



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

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To:
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cc:
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Dear Kilvinder,

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

We have now completed the inspection of: Hammersmith, Fulham, Kensington, Chelsea, and Westminster (HFKCW); Lambeth; Ealing and Hillingdon; Lewisham and Bromley; Newham; and Barking, Dagenham and Havering 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

In June 2021, with the national unification of probation services, the London probation region was created combining the former London National Probation Service (NPS) and services provided by the London Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). Set in the context of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenge this posed has been enormous.

The strategic direction of the service is clearly set with an emphasis on developing a high-quality service. There are effective partnership arrangements and initiatives with a wide range of organisations across London, focused primarily on both the most dangerous offenders and some of the most difficult-to-reach individuals.

Despite this, the quality of frontline practice observed across the six PDUs we inspected raises questions about: how effective this work is in driving everyday casework; how clearly messages about priorities are communicated; and how willing and able staff at the frontline are able to act upon them.

Key strengths

- London probation region has a clear strategic focus on creating an effective and high-performing organisation. The regional reducing reoffending plan (2022-25) outlines the organisation's objectives over the forthcoming years, maps out its involvement with key partner agencies in the region and reflects the national objectives of both the Ministry of Justice and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Key priorities for 2022-23, broken down to reflect the key functions of operations and delivery, people, and corporate, are also clearly identified and reflected across each of the six PDUs we visited during this inspection. In our surveys, 72 per cent of probation practitioners across the inspected PDUs (from a total of 116 responses), and 77 per cent of regional staff (from 154 survey returns) said that the organisation prioritised quality and adherence to evidence.
- Transition and change have been managed through the London change board. A range of sub-groups and work streams, facilitated by heads of operations and monitored against identified business plans, the regional reducing reoffending plan and identified key objectives, feed into the overarching board which works well.
- The region is, where it is able, responsive to identified shortfalls in services. As an example, a regional lead for court work was recently appointed following concerns regarding the range and quality of information shared with sentencers and the lack of staffing due to vacancies in some court teams. The creation of this role, subsequent liaison with magistrates' representatives and an action plan of work to be taken forward appear to be both appropriate and effective. A Resettlement and OMiC (offender management in custody) lead has also been recruited for similar reasons (see section covering resettlement) but only took up post the week prior to our review fieldwork.
- Diversity and inclusion are particular strengths in London which are prioritised by and driven by you at every level. London is the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales, with around 57 per cent of the population identifying as other than 'white-British'. Overall, the profile of London's probation staff is 52 per cent identifying as black, Asian and minority ethnic. Five extra staff have been recruited above the target operating model (TOM) to deliver the equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging strategy, which includes a range of initiatives. Included in these are work with staff, people on probation and managers to develop an understanding of feelings and perceptions of inclusivity and to develop effective means of responding to them. The 'bridging the cultural divide' committee and series of sub-groups developed by staff for staff ensures effective feedback to the overarching equalities board. Furthermore, the 'golden thread' campaign focuses on ensuring the quality and accuracy of data relating to the diversity of people on probation and supporting appropriate specialist services via commissioned contracts for those who are disproportionately represented. Examples of such work include projects for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers and for people on probation who are ex-armed forces.
- There are good partnership arrangements across London, in particular with MOPAC (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime), the Metropolitan Police (MET) and the Greater London Authority. Several initiatives have been established with MOPAC, including the Youth Transitions Hub in Newham, two GPS (Global Positioning System) tagging pilots focusing on knife crime and high risk of harm domestic abuse perpetrators, and the expansion of women's services to include co-commissioning with the NHS (mental health support) and local authorities. A further initiative undertaken with the MET includes the setting up of the Violence and Harm Reduction Unit which is focusing on domestic violence and open space violence, including

serious group offending. These initiatives are essential to the effective long-term assessment and management of many particularly high-profile and high-risk groups of people on probation.

Areas for improvement

- Under the prioritising probation framework (PPF)¹ London had 12 of its 18 PDUs identified as red sites in October 2022. A chronic lack of staffing across the region is the primary reason for this situation. The PPF is nationally driven and offers very little by way of support to those areas applying for 'red' status under the framework. Further consideration needs to be given by HMPPS as to whether the model is fit for purpose and what further help can be given to London probation service to manage this chronic situation.
- Overall, governance arrangements by the region are structured through the three heads of operations (HoOps) linked to the London PDUs, primarily via the three district performance accountability meetings which are held monthly. While the approach is appropriate, the span of responsibility each HoOp has is substantial given the 18 PDUs making up the London probation region. Given the paucity of effective case management observed across the PDUs we inspected, clearer and more effective feedback loops are required to ensure that regional leaders have a clear picture of local delivery.
- Despite regional initiatives to improve the quality of probation delivery, four of the six PDU inspections were rated overall as 'Inadequate', with the remaining two assessed as 'Requiring improvement'. Central to these ratings are the findings in relation to the assessment and management of risk of harm, with up to 85 per cent of the cases we inspected being assessed as insufficient against our key questions on risk of harm in some areas (HFKCW in relation to assessment). Similarly, out of 223 cases inspected across the six PDUs that required management oversight, in only 51 was that oversight assessed as effective. Further work is urgently required to ensure priority is given to the management of risk of harm across London and that quality assurance is consistently and effectively undertaken. Questions must remain as to the current assurance checks in place.
- Following the HFKCW inspection we raised an organisational alert. Our concerns related primarily to the lack of management of a large number of people on probation whose cases were unallocated, and in some cases were not being seen sufficiently frequently, despite them being assessed as high risk of serious harm or coming under the management of the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs) model. The situation was in place because of a lack of staff, but the level of management oversight was chronically lacking. While initial steps have been taken to improve the circumstances, with extra staff drafted in from services outside London probation region, and a review of all unallocated and MAPPAs cases, it remains essential that checks are in place to reduce the risk of a similar situation arising here or elsewhere in the future.
- The extent to which staff across London understand what to prioritise, how and when remains unclear. In our survey of staff, only 56 per cent of those across the six

¹ The probation prioritising framework was introduced initially as an alternative to the exceptional delivery model in place during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has since been used to assist regions in identifying areas of flexibility in response to capacity and workload, regardless of the reason, ensuring the most critical aspects of risk management are retained while other aspects of work can be reduced or paused.

PDUs and 59 per cent undertaking regional roles said that change was communicated and implemented effectively 'always' or 'most of the time'. A better understanding as to why this is the case would help the region ensure that messages are better understood and built into practice by operational staff.

- Despite some positive initiatives in relation to diversity and inclusion, work relating to engagement with people on probation requires further attention. In our own survey of 471 people on probation across the six PDUs we inspected, although 74 per cent said they had been able to have contact with the probation practitioner when they wanted, 83 per cent said they could have conversations in private and 71 per cent said they could have appointments at a time suitable to them, only 30 per cent said they had been asked by the service about their experience of being on probation.

Staff

The shortfall of staff across nearly every element of frontline probation work is the single most significant risk factor for London probation services. This has been an ongoing concern for several years. Although we were told that the target staffing level has increased by over 1,300 in London and that the actual number of staff in post is 680 higher than five years ago, this contrasts with official figures suggesting that the net workforce has declined in the last 12 months (from June 2021) by 237 staff across London (HMPPS Workforce Statistics Bulletin, England and Wales, 30 June 2022).

In both our last two reports (of London division NPS² and London CRC³) – both in 2019– we noted perennial issues of recruitment, retention and high sickness levels. The situation has, however, deteriorated since then. At the time of this inspection announcement the overall vacancy rate stood at 23 per cent but this fluctuates almost daily. There are vacancies across virtually every role, function and PDU, but at its extreme, for instance in HFKCW where the overall vacancy rate was 43 per cent at the time of our fieldwork, effective services simply cannot be delivered, despite the enormous efforts of staff. High vacancy rates are compounded by high levels of sickness, around 17 days a year, along with an attrition rate which, during our regional fieldwork, stood at 24 per cent.

A vicious circle exists whereby high staff absences lead to high caseloads (only 25 per cent of staff across PDUs told us their caseload was manageable) leading staff to look for alternative employment. Under the PPF, which prioritises the most critical elements of case work, many staff find less satisfaction in the work they are doing and suffer increased burnout, which increases the likelihood of them looking elsewhere for work. The high cost of living in London means the salaries offered to main grade staff are also lower than many alternative options.

At the time of the regional fieldwork there were in excess of 500 vacancies across London.

