



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

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22 December 2022

To:

Bronwen Elphick, Regional Probation Director

cc:

Alexa Watson, Inspection Single Point of Contact

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Linda Neimantas, Simi Badachha, Heads of Inspection Programme

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Stephen Doust, Operations Officer (Inspections)

Dear Bronwen,

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

We have now completed the inspection of the Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough and Gateshead and South Tyneside 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 2021 brought together part of the former North East division of the National Probation Service (NPS), Durham Tees Valley (DTV) Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and Northumbria CRC. The context to the creation and development of the new North East (NE) region included bringing together the three different operating models, alongside recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Positively, it is evident from both our PDU inspections, and the regional review, that significant progress has been made in establishing a coherent and effective organisation.

There is a clear NE probation regional vision and strategy, which is focused on public protection and reducing reoffending. The strategic arrangements prioritise operational delivery, and there are effective strategic partnerships with key organisations across the north east. These strategic arrangements and clearly laid out priorities effectively support the delivery of probation services across the region.

There was, however, inconsistency in the quality of sentence management in the two PDUs we inspected. We believe that this inconsistency partly stems from the different levels of PDU engagement with the regional functions that support PDU delivery. The unclear lines of accountability within the Operational Leadership Group (OLG) facilitates this inconsistent engagement. A more coherent framework for accountability and decision-making at this level would, in our view, deliver improvements and help to drive 'good' sentence management across the PDUs in the region.

Key strengths:

- The NE probation service's vision and strategy are set out in HM Prison and Probation Service's regional reducing reoffending and delivery plans. These plans are underpinned by a regional business plan that covers the key areas for service delivery, including public protection, victim services and court services. PDU delivery plans are in line with these regional priorities. The region prioritises the quality of services and has communicated this effectively throughout the organisation. In our regional survey of staff, 68 out of 84 respondents stated that the region prioritised quality, and adherence to evidence, always or most of the time.
- There is visible and accessible leadership in the region and staff have confidence that the regional leadership team (RLT) will, if necessary, deviate from the national target operating model to support effective operational delivery. The arrangements for unpaid work and court services are examples of this flexibility. The RLT has also prioritised high-quality practice over-achieving process-based performance targets in initial sentence plans. Formal arrangements ensure that the initial plans are completed as soon as possible, where the target has not been met because of the focus on quality.
- The NE region has strong relationships with its key strategic partners, including the three Police and Crime Commissioner offices within its boundaries. It is represented at senior level at the key strategic boards across the region, including community safety partnerships, safeguarding children boards and domestic abuse partnerships. These strong strategic arrangements are replicated at an operational level, where there are effective information-sharing relationships with both the police and children's social care. In two of the region's police forces, agreements are in place to allow probation staff to have direct access to police information systems.
- The performance and quality team produces comprehensive management information that covers all areas of service delivery, using an excellent and accessible information network site. This supports and improves service delivery in areas such as unpaid work and the commissioning of services. BOOST was introduced in 2021 and has been developed as a bespoke management information tool, to aid operational managers and practitioners. It is not yet used consistently across the region, but we were impressed by its potential to improve both performance and the ability of practitioners to manage their workload.
- The NE probation region has effective communication strategies and generally manages change well. In our regional staff survey, 65 out of 84 respondents stated that change was communicated effectively, always or most of the time. The operational staff from the three legacy organisations are now operating in blended teams with blended workloads. The region achieved this by carefully considering both personal circumstances and operational needs, combined with an effective communication strategy.

Key areas for improvement:

- There is a lack of consensus and clarity about the operation of accountability and decision-making within the OLG. This results in PDUs having different levels of engagement with regional strategies, such as continuous improvement, and equality, diversity and inclusion. This prevents the region from taking a consistent approach to implementing practice and operational improvements.
- The NE region's strategies and decision-making are not routinely informed by the views of people on probation. There is an Engaging People on Probation (EPOP) strategy in place, but this has not been fully implemented. This strategy is based on appointing EPOP coordinators and establishing an EPOP forum in each of the seven PDUs. The region is currently recruiting coordinators and has set up a pilot forum in one of the PDUs. It has also developed a regional monitoring and evaluation system to capture the views of people on probation once the strategy has been implemented. Currently, however, there is no timescale setting out when the EPOP forums will begin in the PDUs.
- The NE region has equality, diversity and inclusion action plan for people on probation and for staff. These plans are overseen by the equality, inclusion and diversity committee, which is attended by members of the RLT. Some progress in implementing the plans has been made. The region has recorded and established, the protected characteristics of 86 per cent of its staff and has established safe staff forums in each PDU. However, engagement with the action plans is inconsistent across the PDUs. For example, in our two PDU inspections, we found that there was an inconsistent approach to outreach and to building relationships with organisations in the local community. Similarly, there was no evidence that the equality aide memoire had been implemented. This was introduced to support staff who work with people on probation with protected characteristics. This lack of consistency in implementing the actions plans needs to be addressed. In addition, although there is some monitoring of the disproportionality of outcomes, a more comprehensive strategy should be developed. This should include areas such as enforcement, programme referrals and recall rates.
- We understand the need for senior management oversight of high-profile cases, but the operation and criteria for inclusion, of the North East Operation Confidence Group (NEOCG), were unclear. A relatively large number of cases are subject to its scrutiny but, to be effective, the group requires clear criteria and terms of reference that set out how it will operate. for its operation.

Staff

The NE probation region has a clear structure and good processes in place both to manage and to recruit staff in the region. Since unification, recruitment issues, particularly in relation to unpaid work (UPW) and administration staff, have affected service delivery. The overall vacancy rate at the time of our review was 22 per cent, against the national target staffing figure. However, our inspections of the PDUs found that the workloads of operational staff were reasonable, with good management processes in place to allocate work and manage workload. The national workload management tool (WMT) showed that staff in only one PDU were operating at above 100 per cent of their target workloads.

There was a positive and engaged staff culture in the PDUs that we inspected. In the main, staff were proactive and took a 'can do' approach to service delivery. There were inevitable frustrations with, for example, the bureaucratic challenges of the dynamic framework. But,

generally, staff had confidence that their managers were working with them to deliver the best possible service.

Key strengths:

- The amalgamation of the three legacy probation organisations into the single NE region has been managed effectively and there is evidence of a unified identity and working culture. The change process was supported by a comprehensive communication strategy, and by analysing the region's workload, considering the staff profile; and prioritising the maintenance of existing practitioner relationships with people on probation. As a result of this carefully managed change operation, staff now operate in blended teams with blended workloads.
- At a strategic level, the workforce planning committee oversees the region's strong recruitment strategy. Effective decision-making at this level has included the appointment of a regional court manager. Immediate priorities are dealt with at a weekly tactical workforce planning meeting. This reviews PDU and team workloads as well as the WMT data. Actions taken include arranging for cases to be managed by neighbouring PDUs when staff shortages have arisen. There has been a positive response to the most recent staff survey, and there is evidence that HR policies are used effectively to manage issues such as staff absence and bullying and harassment in the workplace. There is also evidence that the analysis of complaints and grievances has been followed by appropriate action.
- The vacancy rate for case administrators is 38 per cent of the target staffing figure, and this has put some pressure on service delivery. Following a comprehensive review of its administrative structure and function, the NE region has now moved to a centralised hub model of administrative support. At the same time, it has adopted the Jitbit system from the former DTV CRC, to allocate and manage administrative work. This change has been supported by a comprehensive communication strategy. We believe that, once fully implemented, the new system will provide key information on the administrative workload. It will also ensure resilience during periods of absence and an equitable workload allocation.
- There are high rates of completion (over 90 per cent) for the mandatory training in adult safeguarding; child safeguarding; and domestic abuse across all grades of staff. The recent absence rate is high, at an average of 14.1 days per year, although 66 per cent of this absence is long term. Detailed analysis of absence patterns is undertaken by the head of HR. This is fed into workforce planning meetings. At operational level, review meetings between HR business partners, heads of PDUs and line managers are held monthly, to review staff absence.
- There have been clear directions to staff about returning to office working following the Covid-19 pandemic. Staff are expected to spend 80 per cent of their time in the office and work away from the office is actively managed. This has enabled operational effectiveness and helped to develop the strong working cultures that we saw in both of our PDU inspections. It has also helped to support and develop the inexperienced middle management and staff teams. In our regional staff survey, 62 out of 82 respondents stated that their workload was 'very' or 'quite' manageable.
- The priority given to continuity in sentence management was demonstrated by our findings in the PDUs. Out of 88 cases inspected, 53 had been managed by only one probation practitioner and 21 by two practitioners. No case had been supervised by more than three probation practitioners. This emphasis on continuity of professional relationships is evidently valued by the people on probation, who rated their relationships with practitioners highly in our PDU surveys.

Key areas for improvement:

- The region has a comprehensive probation services officer (PSO) development programme, but we found that PSOs sometimes had inconsistent access to it. Some felt that they received insufficient support. In both of our PDU inspections, we found examples of poor risk management practice at PSO level, and, generally, their scores for keeping people safe were lower than those of qualified practitioners. The constant need for the organisation to recruit PSOs, caused by the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) recruitment drives, partly explains this inconsistent access to training. However, PSO training should be routinely available, and should focus particularly on the core areas of risk management practice.
- In both of our PDU inspections, we found the performance of PQiP learners to be weaker than that of qualified officers, particularly in relation to public protection. This is of concern, given the level of scrutiny their work is subject to. We recognise that this level of performance may have been exacerbated by remote working and the consequent absence of immediate, informal support. However, given our findings, the arrangements for assuring the quality of PQiP work should be reviewed. The region should focus particularly on sharing quality assurance responsibilities between the PQiP senior probation officer (SPO), the practice teacher assessor and the operational SPO.
- The region has a comprehensive learning and development plan. It has focused on delivering bespoke training to improve the management of risk of harm. The findings from our PDU inspections on public protection practice are therefore disappointing. We recognise that the work of the regional learning and development team focuses on assessing NVQs and that training is driven by national initiatives. However, given the findings of our inspection, and indeed the November 2021 Operational and System Assurance Group sentence management audit, the current plan should be reviewed to improve risk management practice for all probation practitioners.
- Generally, safety and wellbeing are managed well. There are regular regional and local staff briefings and good engagement at health and safety meetings, with staff directly involved. However, the working environment for some UPW supervisors and people on probation in the north of the region is unsatisfactory, as there is very limited access to basic facilities such as toilets and kettles. We understand that this is a long-standing issue, and the region needs national funding to pay for the necessary changes. In our view, the current situation is unacceptable and requires immediate resolution.

Services and interventions

The NE region has established processes in place to analyse its caseload and to understand the needs of people on probation in the region. This understanding directly informs its strategy for commissioning and monitoring services. There is an understandable frustration that the national Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) contracts focus on process rather than quality. However, leaders have taken a proactive approach, at both regional and operational level, to improve service delivery.

The arrangements for UPW vary between the north and the south of the region. This stems from the different operational structures in the two legacy CRCs. Due to its more effective operation and performance, the NE region is adopting the DTV CRC model, which formerly operated in the south, across the whole region. The difference in operational structures and culture makes this a challenging process. However, the region has made good progress in unifying the working practices. Service delivery is improving. At the time of our inspection

announcement, the backlog of cases with hours outstanding 12 months after sentence had fallen from 665 to 327 since probation unification in June 2021. The proportion of hours completed as education, training or employment was, at 27 per cent, the highest in England and Wales.

Capacity issues and the Covid backlog have affected delivery of accredited programmes in the region. As a result, for some people on probation, there are still significant waiting times to start a programme. However, the region has taken pragmatic decisions to address this situation and there is evidence of progress to ensure that people on probation who have a programme condition, or a requirement receive the necessary intervention.

A bespoke model is in place to deliver services to the court, and high-quality, responsive services are provided. Integral to this model is a comprehensive court engagement strategy.

Key strengths:

- Court services in the region are comprehensive, and the court work we inspected in the one PDU with responsibility for courts was rated 'Outstanding'. This performance is supported by the RLT's decision to maintain the pre-unification operating model and a comprehensive court engagement strategy. A designated regional court strategic manager oversees the region's court work. This role is clearly central to the quality of the work undertaken in the region. The excellent performance of the regional court services is confirmed by the national performance data, which shows sentencer satisfaction in the NE region running at 76.08 per cent. This is the highest of any probation region in England and Wales. The innovative practice being developed by the enforcement hub has the potential to deliver consistent regional enforcement practice.
- The NE region has an experienced community integration team, which monitors and evaluates the delivery of CRS services. These cover six main pathways: accommodation; education, training and employment; personal wellbeing; women's services; finance, benefits and debt; and dependency and recovery. The region routinely monitors referral rates to the CRS services, the complexity levels of supervised individuals and the characteristics of people on probation who have been referred to CRS services. The referral rates for CRS services in the region are the highest for any probation region in England and Wales. The two outcome measures for the services, set by the national contracts, relate to timeliness and assessment completion. The NE regional team, consequently, have no contractual levers to improve the quality of the services being provided. Through effective relationship-building with providers, however, they have been able to influence and change some elements of service delivery, for instance the implementation of an expedited accommodation referral process, if required.
- The resettlement strategy in the region is still taking shape, but there are signs that positive progress is being made. The strategy has specifically focused on increasing the number of pre-release handovers that take place under the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) framework. The drive to improve performance included a series of briefings to staff; scrutinising information on case performance; and issuing advice on practice. There are clear indications that this strategy is working, with monthly performance reports demonstrating improvement. In the Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough PDU, designated probation practitioners are responsible for OMiC handovers. This has resulted in a significant improvement in performance. It has been accompanied by the prioritisation of pre-release planning in the PDU, and we saw examples of prison visits that resulted in good release plans. This focus on practice, as well as process, is embedded in the strategy. The region

has developed guidance on handovers, to support probation practitioners in undertaking their tasks.

- The NE region decided to keep the legacy Through the Gate teams in the local prisons following unification, and to develop a short sentence community function for prisoners with short sentences. This will provide a coherent framework for when this service goes live in December 2022.

Key areas for improvement:

- The community integration team is responsible for the detailed commissioning plan that oversees the expenditure of the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF). The funding for 2022-2023 was allocated primarily to provide services in the areas of restorative justice; prison departure lounges; stalking and harassment; and neurodiversity. To obtain approval for the allocated funding, it is necessary to navigate a complex commissioning process, operated at the centre by Ministry of Justice (MOJ) commercial team. Restorative justice has been funded in Cleveland, but the delay in obtaining approval for the other services means that most of the region's allocated ROIF is unlikely to be spent this financial year. Small grants of under £10,000 can be paid out of the fund by the region with minimal commercial involvement. In recognition of the current underspend, the community integration team has used these grants to fund care packs for released prisoners and a charity that supports victims of stalking and harassment. We recognise that the NE region is not primarily responsible for the likely underspend of the ROIF, but this is clearly an area that requires improvement. The current operation of the dynamic framework is inflexible and time-consuming. As a result, the region has been unable to plan, implement or improve key services.
- Although we believe the NE region's approach to CRS services is a strength, we have concerns about the quality of the services provided and the focus on process measures to monitor the performance of the contracts. The accommodation contract, in particular, was regarded as ineffective by the probation practitioners and leaders we spoke to. Similarly, the referral process for the personal wellbeing service is over-complicated. Both providers of the service in the region recognise this. The NE region approached the MOJ commissioning team in June 2022 to amend the contract in order to improve the referral process. However, at the time of our review, this had not been actioned. We also found that CRS providers often signpost to services that probation practitioners could access more efficiently themselves, by making direct referrals. The CRS provision for women in the region is good, however. We were particularly impressed by the trauma-informed bespoke support provided for the women in the Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough PDU.

Accredited programmes

Key strengths:

- The NE region is taking some positive steps to improve delivery of accredited programmes, and performance is currently at 92 per cent of the pre-Covid baseline delivery target. There have been revisions to the accredited programmes themselves, to help expedite delivery. The Thinking Skills programme, for example, is now delivered in a rolling format to maximise the number commencements. This has resulted in some recent progress. During our review fieldwork, we were informed that the commencement rate for the Building Better Relationships programme was now 63 per cent. There is also evidence of good working relationships with the PDUs

in the region. The delay in providing sexual offending programmes has been exacerbated by a national dispute about the grading of staff, which has delayed recruitment. This has had a significant impact on the region's capacity to run sexual offending programmes. These are currently operating at 50 per cent of target capacity. Although it is planned that 40 people will commence the programme in January 2023, this situation needs to be resolved to ensure that the necessary programmes are delivered.

Key areas for improvement:

- As in other regions, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the delivery of accredited programmes and resulted in a significant backlog. The situation has not been helped by staff vacancies in the team, some of which have only recently been filled. At the point that our inspection was announced, 61 per cent of all people who required a programme had still not begun one. Since face-to-face programmes were re-started in July 2022, the regional team has worked with colleagues in the PDU to reduce the backlog. They have used the performance and quality information to review cases in the backlog. They have assessed their suitability for intervention by means of an approved toolkit, delivered by the probation practitioner. In 227 cases across the region, this alternative provision has either started, or been delivered. Programme staff have provided some support to probation practitioners to deliver these interventions. However, there has been no formal oversight of the delivery, and this gives us some concern. In addition, during our PDU inspections, we were unable to find any record of the toolkit interventions being delivered. It is important that the quality of interventions is not sacrificed to manage the backlog. A consistent process and framework, which includes quality assurance, should underpin the different methods of intervention.

Unpaid work

Key strengths:

- The NE region is making concerted efforts to address the backlog of UPW caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It has made significant progress since implementing a regional UPW improvement plan. For example, it has increased the education, training and employment rate of 27 per cent of all UPW hours and has reduced in the backlog for category D cases (those cases which commenced before June 2020), from 228 to 24. The overall backlog of UPW cases that have not been completed 12 months since sentencing stands at 328 (16 per cent), which compares favourably with other regions. These improvements have been enabled by the effective performance management of the UPW supervisors and the availability of comprehensive management information provided by the performance and quality team. Since this information became available in May 2022, it has allowed UPW performance to be effectively monitored across the region.

Key areas for improvement:

- The region is addressing the inconsistent UPW performance caused by having two different legacy structures. Nevertheless, UPW performance still requires improvement. There are 220 cases in the NE region (11 per cent) that have been extended beyond 12 months because the hours were not completed on schedule. Combined with the current backlog of 16 per cent, this means that 27 per cent of the overall caseload is either in the backlog or has been extended. Similarly, at the point the inspection was announced, the NE region's performance was only at 90 per cent against the nationally set target of achieving 155 per cent of pre-pandemic

performance by December 2022. It is evident that the NE region will not meet the national target by December 2022.

Information and facilities

The analysis of information and the production of management information reports to improve service delivery are key strengths of the NE region. These are primarily driven by the performance and quality team, but there was good evidence, from our PDU inspections, that this is also undertaken locally. Generally, communication within the region is strong. We saw good examples of targeted briefings to staff and managers, relating to areas such as rehabilitation activity requirement days, approved toolkits and managing absence. The strong strategic partnerships are replicated at operational level in good information-sharing arrangements.

Key strengths:

- The continuous improvement strategy was implemented in March 2022. Central to the strategy is the regional accountability meeting. This is attended by both the RLT and the OLG, and has a primary function of monitoring and assuring the quality of work. The key learning from case monitoring, case audits and Serious Further Offence reviews is also collated for dissemination through this meeting. This process is supported by the interactive newsletter Improvement Quarterly, and a comprehensive database that includes the analysis of regional case audits. These arrangements provide a coherent structure for improving quality and embedding a learning culture across the region.
- The performance and quality team has developed the P and Q Network, a performance information system designed to support and improve service delivery across the organisation. This includes a series of P and Q dashboards for different areas of service delivery. We saw evidence that this performance monitoring is used to inform and improve services in areas such as court work, accredited programmes and UPW.
- Generally, communication methods in the NE region are effective. We saw good examples of bespoke management, administration and operational briefings being delivered to provide key information or practice direction. This is backed up by the excellent North East Regional Directory (NERD), a platform that provides key information and contact details from across all areas of the NE region's work. Key to this effective communication is the organisational culture we found in the NE region. Managers are visible and considered to be accessible.
- The NE region has taken a systematic approach to documenting service level agreements with all the key agencies, including the police, NHS teams and key third sector organisations. This painstaking process is now almost complete and underpins the good information-sharing arrangements we found in the region.
- The NE region is one of the regions piloting the adoption of the Jitbit system to allocate and manage administrative work. Originally devised by DTV CRC, this system will ensure resilience and equity in the administration processes. This demonstrates the RLT's willingness to use the innovations in service delivery introduced by the CRCs.

Key areas for improvement:

- A new probation office is due to open in Sunderland in January 2023, but other probation buildings in the north east require refurbishment. In one of the offices we

visited, the lift had been out of use for several months, and in another building, there was no lift. Wi-Fi coverage in offices is also inconsistent across the region. We recognise that the RLT has made strenuous efforts at a national level, to improve the facilities for UPW staff and people on probation in the north of the region, but it does not have the remit or budget to rectify the concerns directly. However, as already stated, working conditions for some staff and people on probation are unacceptable and require immediate improvement.

- We saw evidence that the regional performance and quality strategy is improving services, but it was also evident that PDU engagement is inconsistent. Similarly, the introduction of BOOST to help manage workload and performance is currently underused by practitioners.

Statutory victim work

We looked at 13 statutory victim cases and interviewed the strategic lead for victims work in the NE region. We reviewed case records to look at whether initial contact with victims encourages them to engage with the victim contact scheme, whether information-sharing and communication support the safety of victims, and if pre-release contact with victims allows them to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release.

Key strengths:

- The NE region's victim liaison team operates out of two units located in the north and south of the region. Since unification in 2021, the working practices of the two units have been aligned in areas such as allocation and initial contact with victims. Case reviews for all victims are undertaken before the initial contact is made. This alignment of procedures ensures that the good practice we found in our inspections is consistent across the region.
- In the cases we inspected, the initial contact with victims was appropriately personalised and provided sufficient information about their potential participation in the victim contact scheme. The sensitive and informative style of the letters has been adopted nationally, following the NE region's contribution to a national working party.
- The victim liaison teams generally have good relationships with probation practitioners. Each victim liaison officer has a linked PDU work office and is expected to attend on a weekly basis. In the cases inspected, victims were appropriately consulted on pre-release planning, and their views were incorporated.
- There is evidence of strong relationships between victim liaison teams and external agencies, particularly the police. In Northumbria, this has resulted in an impressive practice initiative in relation to the victims of murder and manslaughter offences. There is now a process in place that ensures a handover takes place between the police family liaison office and the allocated victim liaison officer.
- The NE region is involved in the national pilot to support victims of stalking and harassment. This was set up in recognition of the link between murder offences and the perpetrators of stalking and harassment offences. Support is being offered to victims of this crime, where the sentence is less than 12 months in prison. Victims who opt into the pilot service are notified of release dates and their views are sought on licence conditions. The team is being notified of 14 cases per month, on average, and 85 per cent of victims are taking up the offer of the service.

Key areas for improvement:

- In the cases we inspected, the relationships developed between the victim liaison officer and the victim were strong. However, in two of the cases, the victims had not been advised on what action they could take if a prisoner attempted to contact them. In another two cases, inspectors felt that victims should have been provided with more information about the community services available to support them.
- In most cases we saw strong relationships between the victim team, external agencies and probation practitioners. However, there were two cases where information on victims was not being sought in the management of Multi-Agency Public Protection (MAPPA) cases. It is important, in our view, that victim information routinely informs the reviews of MAPPA level one reviews as well as the more formal information exchange at levels two and three.

Learning from Serious Further Offence investigations

The NE region's Serious Further Offence (SFO) team reports to the head of performance and quality. As well as completing SFO reviews, the team is responsible for complaints in the region and any internal management reviews requested by external reviews or investigations. There are processes in place for ensuring the timely completion of reviews. Internal quality assurance is undertaken before they are submitted to the central SFO team.

In the 12 months to 18 August 2022, the team completed 13 SFO reviews. Of these, two were rated 'Good' and 11 'Requires improvement'. The issues raised by the central team for the reviews that required improvement included the limited inclusion of senior managers in the review process and action plans not always containing learning for the organisation, above the middle management level. The proportion needing improvement does raise questions about the efficacy of the region's internal quality assurance process. However, action has been taken to address the main shortcomings, and this includes ensuring that heads of PDU are interviewed, where necessary. SFO managers also now engage directly with heads of PDUs to discuss action plans and findings.

The common themes in review findings include the quality of risk assessment, shortcomings in safeguarding practice and inconsistent management oversight. As well as the SFO action plans developed, these areas are also targeted in the area's quality improvement plan. The SFO process is also embedded into the region's continuous improvement strategy. Learning from SFOs is reviewed at the regional accountability meetings and disseminated through the interactive newsletter, Improvement Quarterly. This improvement strategy is in its infancy. It is important that the RLT ensures both the engagement with the strategy and the embedding of key learning in subsequent practice improvements.

Summary

In our PDU inspections, we rated Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough as 'Requires improvement' and Gateshead and South Tyneside as 'Good', the first PDU to receive this positive rating since we began our inspection programme of the newly unified service in autumn 2021. In both PDUs we met motivated staff, who were committed to working with complex individuals to reduce reoffending and to protect the public. We also saw good examples of partnership working and innovative practice that improved services and the lives of the people under supervision. Inevitably, there are areas that require improvement, particularly in relation to risk management practice, but we are confident that the region has an effective framework in place through which these can be addressed.

The NE region is a well-led organisation, with a positive working culture. Generally, staff are clear about their priorities and have confidence in their managers. There are strong

relationships with the key external services at every level, and these contribute positively towards achieving the organisation's objectives. There are, however, understandable frustrations with the national commissioning framework, which limits the region's ability to expand and improve key services. There are similar frustrations at the region's limited ability to improve facilities and working conditions directly. This is still a relatively new organisation and some of the structures in place have only recently been implemented. We believe, however, that sound foundations have been laid and that, under your leadership, the organisation will continue to make further progress.

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 style with a large initial 'J' and 'R'.

Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Annexe one – Recommendations

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

Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough PDU should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm and use the region's support to achieve this
2. ensure risk-related information is obtained and shared with other agencies in all relevant cases to support the assessment and management of risk of harm
3. ensure training is prioritised and evaluated to enhance the skills of the workforce
4. ensure diversity is prioritised in strategic and operational practice.

North East region should:

5. ensure accommodation support services provide an effective service that meets the needs of people on probation.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

6. ensure all probation offices have reliable Wi-Fi access
7. review the value added by the community rehabilitative services contracts.

South Tyneside and Gateshead PDU should:

1. ensure that priorities are communicated clearly to, and understood by, probation practitioners and middle managers
2. conduct a strategic analysis of the needs of people on probation and develop a strategy for addressing local diversity issues
3. improve contingency planning and delivery on medium- and high-risk cases
4. ensure that enquiries into domestic abuse and child safeguarding are made on all cases and used to inform assessments of risk
5. ensure that the interventions necessary to reduce reoffending and risk of harm are delivered in all cases
6. ensure that sufficient arrangements are in place to effectively oversee the quality of casework by PQiP trainees and PSOs

North East region should:

7. ensure that PSOs have sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to adequately assess, plan, work with and review risk of harm to others.










HM Prison and Probation Service should:

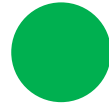
8. ensure that Commissioned Rehabilitative Service provision meets the needs of people on probation
9. review arrangements for managing and assuring the quality of work done by PQiPs to keep people safe
10. provide further training for probation practitioners on the delivery of approved toolkits and monitor rates of their use
11. carry out repairs to the lift at the South Shields office and install suitable internet connections at both of the PDU's offices.

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 \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](http://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough		Score	8 / 24
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	Court work	Not inspected	
2.2	Assessment	Inadequate	
2.2	Planning	Requires improvement	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Inadequate	
2.4	Reviewing	Requires improvement	

Overall rating**Rating****1. Organisational delivery**

1.1 Leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement

**2. Court work and case supervision**

2.1 Court work

Outstanding



2.2 Assessment

Good



2.2 Planning

Good



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement

