



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:
Blackburn with Darwen PDU
The Probation Service – North West region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, June 2023

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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Foreword

There were a number of positive aspects to this Probation Delivery Unit (PDU), including sufficient and stable staffing levels; however, the overall quality of work to assess and manage people on probation against our five quality standards for casework had deficits, which resulted in an overall rating of 'Requires improvement'.

A well-established and experienced leadership team was present in this PDU which had strong strategic relationships with partners. As a result, the influence of probation was clear, for example in contributing to the commissioning of substance misuse services in the PDU. Change management, before and after the unification of local Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and National Probation Service (NPS) services in summer 2021 had been impressively delivered, resulting in a clear unified culture across the PDU.

In contrast to what we have seen in other recent PDU inspections, Blackburn with Darwen PDU had a full complement of staff. There were manageable workloads, high levels of experience across various grades of staff and a generally committed, engaged and stable workforce. Morale was positive in many areas of the PDU, despite some of the challenges the service was facing, and the impact of this was being seen in the casework, particularly in the quality of planning.

However, despite strengths in leadership and stable staffing levels, this had not fully translated into quality of practice. The ratings across the cases we inspected were disappointing in some areas, with court work scoring low. Improvement was needed in the quality of work to assess and manage the risks that people on probation may present to the wider community. This needed to be strengthened, particularly in relation to assessment, where only 52 per cent of cases inspected had an assessment which effectively supported the safety of other people.

Although there were a significant number of positives in relation to staffing, the PDU faced challenges managing and supporting a high volume of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees. This has led to challenges in providing adequate learning opportunities for trainees as well as impacting on the workloads of experienced staff, who have needed to support a large number of new team members. The PDU and region were clear that the current position is temporary, but we felt the current arrangements are not sustainable and need re-evaluating. Staff were also working in buildings and estates that were not fit for purpose, which was impacting on service delivery for both staff and people on probation. This requires attention at a national level by the HMPPS estates team as a priority.

Blackburn with Darwen will be disappointed with the overall findings of this inspection, given their strengths in leadership and committed staff. However, the PDU has strong foundations in place and, with a focus on the quality of casework, it will be in a strong position to make the next steps needed to continue on a positive journey.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Blackburn PDU

Fieldwork started March 2023

Score **10/27**

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

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work

Inadequate



2.2 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.3 Planning

Good



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.5 Reviewing

Requires improvement



Recommendations

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

Blackburn with Darwen PDU should:

1. improve the quality of court reports to inform sentencing
2. improve the quality of work to assess, manage and review risk of harm
3. ensure diversity is prioritised in both strategic and operational practice
4. develop and implement a stronger offer to engage the voice of people on probation
5. ensure the delivery of training is prioritised to enhance the skills of the workforce and put in place a blended offer of online and in-person staff training.

North West region should:

6. review the commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) contract for accommodation support services to provide an effective service which meets the needs of people on probation
7. consider the implementation of a regional intranet for staff to access regional updates, policies and tools to support interventions.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

8. provide more suitable buildings and estates for staff, people on probation and services for effective service delivery
9. evaluate the PQiP allocation process to ensure there is sufficient infrastructure within PDUs to manage high numbers of staff in training.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Blackburn with Darwen PDU over the period of a week, beginning 27 March 2023. We inspected 21 cases where sentences and licences had commenced between 29 August 2022 to 04 September 2022 and 12 September 2022 to 18 September 2022. We also conducted 19 interviews with probation practitioners.

Blackburn with Darwen is one of 13 PDUs in North West region. The PDU delivers probation work across two probation offices, adjacent to each other. Additionally there is a magistrates' court located in Blackburn. Prior to unification in June 2021, the area covered by Blackburn with Darwen PDU came under North West NPS and the Cumbria and Lancashire CRC. Accredited programmes are managed regionally, and stand-alone unpaid work orders are managed by specialist practitioners who are managed at a regional level, but aligned to the PDU.

The PDU is relatively small in size in comparison to others in North West region and covers the town of Blackburn, along with Darwen and the surrounding rural areas. Blackburn with Darwen is a unitary local authority and therefore the PDU's setup is in line with this. Partnership boards have recently moved from a pan-Lancashire approach to that of the unitary local authority, providing a more localised approach to forums such as the community safety partnership and the youth justice management board. Lancashire Constabulary police the whole PDU area. The reoffending rate for Blackburn with Darwen is 28.7¹ per cent, which is the highest in North West region.

The total caseload for North West region was 24,167², with this PDU's caseload accounting for 918³ of the region's total. The PDU caseload includes significant numbers of people from black, Asian or minority ethnic groups, which accounted for 24.7 per cent of the total. 41.7 per cent of the caseload were classed as having a disability.

A range of CRS were delivered across the PDU. These included personal wellbeing services delivered by the Growth Company, women's services delivered by Lancashire Women and accommodation delivered by Interventions Alliance. Substance misuse services were provided by Spark, which has several strands to its service delivery, including the 'early break' service, specifically delivering substance misuse support to the younger cohort.

At the time of the inspection, and since the implementation of the national Prioritisation Framework (PF),⁴ the PDU has been operating under a 'green status'. Therefore the PDU had been operating without any changes to the standard service delivery model. Following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions in March 2022, staff of all grades had returned to working a minimum of 60 per cent of the time in the office or alternative delivery sites.

¹ Source: Ministry of Justice. (January 2023). *Proven reoffending statistics: April 2020 to March 2021*.

² Source: Ministry of Justice. (2023). *Offender Management Caseload Statistics as at 30th September 2022*.

³ This is inclusive of community, licence and custody cases with the figure confirmed by the PDU.

⁴ The framework is designed to assist regions to respond to capacity and workload concerns (for example, by reducing expected levels of face-to-face contact with people on probation). This has been nationally developed by HMPPS.

1. Organisational delivery

1.1. Leadership



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

Requires Improvement

Despite the strengths that have been identified below court work was rated as 'Inadequate' which rules out a rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for leadership. This has resulted in a rating of 'Requires improvement' for this standard.

Strengths:

- There was a dedicated and very experienced leadership team, inclusive of the PDU head, middle managers and the business manager. A PDU plan, aligned to the regional strategy, set the vision and priorities for Blackburn with Darwen PDU, which was well understood by both strategic and operational staff.
- At a strategic level there were strong relationships with key partners and the PDU benefited from being structured in line with the unitary local authority of Blackburn with Darwen. The voice of probation had influence, evidenced by the PDU's key role working with Public Health England in the commissioning of substance misuse services in the area.
- The change management process following unification was delivered impressively. Caseloads and teams integrated at an early stage following unification, resulting in a very clear 'one PDU' culture, evident across all grades of staff.
- Leaders valued the views of the wider team and worked collaboratively with staff to gain feedback on the direction for the PDU going forward. The PDU head and other leaders in the PDU were accessible and facilitated regular forums to communicate with staff, including more informal settings such as 'kitchen catch ups' where staff can approach the PDU head on any matters.
- There was a clear understanding across the PDU of what staff roles and priorities were, and this had been clearly communicated by leaders.
- The PDU had been consistently operating under green status on the PF and had managed to deliver a 'business as usual' service following the lifting of the exceptional delivery model, largely due to the PDU's ability to maintain a stable and experienced workforce.
- The stability of the PDU was beginning to be seen in parts of the casework, particularly around planning which received a rating of 'Good'.

Areas for improvement:

- The quality of court work was rated by our inspectors as 'Inadequate'. Too many cases were sentenced without appropriate domestic abuse and safeguarding enquires being received or requested prior to sentencing.
- Although the PDU plan was in place and understood by staff, limited progress had been made in regard to the priorities. An example was a priority for the PDU to deliver more specialist services to cohorts including women and 18–25-year-old people on probation, which remained in its infancy.
- There was a regional strategy in place for engaging people on probation, but this area of practice was still in the development stages at PDU level. From the people on probation surveyed, none of the respondents felt their views were considered in how probation services were run.
- There was limited focus at a strategic and operational level on diversity. This area of practice needed development across the PDU.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- In contrast to other areas across the country, the PDU was fully staffed with a stable workforce. Additionally, the PDU benefited from having numerous very experienced staff at all grades, enabling an offer of support to PQiP trainees and less experienced staff.
- Staff across all grades were committed to their roles and felt well supported by colleagues. This included case discussions, assisting with each other's workloads, sharing knowledge of processes and supporting wellbeing. Morale was positive across numerous grades in the PDU.
- Workloads were assessed to be at a manageable level, particularly in comparison to other PDUs across the country. The Workload Measurement Tool (WMT) workload figure for the Probation Officer (PO) grade was 95.3 per cent and for Probation Services Officer grade was 69.5 per cent.
- There were impressive staff retention rates within the PDU, with an overall attrition rate for staff of four per cent. There were examples of staff who had previously left the PDU who then chose to apply for roles back at the PDU.
- Sickness in the PDU was low in comparison to the region. The average number of days lost to sickness was 6.2 compared to 10.5 across North West region.
- The skills of the workforce met the caseload needs – 100 per cent of staff interviewed as part of the inspection stated that they either "always" or "most of the time" had the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience.
- The views and contributions of staff were valued in the PDU, evidenced by the staff charter, where communication methods were set and agreed by staff in the PDU and through staff input to the PDU strategic plan and priorities.
- Reflective supervision was embedded and delivered to both practitioners and middle managers. This enabled appropriate space to discuss cases to improve the delivery of intervention for both staff and people on probation.
- Of the cases inspected, 70 per cent had the same practitioner for the entirety of the order or licence, and none of the cases inspected had more than two allocated practitioners. This provided consistent and supportive relationships to people on probation.
- The reward and recognition process were regularly utilised in response to exceptional and quality pieces of work undertaken by staff. This enhanced staff's feeling of being valued by their leaders.
- A culture of learning and continuous improvement was present, with examples of staff being supported with development opportunities in areas of specific interest. There was further evidence from the staff survey where

14 out of 17 respondents stated that learning and improvement was either “always” or “most of the time” promoted.

- There was regular ‘shut down’ sessions for staff across the PDU. These sessions were protected for staff to undertake training, for briefings from external facilitators and for other learning.

Areas for improvement:

- High PQiP trainee numbers were impacting on both staff training and more established members of the PDU. There were limited mentors for PQiP trainees, and gaining sufficient learning opportunities was challenging. For experienced staff, there was an impact on workloads in supporting newer members.
- In 50 per cent of cases inspected, management oversight was assessed as being insufficient, ineffective or absent.
- Despite the WMT figures, practitioners reported challenges with their workloads. In our practitioner interviews, 38 per cent of staff stated that their workload was “not so manageable”. Many attributed this to support required for PQiP trainees and covering for colleagues on sick leave.
- Administrative resources had not increased in the PDU in line with the increase in PQiP trainee numbers. As a result, the workloads for this area of the PDU were stretched.
- Despite the low levels of sickness generally across the PDU, the levels for court staff were at a much higher level, at an average of 11 days per year. There is likely to be a correlation with this figure and the disappointing court domain two data.
- The nationally provided training offer remains largely online based and feedback from staff was that this has limited value. An increased offer of a blend of online and in-person training drawing upon local resources should be considered to improve staff’s knowledge, skills and confidence.

1.3. Services



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

Strengths:

- The offer of services within the PDU was extensive. This included CRS and other commissioning arrangements that were more established in the PDU. This was demonstrated further in our practitioner interviews where staff overwhelmingly stated they had access to an appropriate range of services.
- The PDU's offer of women's service was strong. The CRS provision delivered by Lancashire Women offered a holistic and effective service, including the offer to see women at an alternate delivery site away from the probation office. Nine per cent of the PDU's caseload are women.
- The delivery of unpaid work was impressive and a significant strength. At the time of inspection, the caseload of unpaid work was 79, with swift allocation to a varied offer of projects, including specific groups for women. The PDU was utilising education, training and employment (ETE) hours effectively and supporting those people on probation with ICT learning, for some of whom this may be a challenge. In regard to the unpaid work backlog, the percentage of unpaid work requirements with hours outstanding beyond 12 months was 21.5 per cent in the PDU, lower than the regional average of 28.8 per cent.
- 'Changing Futures' was a positive service being delivered in the PDU. Funding had come through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the service utilised those with lived experience to work as 'navigators' to support people on probation.
- There was an effective use of the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) level one framework. Appropriate oversight was in place through the touchpoint model, which was leading to increased referral numbers. Relevant scrutiny was in place and the referrals were of good quality.
- The recently commissioned 'Spark' service, which delivers substance misuse services in the area, was promising. The offer from the service provider was varied, with several strands, including harm reduction, young people's service and working with those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic group who may be hard to reach.
- Courts were routinely updated on services available in the PDU and the region. This included regular court liaison meetings, quarterly newsletters for sentencers and presentations by the unpaid work team on the delivery of the service.
- In regard to domestic abuse enquires, these were completed when required in 76 per cent of cases inspected.

Areas for improvement:

- CRS services were underused. There were variations across services, with the accommodation service provided by Interventions Alliance receiving high levels of referrals, but the referral numbers for services such as personal wellbeing were low. This was despite proactive promotion of the services from both providers and the PDU.
- The accommodation CRS contract did not meet the needs of people on probation sufficiently. Staff viewed that due to the accommodation issues in the area, including poor-quality housing in houses of multi-occupation, the service delivered by Interventions Alliance was insufficient.
- Despite the promising offer from Spark, (the substance misuse provider), there was limited understanding of what the various strands of the service offered. Information sharing was inconsistent at times and the effectiveness of this service was in the developing stages.
- The undertaking of safeguarding enquiries needed to improve. In cases inspected, enquiries were not completed in nine out of 17 relevant cases and in court work only three out of seven cases had relevant safeguarding information prior to sentencing.
- Accredited programmes were not delivered within the PDU. That meant people with a requirement to complete an accredited programme had to travel to neighbouring offices to complete their group work.

Resettlement work

Strengths:

- Practitioners were having proportionate contact with people on probation prior to their release from custody. In addition, practitioners in the vast majority of cases had addressed the key resettlement needs for individuals prior to their release. This resulted in people being released with appropriate and supportive plans in place.
- There was a high level of contact with people on probation to sufficiently manage and minimise the risk of potential harm posed, with this being judged as sufficient in seven out of eight relevant post-release cases.
- In three quarters of relevant cases, work to address issues towards victims and potential victims was judged as sufficient. This was positive to see in keeping them safe.

Areas for improvement:

- The involvement of other agencies to support desistance and to keep other people safe needed to improve. This was judged as sufficient in only half of relevant cases. This was disappointing to see and missed the opportunity to utilise valuable information to support both people on probation and to mitigate the risk of harm going forward.
- Home visits were not always undertaken for post-release cases, with three out of eight relevant cases inspected not having a home visit we felt was necessary to support and manage risk of harm posed by individuals. Practitioners were missing a key opportunity to gather vital information for their assessment and to support engagement from the person on probation.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The Regional Case Assessment Tool process was embedded and regularly used. This was led by a quality development officer and had been used by the PDU as a way of monitoring the quality of casework and also for identifying areas for improvement to ensure specific areas were targeted.
- Wi-Fi was available across both buildings in the PDU, which enhanced the delivery of toolkits and interventions with people on probation. Staff were supplied with laptops and appropriate equipment to support satellite working.
- A dedicated Microsoft Teams channel was in place for the whole region. This provided information on areas such as wellbeing, training and policies. To ensure key messages were delivered to all staff, a weekly bulletin was also sent out with the most pertinent information.
- Specified probation staff had access to the systems of the Changing Futures service, which allowed more timely updates on cases working with navigators in this service.
- Information-sharing agreements were in place with Lancashire Constabulary with agreed timeframes for the sharing of police information, such as domestic abuse call-out information.
- Although there was a very low number of Serious Further Offences (SFOs) in the PDU, action plans – including early look action plans – were completed. Following the publication of high-profile SFOs in the media, staff in the PDU were engaged in discussions to identify the learning from these events.

Areas for improvement:

- Wellington Street probation office, which was the main building for staff and people on probation in the PDU, was not fit for purpose. The building itself was not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, therefore staff and people on probation with mobility issues had difficulty accessing the main premises and had to use the secondary building on site. The PDU had been told that they are now in the 2024-2029 estates strategy, which is the earliest point that a new building will become available.
- There were challenges around sufficient interview room space, which was hampering the time that both practitioners and services could spend with people on probation to deliver interventions.
- Given the unsuitability of the main PDU building, the PDU would benefit from having further alternative delivery sites. This would enhance the experience of people on probation and the delivery of any intervention.

- Although the numbers of people on probation undertaking accredited programmes and structured interventions were low in the PDU, the delivery of these did not take place in the PDU. This meant that people on probation needed to travel to Accrington and Preston in order to complete the relevant programme or structured intervention.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 66 people on probation as part of this inspection. Of these, 41 per cent reported that they were subject to a community sentence and 58 per cent were being supervised having been released from prison. The respondents were largely representative of the caseload demographics in terms of gender, but slightly underrepresented in terms of ethnic diversity as 20 per cent of respondents were from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background, in comparison to 24.7 per cent of the caseload.

Strengths:

- People on probation overwhelmingly felt safe accessing probation services (86 per cent) and were able to have private conversations with their practitioner (93 per cent).
- In correlation to what inspectors found, those surveyed were positive about the offer of services in Blackburn with Darwen PDU, with 83 per cent of people on probation stating they had been able to access services relevant to their personal needs and 77 per cent of respondents giving the view that they had been able to access services in a reasonable timeframe.
- Over two thirds of those surveyed reported being happy with the overall support they received:

“My PO has been very accommodating to my personal needs. RAR was clear and helpful and the sessions took place in the office. My PO is phenomenal and really helped identify problem drinking around my drink driving offence.”

Areas for improvement:

- Just over a third of individuals consulted by User Voice felt that their views has been considered as part of their sentence. None of the respondents felt they had had a say in how probation was run:

“In your dreams pal. Not a chance, I’ve certainly never been asked.”

- People on probation often did not recall having an induction. This missed a vital opportunity to ensure people on probation have an increased understanding of the expectations of them as part of their order or licence.

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

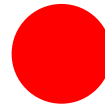
- The PDU's offer of women's service was appropriate to the need of the cohort, which accounted for nine per cent of the caseload. The CRS service delivered by Lancashire Women offered a holistic and effective service for women on probation, including the offer to see women at an alternate delivery site away from the probation office.
- Across the PDU and North West region, a neurodiversity service was available. The service offered support to practitioners working with people on probation with neurodiversity issues, enhancing the delivery of an intervention on the person on probation's order or licence.
- There was consistent recording of protected characteristics. Ethnicity was clearly recorded in 20 out of 21 cases and inspectors found that in 18 out of 20 cases, people on probation were asked about their diversity characteristics.
- In response to the demographics of a younger population, the PDU had ambitions to develop specialisms in certain areas, including a concentrator approach to working with 18–25-year-olds and women in the PDU.
- There were strong transition arrangements in place for cases transferring from youth justice services to the PDU. Strategic and operational relationships with the two services were working well.

Areas for improvement:

- There was an overrepresentation of women in the PDU's workforce, with 77 per cent of the staff identifying as female in comparison to nine per cent of the caseload.
- 15 per cent of the workforce identified as being from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background, compared to 24.7 per cent of the caseload. In terms of ethnicity the workforce was not representative of the caseload demographic.
- There were no specific 'women only' reporting times in the PDU. Although the PDU was seeing some women on probation at venues away from the PDU, it was disappointing that 'women only' reporting was not being facilitated at Blackburn with Darwen PDU's office.
- Although regional strategies were in place, at a PDU level there were no diversity action groups or forums in place. Opportunities for discussions and strategies to address issues linked to diversity were being missed in the PDU.
- Tracking the outcomes of those from various demographics was limited. This included those who had transitioned from the youth justice service, women and those from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background.
- There was limited focus at a strategic and operational level on diversity. This area of practice needed development across the PDU.

2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁵ for court work is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against the key question:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?	44%

Strengths:

- Practitioners were involving people on probation meaningfully and considering their views in the vast majority of court work inspected, enabling the voice of people on probation to be present in reports for sentencing.
- There were strong strategic relationships in place with court. Updates were provided to sentencers and legal advisors on areas such as the unpaid work offer, performance data and general updates across the region in a quarterly newsletter. Daily morning meetings took place across all agencies in court, to look at listings and address logistical issues that may occur during the day.

Areas for improvement:

- Domestic abuse information was not presented to the court at the time of sentencing in five out of nine inspected cases, In regard to safeguarding, the picture was similar; safeguarding enquires were only made in three out of seven relevant cases prior to sentencing. Without this information, the appropriateness of sentencing comes into question.
- Although there were low sickness levels across the PDU, this was higher in court, with an average of 11 days lost per year. Additionally, some of the court's more experienced practitioners were largely working remotely, resulting in there being limitations in the learning for newer practitioners to the court team.
- The suitability of sentencing proposals was at times inconsistent. In our inspection we found examples of cases where unpaid work was proposed, despite the individual being signed off unfit for work. Additionally, inspectors found some cases were not being assessed for substance misuse requirements such as alcohol treatment requirements and drug rehabilitation requirements, despite their being an identifiable need.

⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.2. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁶ for assessment is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	86%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	71%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	52%

Blackburn with Darwen PDU is rated as 'Requires improvement' for assessment as the lowest score out of the three questions was 52 per cent. This related to whether there was sufficient focus on keeping people safe, demonstrated in just over half of cases.

Strengths:

- Practitioners were routinely identifying and analysing the key risk of harm factors as part of assessment. A robust assessment with a sufficient understanding of risk supports practitioners with what needs to be focused on throughout the period of supervision.
- In 86 per cent of cases we inspected it was assessed that practitioners were engaging with people on probation as part of assessment. Information had been gathered on motivation, readiness and personal circumstances. This information was used to inform future work with the person on probation.

Areas for improvement:

- Child safeguarding information sharing did not take place in nine out of 17 relevant cases inspected. This meant that valuable information needed to inform accurate risk assessments was missing. Improvements needed to be made in regard to utilising a range of sources of information as part of assessment. This was judged to be sufficient in less than half of cases, therefore missing the opportunity to gather valuable information to form accurate risk assessments.
- There were too many cases where the safety of victims and potential victims was being missed. Assessment failed to analyse specific concerns related to victims in 38 per cent of relevant cases.

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.3. Planning



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

Good

Our rating⁷ for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	86%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	76%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%

Blackburn with Darwen PDU is rated as 'Good' for planning as the lowest score of the three questions was 67 per cent. Planning was the highest rated area of domain two.

Strengths:

- Within planning, there was a significant focus on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance, evidenced by the fact this area was judged sufficient in over three quarters of cases inspected. There were several examples of the appropriate focus on offending-related areas, such as ETE and substance misuse, with the relevant links and referrals.
- Throughout the planning process practitioners were regularly engaging with people on probation. Consideration was given to people on probation's individual circumstances in all cases and took into account any diversity factors that may impact engagement or compliance.
- Overall inspectors assessed that in planning, 67 per cent of cases were sufficient in keeping people safe. By ensuring effective planning was in place, practitioners were improving the management of harm posed by individuals.

Areas for improvement:

- Contingency planning was insufficient in eight out of 20 relevant cases. Plans were too generic to fully mitigate the risk posed. Additionally, there needs to be stronger consideration of critical factors linked to serious harm, which was insufficient in seven out of 20 relevant cases.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.4. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

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

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	86%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	57%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	62%

The PDU is rated as 'Requires improvement' for implementation and delivery as the lowest score of the key questions was 57 per cent, relating to desistance.

Strengths:

- Of all the cases inspected, 70 per cent had had the same allocated practitioner since the start of their order or licence, and 100 per cent of cases had no more than two allocated practitioners. This provided continuity and time to build a working relationship.
- Practitioners were regularly engaging with key individuals in the person on probation's life, to support desistance and to keep people safe. This engagement enhanced the likeliness of improving both the engagement and compliance of the person on probation.

Areas for improvement:

- Further work was needed with local services to engage and support desistance during the sentence and beyond. This was judged as sufficient in only six out of 18 relevant cases, missing an opportunity to have the input of valuable services to assist with the delivery of interventions.
- Not enough work was being done to protect actual or potential victims, with this being judged as insufficient in seven out of 20 relevant cases. In cases where there were domestic abuse concerns, there was a lack of monitoring of developing or existing relationships to ensure measures were in place to keep people safe.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.5. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

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

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	81%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	67%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	57%

Blackburn with Darwen PDU is rated as 'Requires improvement' for reviewing with the lowest score for the key questions being 57 per cent.

Strengths:

- Practitioners were considering compliance, engagement and overcoming relevant barriers to working with people on probation. Probation practitioners were using appropriate enforcement and continued work with individuals following breach or recall, improving chances of desistance going forward.
- In a similar way to other areas of domain two, engagement with people on probation in reviewing was strong. This was judged as sufficient in 81 per cent of cases inspected. Additionally, in 71 per cent of cases we assessed people on probation were meaningfully involved in the reviewing process, strengthening the relationships with practitioners and people on probation as well as potentially improving compliance.

Areas for improvement:

- There was inconsistency in the completion of formal reviews. Although formal reviews were completed in 14 out of 18 relevant cases, the overall quality, particularly in relation to risk of harm, was insufficient. Significant information in reviews was missing, demonstrated by nine out of 15 cases failing to identify and address changes in factors related to risk of harm.
- Reviewing was not sufficiently informed by input from other agencies. In relation to desistance this was insufficient in five out of 18 relevant cases. In regard to keeping people safe, the picture was slightly worse, with this area being judged sufficient in six out of 19 relevant cases. Input from other agencies is crucial to ensure current and pertinent information from a number of sources is used in reviewing, improving accuracy in the process.

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

2.6. Outcomes

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

We do not currently rate the Outcomes standard but provide this data for information and benchmarking purposes only.

Outcomes	Percentage 'Yes'
Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	43%

Strengths:

- An increase in offending was found in only two out of 21 cases inspected. In addition to this, only four out of 17 cases were charged or convicted with a new offence. Given the challenges within the PDU, it was positive that the rate of re-offending on the cases we inspected was very low.
- There had been progress made to address certain factors linked to risk of harm, with positive scores for ETE progress. This was likely to be linked to the PDU having the offer of both a CRS and a longer established service offer to support in this area. There were improvements in strengths and protective factors, with promising scores in relation to motivation to change. This was often evident through practitioners' continued impactful working relationships with people on probation.

Areas for improvement:

- Early outcomes demonstrated sufficient progress in just nine out of 21 cases. Whilst it is acknowledged this was the early stages of some orders and licences, this figure is disappointing.
- Not enough work was undertaken to address factors to reduce reoffending, particularly around drug and alcohol use. Improvements were made in two out of 13 cases where drug use was a factor and only one out of 11 relevant cases where alcohol was a factor related to offending.
- There was insufficient work undertaken to address and reduce risk of serious harm posed by individuals, with improvements seen in only eight out of 20 cases. In cases where domestic abuse was linked as a factor for keeping others safe, inspectors judged improvements had been made in only two out of eight relevant cases.

Annexe one – Web links

Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection [on our website](#).

A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website using the following link: [Glossary \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)