² [An inspection of London division of the National Probation Service \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

³ [An inspection of London Community Rehabilitation Company \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

Key strengths:

- Various attempts are being made to improve the current staffing situation, including numerous recruitment fairs, pursuing detached duty options from other regions and services, and exploring enhancements for staff joining the service. Overtime has also been offered to staff across London, the cost of which, in April this year, reached a peak of over £200,000.
- Given the size and complexity of London, the current TOM may not adequately meet the needs of the service. Currently a bid to enhance the number of staff across a number of workstreams is being considered. Many of these are at a higher grading than main grade staff and should be easier to recruit to. If agreed, this will enable greater flexibility for the service and enhance its ability to deliver the service it aspires to.
- At the time of the inspection announcement there were 296 Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees in post (data from March 2022). It is anticipated that by March 2023 this number will have risen to around 400. While this is a positive approach to developing the workforce, identifying sufficient staff-in-post to act as mentors will become an even greater challenge. It is encouraging that alternative approaches are being considered, including an 'academy' with support from HMPPS.
- Across the region many administrative tasks have been allocated to the two hubs, in Norwich and Bromley. The hub in Norwich has not experienced the same staffing issues as in London and is an effective approach to ensuring the continuing operation of key functions.

Key areas for improvement:

- The senior leadership team is acutely aware of the challenges around recruitment and retention. The recruitment and retention plan 2022-23 outlines a clear approach to managing the shortfalls, with many actions identified to be undertaken in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice's central recruitment team. The workforce planning group meets monthly to review progress against identified objectives, with the People Board reviewing workforce planning as part of the wider review of all aspects of staff recruitment and development. While this model works well to track progress against objectives, further work is required to bring about a significant improvement in the current circumstances.
- Despite the capacity to increase the number of PQiPs, there remains concern as to whether the increase projected for March 2023 will be met. In the last recruitment round in April 2022, only around 50 PQiPs were recruited from a target of 65.
- The range and focus of training for staff is broadly appropriate, with a particular focus on key issues. Seventy-five per cent of probation officers and probation service officers have completed domestic abuse training, 74 per cent child protection and safeguarding training and 68 per cent adult safeguarding training, and in our PDU staff survey 71 per cent said that a culture of learning and continuous improvement was actively promoted. National role training packs have also been translated into bespoke London options. However, despite this there remains some concern, given our casework findings, about how much of this training has been taken on board by staff. Similarly, when staff are under intense pressure to meet the demands of their cases, training is often the first area to suffer. More work is needed to better understand both of these issues.

- Further work is necessary from HMPPS to resolve the perennial concern of delays in the vetting process. Across all the PDUs we visited, and again during our regional fieldwork, we heard accounts of potential new staff leaving during the vetting process because of delays.
- Unnecessary anxieties are being caused to some key staff whose jobs are being re-evaluated which may result in them being downgraded. This includes both facilitators of accredited programmes (and related interventions) as well as victim liaison officers. We were told that this could result in programme facilitators losing as much as £10,000 a year. In the case of the latter group, we were also told that a number of staff were working via agency contracts because this was more lucrative.
- Quality assurance arrangements across all the PDUs we visited were insufficient. With only three of the scheduled 18 quality development officers in post – a decision based, understandably, on needing to prioritise frontline staff (each of whom are presently focused on supporting individuals) – the role of quality assurance has fallen almost exclusively on senior probation officers. However, this is having only limited effect. Further consideration needs to be given as to whether the level of support to staff is sufficient and whether staff have the necessary skills to undertake the work required for a given case.

Services and interventions

The needs of people on probation across London are well understood by the service. Provision is being developed, via the use of grants through the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund, to provide services for minority groups identified as disproportionately represented across the region.

The quality of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) provision has been mixed and not all staff appear to understand what is available. While referral processes are improving, there remains a disconnect between what staff believe is available and them actually accessing the necessary services for people on probation.

Ensuring that frontline staff undertake appropriate safeguarding and police enquiries is a priority for the region and while recent negotiations with the police are positive, the completion of domestic abuse enquiries needs to be better managed.

Resettlement services, like many others, are severely hampered by the lack of staff, compounded by limited resources in PDUs. Too many cases are not being managed sufficiently well. The appointment of a lead manager for this work is encouraging but considerable effort will be required to address the shortfalls.

The delivery of unpaid work is developing well given limited staffing, and the management of the backlog is well organised. The development of the 'Cleanse and Expect' programme is a positive initiative. A greater focus on managing risk factors presented by those attending unpaid work placements is required.

Accredited programmes and structured interventions are also managed reasonably well and a focus on the backlog of cases caused by the pandemic is appropriate. Attrition rates remain high and the recent focus on better engagement with probation practitioners to improve engagement is appropriate.

Key strengths:

- There is a good overall analysis of the needs of people on probation in London which is drawn from NDelius and OASys completions. This is used as the basis for both the service delivery of CRS and commissioned/co-commissioned services. Information is also broken down by protected characteristic and geography in order to inform the 'golden thread' initiative (see Leadership) and to monitor disproportionality.
- Following the publication in August 2021 of the Oldfield Report⁴ which identified the need for HMPPS to use grants rather than contracts for services of less than £1million, London probation service has moved to create a procurement portal to facilitate the process. Currently a large number of separate organisations have registered an interest, with the roll out of grants likely in early 2023. Commissioning arrangements are well established, and a number of projects have already been commissioned, including work mentoring Bangladeshi men in Tower Hamlets.
- Overall, the implementation of CRS across London since unification has been mixed. Almost 15,000 referrals were received across London in the first 12 months of delivery, with some, such as women's services and those for accommodation support, oversubscribed from their initial projected demand while others have been undersubscribed. Many staff remain frustrated that, although commissioned centrally, there is no obligation for service providers to produce outcome data which makes their evaluation difficult to judge. Referral process have improved over the last 12 months as has information from probation practitioners to service providers.

Key areas for improvement:

- Despite a clear probation commissioning strategy and development objectives, many co-commissioned services are managed through the 32 London boroughs, which do not align in most cases with PDU areas. Consequently, some individuals may be able to access certain provision within their borough yet others, within the same PDU area but in a different borough, may not.
- CRS were not always understood by PDU staff and in some cases, staff were not referring to services because they did not feel the services met the needs of people on probation.
- Of the 187 staff interviewed during PDU inspections, 86 per cent said that there was a sufficient range of services available to meet the needs and risks of the person on probation whose case was being reviewed. However, of the 248 cases we reviewed across the six PDUs we inspected, only 39 per cent (97) were deemed to have delivered services most likely to reduce reoffending and desistance. This equates with what we found in our survey of people on probation where only 38 per cent said they were able to access services relevant to their personal needs. This disjoint between probation practitioner perceptions and effective practice requires exploration and attention.
- Not enough safeguarding and domestic abuse enquiries are being made to safely manage risks of serious harm from people under probation supervision. For domestic abuse checks, this was primarily due to concerns raised by the MET about the resources necessary to undertake the work, which meant they restricted checks to those cases that met specific criteria (i.e. high or very high risk of harm cases or where there was a history of abuse). This impacted significantly on the ability of practitioners to effectively manage both actual and potential risk. It is encouraging

⁴ [Review of the Dynamic Framework of the National Probation Service - Richard Oldfield.pdf \(clinks.org\)](#)

to note that recent negotiations with the MET have produced a short-term work-around which, while not ideal, does offer a more manageable position. Longer term, probation staff are being recruited to the Violence and Harm Reduction Unit who will be able to access police intelligence systems themselves and undertake such enquiries on behalf of London probation service. A further alleged stumbling block related to whether enquiries can be undertaken on those with no history of domestic abuse under Article 8 of the 1998 Human Rights Act. This has not been raised as an issue in other regions we have inspected and the legal position around this requires urgent clarification between the MET and the London probation region, to ensure appropriate information sharing takes place to sufficiently keep people safe. Ensuring staff are aware of their obligation to request police and children's services information on cases at the point of assessment remains a key objective for senior leaders.

- Staff shortfalls are impacting substantially on resettlement and OMiC provision across London and the ten prisons within it. Prisons are still recovering from Covid-19 and insufficient keyworkers are in place, compounded by only around 45 per cent of staff in custody locations undertaking the pre-release function being in post. At the time of the regional fieldwork there was a backlog of 436 start-of-custody OASys assessments with only 88 completed in August. The situation is compounded by the regular delay in the allocation of resettlement cases prior to their release and in some cases such delays can be weeks after release. Many staff do not fully understand how prisons function and what their roles are, exacerbated further by new staff not having been able to undertake prison placements during their training because of the pandemic. This was reflected in our PDU inspections where only 46 out of 116 relevant cases that we reviewed across the six PDUs we inspected had a proportionate level of contact with the prisoner before release. In only 35 out of 99 cases were the key resettlement or desistance needs assessed before release and in only 32 out of 101 cases did the probation practitioner assess key risks of harm prior to release.
- 'Senior regional and prison managers attend the regional custody/resettlement steering group which is held regularly along with the pre-release implementation board. Both are used as a means to try to find resolutions to these shortfalls. This and the recent appointment of a lead regional manager are early steps towards improvement. Nevertheless, a clear prioritisation framework is still required to manage the current limitations.

Unpaid work

Key strengths

- Unpaid work is well organised and managed across the three districts of London, with three district managers and six senior probation officers responsible for the management of stand-alone unpaid work cases and liaison with probation practitioners within PDUs. Overall, as of 02 October 2022, the service was delivering around 13,000 hours a week, equating to approximately 90 per cent of the pre-pandemic level.
- Despite shortfalls in staffing levels, increases in attendance by people on probation have been achieved through an increase in the range and numbers of projects, with at least some in all 32 London boroughs. The easing of pandemic restrictions has also meant that more people can now be transported in vans and higher numbers can be accommodated on specific projects.

- The service has also improved efficiency through the development of the 'Cleanse and Expect' programme, a data management system run through NDelius which allows managers and probation practitioners: to look at the profile of individuals and their pattern of attendance and engagement; and to project the likely take up of services. This has enabled the service to improve delivery and to target instructions without impacting significantly on standdown rates which remain steady at around two per cent. The programme, while developed by the London team is, apparently, being considered for use nationally.
- Education, training and employment (ETE) provision as part of unpaid work provision is provided at a steady rate of around seven per cent. While this is not particularly high, the current focus is on ensuring that its delivery is targeted to need rather than simply to account for ETE hours. This is nevertheless an area which is planned to increase in forthcoming months.
- As part of the backlog plan, London has now managed to obtain extensions (via bulk listings) of all but five of their category D cases (any sentenced from 16 March 2019 to 30 June 2020) at magistrates' courts. Seven of the 10 Crown Courts have also agreed to bulk-list cases and dates are now being pursued to take this work forward. A backlog team is now in place to write extension reports for new cases reaching the anniversary of their order.

Key areas for development

- As with many aspects of probation work across London, unpaid work is chronically affected by a lack of staff. In particular, this impacts on project supervisors of which only 77.8 are in post from a target of 133, and project coordinators of which only eight of 39.5 are in post. While recruitment is ongoing, until posts are filled it is unlikely that improvements can be made in delivery levels, nor on the current backlog despite current management being well organised. At the end of June 2022, the backlog of cases which had still not completed their unpaid work hours, 12 months after sentence, was 38 per cent.
- From our casework review of stand-alone unpaid work cases, although some aspects of work were of a sufficient standard, especially in relation to engagement and addressing reoffending and desistance, as with other aspects of casework, the assessment and management of risk was poor with, for instance, only around a third of our case sample of stand-alone unpaid work cases judged to be sufficient in relation to the assessment of risk. More attention needs to be placed on this aspect of work. We were nevertheless encouraged to note that this was an area already identified by managers, with training for staff already scheduled for the week after our visit.

Accredited programmes

Key strengths

- The London probation programmes team delivers both accredited programmes and structured interventions, along with offering support to probation practitioners to deliver toolkits, as an alternative to accredited programmes. At the time of our review the team was relatively stable with only a small number (seven) of facilitator vacancies.
- All cases across the region were reviewed in June 2022 in order to determine the management of each. Where it was unlikely that completion could be undertaken prior to an order ending, individuals were directed to one of the five newly agreed

structured interventions which are aligned to need and broadly correspond to addressing similar issues as accredited programmes. Where compliance was an issue or where there were specific individual needs, toolkits were offered as an alternative, delivered by the responsible probation practitioner. This has worked reasonably well, with approximately 120 people on probation who do not have time to complete a programme being offered one of the alternative options. There are approximately 600 cases on the current waiting lists. It is estimated that with projected delivery levels, and so long as the person on probation is compliant, all those currently awaiting a programme will complete a programme prior to their order ending.

- Structured interventions have been prioritised as noted above, but numbers have been boosted by the recent use of former attendance centres to deliver programmes. This has generated over 400 referrals from probation practitioners.
- In March 2020 the most recent Interventions Integrity Framework (audit) was undertaken across London (although at that point it was the former CRC and covered only non-sex offender programmes). London CRC scored an overall amber/red rating and significant development was needed to meet the required standard. Eighty-nine per cent of identified tasks have now been completed.

Key areas for development

- Attrition rates are high, with only around 18 per cent of non-sex-offender accredited programme participants completing programmes. Sex offender programme completions are higher at 53 per cent but more work is needed to improve these rates.
- There are some suggestions that the likelihood of completing a programme is enhanced when pre-programme structured work is undertaken by probation practitioners and there are indications that such work is not prioritised under the PPF. Furthermore, where there is close liaison between programme facilitators and probation practitioners, there may be an increased likelihood of both engagement and completion by the person on probation. We were encouraged to note that such liaison and communication is being increased and includes a range of guidance to staff, regular newsletters and attendance at PDU team meetings.
- Despite the relatively stable nature of the interventions staff group, morale was not high. Primarily this appeared to be over concerns about the national job evaluation of facilitators' roles, compounded by delays in a resolution. We would urge a prompt resolution to reduce the risk of damaging morale still further and increasing the risk of facilitators leaving.

Information and facilities

The commitment to improving the quality and effectiveness of service provision is manifest but, while currently much of this work falls to senior probation officers, there are both limitations and variations in practice. Communication across the region is substantial but the extent to which it is understood or taken onboard by frontline staff remains in question.

Key strengths:

- Despite the shortfall of staff, there is a commitment to improving the quality of performance across the region. In particular, this is driven through the regional quality improvement plan 2022-23 and the data quality strategy. This work links directly to the key priorities identified for the current year. The regional business plan 2022-23 also reflects the commitment to improving quality and performance.
- The central performance and quality team have nearly all performance and quality officers in place and monthly reports are appropriately run for each PDU, identifying where shortfalls are and identifying priority areas of development. The link with PDUs preparing accountability reports in response works reasonably well in identifying where shortfalls are.
- There are numerous events and mechanisms across both the region and individual PDUs to ensure messages about performance and quality improvement are communicated. These include a variety of newsletters, briefings and all-staff calls via Microsoft Teams. Different departments also distribute updates and briefings, including the performance and quality team, interventions team and learning and development teams.
- The change board has been an integral route through which the transition to a single service has been managed since unification. This approach, and the subgroups working to it, have worked well in building the foundations on which to build the service. Ensuring consistent implementation remains the next, and substantial, challenge.

Key areas for improvement:

- At the time of inspection there were only three of the scheduled 18 performance and quality development officers in post. While these staff appropriately focus on supporting staff on a one-to-one basis where practice shortfalls have been identified, there is little opportunity for them to work as intended to support improvements in performance at a wider level.
- Initiatives across the region have been undertaken to try to mitigate somewhat the impact of these limited resources, including the drawing upon senior probation officers to undertake quality assurance work and to improve overall performance. This has had only limited effect as these middle managers are very often hard pressed already, as we consistently found in our PDU inspections.
- Despite the vast range of communications across the region, messages around many aspects of performance and practice are still not consistently being taken on by frontline staff. The reason for this may be multi-fold but given the pressure most staff are presently under, especially given the number of red sites identified under the PPF, many appear not to have time to read newsletters or attend briefings; it is often, however, they who are in greatest need of such messaging. It is worth noting that you have recently reduced the number of communications you send out, focusing on the absolute priorities.

Statutory victim work

We looked at 20 statutory victim cases and interviewed the strategic lead for victims work in the London region. 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.

Key strengths:

- At our last inspection, of London NPS in 2019, when we looked at statutory victim work, we described it as 'wholly unsatisfactory'. That is not what we found on this occasion. Although we had only a small case sample, we found that in all cases where the conviction had occurred less than three years ago, appropriate contact had been made with the victim(s), which encouraged engagement with the victim contact scheme and provided information about sources of support.
- At any given time, the victim contact team is working with around 5,500 individuals across London. At the time of the inspection each victim liaison officer (VLO) had an average caseload of 260. Although there is no workload management tool for VLOs, this workload was deemed to be manageable, but it offered little or no latitude to account for sickness etc.
- In the majority of cases we reviewed there was effective information and communication exchange to support the safety of victims. VLOs are encouraged and supported to check each of their cases at least every six months, even those where there is no anticipated activity due to a substantial prison sentence. This approach reduced the risks of issues being missed.
- In 2019 the unit set up a victim members group – consisting of victims and particularly those who had made complaints. The group acts to provide independent challenge and feedback along with suggestions to improve practice. The approach appears to work well.

Key areas for improvement:

- Although the statutory victim team has an almost full complement of staff bar 0.8 of a senior probation officer, we were told that 32 per cent of the VLO staff and 24 per cent of the administrative team are employed on temporary contracts or via agencies because they can earn more money via this route. This reflects the wider concerns already noted about staffing across London but potentially leads to an unstable staffing group.
- Although in the majority of cases we reviewed, pre-release contact with victims did allow them to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of prison release, there were two cases where this had not happened due to a lack of liaison between the VLO and the probation practitioner responsible for the case. The extent to which this reflected a wider issue was not clear although it is acknowledged that communication can, on occasion, fall down. This appeared to be due in large part to the pressures experienced by offender management staff currently, especially within those sites identified as red under the PPF, but also to relatively new staff whose knowledge about the work of the unit is limited. It is encouraging that VLO staff are now running 'surgeries' on a monthly basis in PDUs to help build understanding, improve liaison and act as advisors to improve communication.

Learning from serious further offence investigations

The serious further offence (SFO) service is divided into two teams across London, with a band six manager responsible for each. In April 2022 the two teams came under the overarching management of the head of performance and quality. This model works reasonably well and the link with performance and quality is appropriate, despite the current lack of staff in the performance and quality team. There are, however, also staffing challenges within the SFO team. At the time of the inspection (July 2022) there were 10.7 SFO reviewing managers in post out of a target of 15.7. This has at times been compounded by the use of some of the reviewing manager resource for operational support in PDUs experiencing staffing crises.

Although there is no workload management tool used within the team, systems are in place to manage demand with an allocation tracker, a further one for actual cases and a mechanism for calendar reminders. While staff spoke of being under pressure, workloads appear to be manageable. A reasonable range of training and staff development is available for staff via both the national SFO team and in-house.

The dissemination of learning across PDU teams and to frontline staff remains a challenge. Information regarding specific reviews is sent to heads of services for them to distribute. Band six managers have also undertaken presentations to operational managers and information is distributed through the performance and quality bulletins. Senior leaders and managers appear to take these messages on board but there remain some doubts as to how well they are understood by frontline staff or imbedded into practice, especially given the pressures many of them are already under.

During the 12-month period to 07 June 2022, 54 SFO reviews were received of which 53 were quality assured. Of these, 37 were assessed as 'Outstanding' or 'Good', with 16 'Requiring improvement'.

Key themes and identified areas of concern include the insufficient frequency or quality of managerial oversight, insufficient pre-release planning, deficits in safeguarding practices, the quality of OASys/risk assessment and recording practice. Senior leaders are aware of these shortfalls and each aspect has been the focus of communication and drives to improve practice, yet they were still among the areas of concern we found during case reviews across the six PDUs we inspected. We urge the region to re-double their efforts and consider alternative approaches to address this work.

Summary

In our PDU inspections we rated HFKCW, Lambeth, Ealing and Hillingdon, and Lewisham and Bromley as 'Inadequate' and Newham and Barking, and Dagenham and Havering as 'Requires improvement'.

Despite the hard work and commitment of your staff, leadership team and yourself across the PDUs and region, we consistently saw deficits in casework practice. As you recognise, staffing is at crisis level across large parts of London with numerous factors contributing to and compounding the problem. This clearly impacts on frontline delivery but there is more to it than that. Probation practitioners need to understand what to prioritise, how and when; middle managers need to have the skills and confidence to help and direct them; and messages to all staff need to be clear and consistent. There is some positive work being undertaken in pockets across all the PDUs we visited. Regional initiatives, relationships with key partners and the setting of the service's strategic direction are also largely positive. However, while commendable, it is essential that this also translates into an improvement in the quality of casework practice to keep people across London safe. The challenge to develop this work cannot be underestimated.

Our recommendations from the inspected PDUs are set out in annexe one. I look forward to receiving your regional action plan in due course, outlining the implementation of 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.

HFKCW should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
2. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
3. improve the arrangements for information sharing to ensure that pre-sentence domestic abuse and safeguarding enquiries are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning and risk management
4. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of all casework
5. ensure staff have the relevant training to use risk and safeguarding information, obtained from key stakeholders, to appropriately inform risk assessment and sentence plans for people on probation
6. ensure staff with responsibility for case management oversight have the skills, knowledge and time to undertake the work effectively
7. engage with people on probation to inform service delivery
8. complete all actions identified as part of the organisational alert.

London region should:

9. complete all actions identified in the organisational alert
10. ensure priorities are clearly communicated and understood by probation practitioners and middle managers
11. ensure HFKCW has sufficient staffing resource in place
12. ensure that management information in relation to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS referrals is available for PDU managers and analysed effectively to increase the use of available services.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

13. consider incentives to improve recruitment and retention of staff
14. improve the support provision to sites assessed as red under the Prioritising Probation Framework (PPF).

Lambeth PDU should:

1. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of all casework
2. ensure that domestic abuse and safeguarding checks are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning and risk management
3. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
4. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
5. ensure rehabilitation activity requirements are started promptly and recorded correctly
6. engage with people on probation to inform service delivery.

London region should:

7. ensure Lambeth PDU has sufficient staffing resource in place
8. increase quality assurance activity at a PDU level
9. improve the completion rates of accredited programmes
10. ensure that management information in relation to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) referrals is available for PDU managers and analysed effectively to increase the use of available services.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

11. consider incentives to improve recruitment and retention of staff
12. ensure that performance monitoring has a greater emphasis on the effectiveness and quality of service delivery.

Ealing and Hillingdon PDU should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
2. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
3. improve the arrangements for information sharing to ensure that pre-sentence domestic abuse and safeguarding checks are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning, and risk management
4. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of all casework
5. ensure staff have the relevant training to use risk and safeguarding information, obtained from key stakeholders, to appropriately inform people on probation's risk assessment and sentence plans
6. ensure staff responsible for case management oversight have the skills, knowledge, and time to undertake the work effectively
7. engage with people on probation to inform service delivery.

London region should

8. ensure priorities are clearly communicated and understood by probation practitioners and middle managers.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

9. consider incentives to improve recruitment and staff retention
10. improve the support provided to sites assessed as 'red' under the Prioritising Probation Framework (PPF)
11. ensure sufficient face-to-face and onsite delivery is undertaken to provide effective supervision and risk management of people on probation.

Lewisham and Bromley PDU should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
2. ensure risk-related information is obtained from and shared with other agencies in all relevant cases to support the assessment and management of risk of harm
3. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of all casework
4. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
5. ensure sentence management staff receive the training they need in order to fulfil their roles effectively
6. ensure appropriate management information is available to analyse and consider any potential disproportionality in the quality of service delivery to people on probation from ethnic minority backgrounds.

London region should:

7. ensure Lewisham and Bromley PDU has sufficient staffing resource in place
8. ensure effective arrangements are in place with the Metropolitan Police to obtain and share risk-related information
9. ensure housing support services provide an effective service which meets the needs of people on probation
10. increase quality assurance activity at a PDU level.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

11. consider incentives to improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Newham PDU should:

1. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance activity and consistent management oversight of all casework
2. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm and to improve desistance
3. ensure probation practitioners always consult and liaise with all relevant services when assessing, planning and intervening with people on probation
4. ensure consideration of the safety of victims in all instances where required
5. ensure that domestic abuse and safeguarding checks are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning and risk management
6. ensure probation practitioners always understand the specific needs of people on probation, particularly regarding protected characteristics
7. review the efficacy of work with people on probation leaving custody, including the efficacy and availability of services for this cohort.

London region should:

6. increase quality assurance activity at a PDU level
7. improve completion rates for accredited programmes
8. review the location of delivery sites for unpaid work to ensure they are accessible for all people on probation.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

9. consider incentives to improve recruitment and retention of staff
10. encourage the Ministry of Justice to continue funding the Young Adult Transitions Hub pilot and ensure all good practice identified by Sheffield Hallam University's evaluation is disseminated nationally.

Barking, Dagenham and Havering should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review the risk of harm
2. ensure that domestic abuse and safeguarding checks are completed and utilised to inform assessment, planning and risk management
3. improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and management oversight of all casework
4. ensure that interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
5. ensure staff responsible for case management oversight have the skills, knowledge and time to undertake the work effectively
6. ensure that Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) learners have appropriate caseloads and management oversight to undertake their work effectively
7. ensure the work environment promotes professional boundaries and inclusivity for all staff.

London region should:

8. ensure Barking, Dagenham and Havering PDU has sufficient staffing resources in place
9. ensure effective arrangements are in place with the Metropolitan Police Service to obtain and share risk-related information
10. strengthen multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) to ensure there is consistency in the arrangements with local police
11. increase quality assurance activity at PDU level.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

12. consider incentives to improve recruitment and retention of staff
13. ensure that performance monitoring has a greater emphasis on the effectiveness and quality of service delivery.

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:

[HMI Probation - Home \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk)

Hammersmith, Fulham, Kensington, Chelsea, and Westminster

Score **0/27**

Fieldwork started August 2022

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Inadequate



1.3 Services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Inadequate



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



Lambeth PDU

Fieldwork started August 2022

Score **3/24**

Overall rating**Inadequate**

1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Inadequate



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



2.2 Planning

Inadequate



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate



Ealing and Hillingdon PDUScore **3/27**Fieldwork started August 2022

Overall rating**Inadequate**

1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Inadequate



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



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



Lewisham and BromleyScore **4/24**Fieldwork started August 2022

Overall rating**Inadequate**

1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



2.2 Planning

Inadequate



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate



Newham PDUScore **6/24**Fieldwork started September 2022

Overall rating**Requires improvement**

1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Good



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



2.2 Planning

Inadequate



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate



Barking, Dagenham and Havering PDUScore **5/24**Fieldwork started September 2022

Overall rating**Requires improvement**

1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



2.2 Planning

Inadequate



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate

