshire PDU**

Fieldwork took place in June 2022

Score **7/27****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

Good

**2. Court work and case supervision**

2.1 Court work

Good



2.2 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.3 Planning

Inadequate



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Inadequate

