



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

Cheshire West 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

In Cheshire West Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) we saw a strong and committed leadership team working hard to promote a culture of professional curiosity and effective practice across the PDU. The staff group were motivated and passionate about working in a trauma-responsive way with people on probation and had embraced opportunities for joint working with co-located partnership agencies.

The head of service proactively used the Regional Outcomes Innovation Fund (ROIF) to co-commission a range of innovative services with local strategic partners which complemented the wide range of rehabilitative interventions delivered in-house and by external providers. It was positive to see a particular focus on improving provision for people on probation with neurodiversity and mental health needs.

Staff welfare and personal development were prioritised, and approaches to sharing learning across the PDU were creative. Managers were accessible and supportive and paid close attention to workload management. Collaborative partnership working in semi-specialist teams facilitated the sharing of information and valuable expertise when working with individuals with the potential to cause the most harm to others.

While we saw some examples of promising practice in the case sample we inspected, the overall quality of casework was insufficient and the PDU was rated as 'Requires improvement' overall. Probation practitioners were focused on engaging people on probation and supporting desistance, but the work to deliver the sentence of the court and manage the risk of harm was inadequate. Recent recruitment activity in North West region had been successful in filling vacancies in frontline staff, but this resulted in a significant number of new probation practitioners in the PDU who needed more robust management oversight to ensure sufficient attention was paid to protecting victims and safeguarding children.

People on probation felt supported and listened to by their probation practitioner. However, they told us their voice was not heard in relation to influencing the way probation services were delivered in Cheshire West. The PDU therefore needs to ensure its organisational delivery plans take sufficient account of the views of people on probation.

Although the PDU will be disappointed with the outcomes of this inspection, we trust they will continue to build on their positive progress to date and deliver their vision of a high-quality service to protect the public, reduce reoffending, and make a positive change in the lives of people on probation.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Cheshire West PDU

Fieldwork started March 2023

Score **7/24**

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 rated

2.2 Assessment

Inadequate



2.3 Planning

Inadequate



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Requires improvement



Recommendations

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

Cheshire West PDU should:

1. ensure new and inexperienced staff are provided with robust management oversight to improve the quality of their work to keep people safe
2. follow up on domestic abuse and child safeguarding checks and use the information provided by the police and children's social care to inform risk assessments, plans and work with people on probation
3. increase their use of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) to support the desistance of people on probation
4. take greater account of the views of people on probation to inform the provision of services
5. ensure staff have sufficient knowledge, skills and resources to work effectively with people on probation from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds
6. improve the consistency and quality of recording in relation to Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) records.

North West region should:

7. ensure Senior Probation Officers have sufficient capacity and resources to undertake effective management oversight of casework
8. ensure sufficient infrastructure in the region to appropriately support the number of people recruited onto the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) training programme, which includes ensuring PDUs have sufficient capacity to deliver effective training, co-working opportunities, and management oversight to trainees
9. ensure unpaid work (UPW) requirements start promptly
10. support the PDU to improve joint working with local prisons and enhance pre-release engagement and planning.

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

11. resource probation regions sufficiently to oversee the training and development needs of a newly experienced workforce.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Cheshire West PDU over the period of a week, beginning 20 March 2023. We inspected 34 cases where sentences and licences had commenced between 5 September 2022 and 11 September 2022 and 26 September 2022 and 2 October 2022.

Before the unification of public and private probation service providers in June 2021, Cheshire West PDU's area was covered by the Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and the North West region of the National Probation Service (NPS). It is now one of 13 PDUs in the North West region of the Probation Service. It operates from three office locations in Chester, Northwich and Winsford.

The PDU serves the local authority of Cheshire West and Chester, covering a large geographical area spanning over 350 square miles. A significant majority of the 357,200 population identify as white (95 per cent), which correlates with the demography of the PDU's staff and caseload.

Accommodation for people on probation is a challenge due to a lack of social housing and a very competitive private rental market. There is also a lack of provision for people on probation with a dual diagnosis of substance misuse and mental health issues.

There are three prisons in Cheshire; HM Prison (HMP) Styal, a closed prison for women and young adults; HMP Thorn Cross, a Category D male prison; and HMP Risley, a Category C male prison. The area is covered by the Cheshire Constabulary.

The county has four courts: South Cheshire Magistrates' Court in Crewe; North Cheshire Magistrates' Court in Warrington (a specialist domestic abuse court); Chester Magistrates' Court; and Chester Crown Court. There are two court teams, both of which are managed in Cheshire East PDU.

CRS providers deliver interventions across the following pathways: Interventions Alliance for accommodation and personal wellbeing; Maximus for education, training and employment (ETE); and St Giles Wise for finance, benefit and debt advice. A dedicated women's centre, provided by Tomorrow's Women Wirral (TWW) provides a female-only reporting space in Chester where probation practitioners are co-located with TWW staff. Dependency and recovery services are provided by the Westminster Drugs Project.

At the time of our fieldwork the PDU employed 62.6 full-time equivalent staff, the majority of whom were female (83 per cent). The PDU's caseload was 1,474, comprising 754 people subject to community and suspended sentence orders, 447 people on post-release licences, and 273 people in prison.

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

In this inspection, three domain two standards were rated 'Inadequate', and one was rated 'Requires improvement' which, when applying our decision rules for leadership, rules out an overall rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. However, we identified a number of areas of effective leadership which were driving positive progress. This has supported a rating for leadership of 'Requires improvement' rather than 'Inadequate'.

Strengths:

- The vision and strategy of the PDU leadership team was to deliver a high-quality service to protect the public, reduce reoffending, and make a positive change in the lives of people on probation. This vision had been widely communicated – 80 per cent of respondents to the 2021 People Survey said they had a clear understanding of the organisation's objectives.
- Following the unification of public and private probation service providers in June 2021 leaders had successfully brought together staff from legacy CRC and NPS organisations to form a cohesive team.
- The head of the PDU was a strong advocate of professional curiosity to keep people safe, and there was commitment from managers and staff to promote this ethos through their work with people on probation.
- Staff were very positive about the leadership of the PDU. They described a culture of support, openness, and constructive challenge, where their voices were heard and their contribution valued.
- The leadership team sought to engage and influence stakeholders and partners in delivering the vision and priorities. The head of PDU was a key member of a number of strategic partnership and safeguarding boards.
- The PDU developed a pod model where semi-specialist probation practitioners were co-located with partners and commissioned providers to promote effective joint working and information-sharing to enhance the quality of service delivery.
- A detailed delivery plan, which was aligned to the regional target operating model, included objectives based on local priorities identified by staff to encourage their ownership and buy-in, which led to an embedded vision.
- Business risks were identified by the PDU leadership team and managed through a regional risk register. The head of PDU reported progress against the delivery plan to regional governance boards with oversight of operational effectiveness, quality improvement and workforce planning.

Areas for improvement:

- The PDU, partner agencies and commissioned providers shared many examples of effective practice and positive case studies during our fieldwork week, and we saw evidence of a strong commitment to improve quality across the PDU. However, the desired impact of the implementation of the vision and strategy was not sufficiently reflected in the cases we inspected.
- The PDU's deployment of the regional Engaging People on Probation plan had not progressed because the nationally commissioned Engaging People on Probation support contract provider had experienced resourcing issues in the Cheshire area. In the meantime, the head of PDU devised an alternative plan to make progress in this area using feedback from people on probation obtained by User Voice.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- Recruitment and retention activity had reduced vacancies, and the PDU planned to fill their remaining six Probation Officer (PO) vacancies through the PQiP programme to achieve target staffing numbers by December 2023.
- Staff described their workloads as busy but were optimistic they would see an improvement when local PQiP trainees achieved qualification.
- Managers monitored the workload measurement tool to identify probation practitioners who were above capacity. They were mindful of workloads when allocating new cases and deployed trainee staff to co-work cases and provide support to PO colleagues. Staff said managers would quickly step in to reallocate work if an individual signalled they were struggling.
- Staff described managers as accessible, visible, responsive, approachable, motivating, supportive and caring. Supervision sessions were used to focus on well-being and personal development, and staff felt management oversight enhanced the quality of their work while providing reassurance that they had completed key tasks. Managers used a coaching style to encourage staff to be reflective.
- Managers implemented reasonable adjustments for staff, who agreed there was flexibility across the teams to accommodate diversity.
- In the 2021 People Survey 69 per cent of staff said their manager motivated them to be more effective in their job, and 74 per cent said their manager recognised when they had done their job well. These results continued on a positive upward trajectory in the 2022 People Survey.
- Staff proactively supported each other and created a team charter which set out how they would work together in an inclusive and respectful way.
- Partnership working created opportunities for staff in semi-specialist roles to access training on stalking and sexual offending typologies.
- A Quality Development Officer assigned from the regional Performance and Quality team offered training and development to staff and was a valuable resource for managers. Staff found approaches to training and development were creative and considerate of different learning styles.
- The reward and recognition scheme was used by leaders to recognise positive contributions. It was also used by staff to show appreciation for each other.

Areas for improvement:

- The PDU had oversight of a high number of people undertaking the PQiP training programme. This required the PDU to invest a significant amount of resources into training and development; however, the majority of these staff

were recruited to fill vacancies across North West region and were going to be relocated following qualification.

- Staff undertaking the PQiP programme required co-working to support their development; however, the ratio of POs (21) to trainees (25) in the PDU was a constraint and meant opportunities were not always available.
- Case interviews with people undertaking the PQiP revealed some trainee practitioners felt overwhelmed and needed more support. This was also reflected in the cases inspected, where the quality of assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery in relation to keeping people safe undertaken by trainees was weaker than in the corresponding areas for qualified staff.
- Out of the 24 probation practitioners interviewed for the cases inspected, only half reported having a manageable caseload.
- Management oversight was deemed to have been effective in only 32 per cent of cases inspected. Given the high number of new and inexperienced probation practitioners within the PDU, robust oversight was not in place to provide enhanced support.

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

In rating this standard, the effective arrangements in place to develop, commission and make available relevant services and interventions have been considered against the domain two rating of 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery which, when applying our decision rules, would rule out a rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. The strengths identified support the overall rating of 'Requires improvement' for services rather than 'Inadequate'.

Strengths:

- The PDU undertook a strategic needs analysis using feedback from probation practitioners and people on probation to inform bids to the ROIF and co-commissioning of services with strategic partners. The needs analysis identified protected characteristics which informed the services secured.
- Managers and staff spoke highly of the services delivered by CRS providers, who embraced opportunities for co-location with probation staff. There were particularly positive reviews from staff in relation to the ETE offer and the provision to increase positive wellbeing.
- The PDU was responsive in meeting the needs of people in less accessible locations. In addition to the main office in Chester, staff and CRS providers were based at Northwich police station and a satellite office in Winsford.
- User Voice had surveyed people on probation. It found 90 per cent of respondents had been able to access services relevant to their personal needs; 76 per cent said they had been able to access services in a reasonable time; and 76 per cent were able to access services in their local area.
- The PDU worked effectively with strategic partners through multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), the integrated offender management scheme, the Harm Reduction Unit, and a semi-specialist team managing people on probation who had committed sexual offences. These approaches strengthened the joint oversight and management of people on probation with the potential to cause the most serious harm.
- Youth-to-adult transitions were carefully planned and managed with consideration of the needs and risks of the young people.
- Probation practitioners, CRS providers and partner agencies used trauma responsive, strength-based approaches to working with people on probation and victims. Multi-agency joint working arrangements were characterised by effective practice, shared goals, healthy challenge and mutual respect.
- The head of PDU had co-commissioned with the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), a women-only reporting centre in Chester and a service which delivered restorative awareness sessions and restorative justice interventions for people on probation.

- People with an UPW requirement had access to a laptop and support to access online materials to improve their employability. A positive range of individual placements, including female-only placements and evening projects, offered flexibility.
- The co-location of UPW practitioners and programme facilitators with case management teams improved communication and information sharing between staff.
- Programme facilitators offered support to probation practitioners to help them develop confidence in the delivery of one-to-one work.
- The head of PDU had established links with one of the local prisons (HMP Risley) to improve communication and joint working.

Areas for improvement:

- In the inspected cases, implementation and delivery of services to effectively support the people on probation's desistance was insufficient.
- Resourcing issues in the regional UPW team caused delays in people on probation accessing UPW work projects or placements. They also impacted on the UPW team's ability to meet their performance targets and progress cases which had been operational for over 12 months at the time of our fieldwork.
- Due to constraints in recruiting programme facilitators to deliver the sexual offending behaviour programme, some people on probation had to travel further to access group work sessions.

Resettlement work

Cheshire West PDU had not yet established a short sentence function team for managing people sentenced to custodial sentences of 12 months or less, and implementation of Offender Management in Prison (OMiC) for longer custodial sentences was still in its early stages.

Strengths:

- Probation practitioners paid attention to the diversity needs and personal circumstances of people subject to post-release supervision.
- Home visits were undertaken to support the effective management of risk of harm in the majority of resettlement cases inspected.

Areas for improvement:

- Resourcing constraints in the PDU and local prisons, along with a lack of video link facilities, were impacting the timeliness of handovers from Prison Offender Managers to Community Offender Managers.
- Probation practitioners did not ensure a proportionate level of contact with people in prison for OMiC or short-sentence cases.
- Key resettlement and desistance needs were not addressed before release in five out of the 10 resettlement cases inspected, and key risk of harm needs were not addressed before release in six out of 10 cases.
- Planning, and implementation and delivery were comparatively worse in resettlement cases than for community sentences. They were insufficient in relation to effective engagement, supporting desistance and keeping people safe.

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.

Good

Strengths:

- When new policies and guidance were circulated, the PDU leadership team met to discuss and digest key messages and practice changes and agree on how to disseminate them to staff in a clear, consistent, and accessible way.
- Monthly practice development days were used to roll out significant policy and practice changes to ensure key messages were delivered and understood. The content was influenced by staff feedback as well as learning from serious further offence reviews, inspections, and local quality assurance.
- Positive attitudes to learning and development were promoted across all teams. Learning from serious further offence reviews prompted the leadership team to establish a culture of professional curiosity within the PDU.
- The MAPPA Coordinator delivered MAPPA refresher training for all staff and relaunched the MAPPA Level 1 Policy Framework in response to the publication of the MAPPA thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Probation.
- Based on analysis of gaps in provision and feedback from probation practitioners and people on probation, the head of PDU co-commissioned services to enhance the level of support to people on probation with mental health and substance misuse needs.
- 83 per cent of Cheshire West respondents in the 2022 annual people on probation survey felt listened to by probation staff and said probation practitioners gave them an opportunity to share their views.
- Staff and people on probation felt safe accessing the probation offices. Buildings used by probation were accessible and provided opportunities for co-location with CRS providers and partner agencies.

Areas for improvement:

- Less than half the Cheshire West respondents in the 2022 annual people on probation survey (44 per cent) said they had seen their sentence plan and only 38% had contributed to it.
- ViSOR records were not being updated consistently due to a lack of ViSOR-trained staff. This was a result of delays in ViSOR vetting and the fact there was only one ViSOR trainer in the region. There were plans for case administrators in the specialist pods to pick up responsibility for recording once all teams were restructured into the pod model.

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, 54 per cent reported that they were subject to a community sentence and 38 per cent were being supervised after being released from prison. Nine per cent of respondents did not specify their sentence type.

The respondents were largely representative of the caseload demographics in terms of gender, but 16 per cent identified as being from a black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage, which was an over-representation of the overall caseload.

Strengths:

- 81 per cent of people on probation said they were able to contact their probation practitioner when needed, and 66 per cent said they were able to have appointments at a time that suited their needs. 73 per cent of those who needed support accessing services felt that probation had helped them.

“I’ve received help with housing through my probation officer and an understanding of my addiction issues.”

- Two-thirds of respondents were happy with the overall support they received from probation and said they had a positive relationship with their probation practitioner.

“My probation officer is very hands-on, always available to speak to, excellent communication, helped with a CV and job applications, always checks at each appointment that I’m ok or if I have any issues, excellent probation service provided.”

Areas for improvement:

- Travel was cited as the biggest issue by just over a third of people on probation, who expressed dissatisfaction with the location of probation offices and the cost of travelling to their appointments.

“My trips here take a little while and cost a bit, and I don’t get it back, it comes out of my benefits.”

- People on probation did not feel their voice was heard when it came to the way probation services operated. Less than half of those surveyed (44 per cent) said they had been asked for their views about being on supervision.

“Daft question really, but no. I’ve given my opinion on things, and you’re told how it is and that’s that.”

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

- In 71 per cent of inspected cases, probation practitioners considered people on probation's protected characteristics and the impact of these on their ability to comply and engage.
- Managers and staff were allocated lead areas of responsibility for raising awareness and improving provision for people on probation across all protected characteristics.
- The head of PDU commissioned services from the National Autistic Society to support neurodiverse people on probation and improve probation practitioners' understanding of neurodiversity.
- The PDU had a neurodiversity-friendly interview room in Chester equipped with items such as fidget spinners to support people on probation with attention deficit disorders, along with a selection of different chairs to create a more comfortable and inviting environment for people on probation with sensory needs.
- The head of PDU secured funding to co-commission a women-only reporting centre in Chester with the PCC.
- In conjunction with the regional Health and Justice Manager, the head of PDU commissioned an in-depth analysis of people on probation's health needs.
- The manager with oversight of youth-to-adult transitions supported the local youth justice team to roll out a toolkit to improve emotional maturity across their youth justice case managers, to support the transition of young people from youth to adult services.
- Opportunities were identified for older people on probation who had committed sexual offences to attend local men's groups for safe socialisation. One of these individuals was supported to access church safely, which involved a dialogue with local church leaders to provide them with safeguarding advice and guidance.
- The manager with the lead for foreign national people on probation established links with the Home Office to obtain advice and support for probation practitioners working with this cohort. They also shared details with probation practitioners about a nearby activity hub where foreign national people on probation could access courses.
- A member of staff with the lead for sexual orientation and gender identity raised awareness among colleagues in relation to the appropriate use of language and pronouns and provided information about sexual safety practices.

Areas for improvement:

- The local population the PDU served was very limited in terms of ethnic diversity. This was reflected in the staffing group and caseload. Leaders recognised there was more work to do to meet the needs of people on probation with a black, Asian and minority ethnic background. The region had developed a race engagement toolkit in support of this, but probation practitioners did not demonstrate an awareness of this resource during case assessment interviews.

2. Court work and case supervision

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

Not rated

This standard was not inspected. There were no pre-sentence reports prepared within the inspected PDU.

2.2. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating¹ 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?	71%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	76%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	32%

Cheshire West PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' in this area because the quality of assessments in relation to keeping people safe was only found to be sufficient in the minority of cases.

Strengths:

- When undertaking assessments, probation practitioners analysed the motivation and readiness of the person on probation to engage and comply with their sentence in 82 per cent of cases.
- In addition to gathering information about the person on probation's offending needs, probation practitioners also identified protective factors which promoted desistance.
- Inspected cases provided examples of positive practice where the probation practitioner explored individuals' protected characteristics and personal circumstances. This enabled them to build a positive rapport and create personalised and well-informed assessments that actively involved the person on probation.

Areas for improvement:

Information was requested from the police and children's social care in relation to domestic abuse and child safeguarding in the majority of cases, where relevant. However, there was a lack of timely follow-up by probation practitioners when they did not receive a response, and they did not consistently use information shared by police and children's social care to inform their assessments, plans and work with people on probation.

¹ 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.

Inadequate

Our rating² 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?	68%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	68%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	38%

While there was evidence that probation practitioners paid attention to engagement and desistance factors in relation to planning, Cheshire West PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' in this area due to insufficient activity during planning which was focused on keeping people safe.

Strengths:

- In 71 per cent of inspected cases, probation practitioners sought the views of people on probation to enable them to be meaningfully involved in creating their plans and to explore potential barriers to engagement.
- The level and type of contact arranged with people on probation was appropriate in 65 per cent of cases, and planning for appointments was considerate of protective factors such as employment, and diversity needs including mobility issues and childcare commitments. Plans and methods of delivery were responsive to the mental health needs and neurodiversity factors experienced by people on probation. They included joint working with commissioned providers to deliver specialist services.

Areas for improvement:

- Probation practitioners did not address the critical elements of risk within their plans in the majority of inspected cases, nor were sufficient links made to the involvement of other agencies.
- 47 per cent of plans lacked the necessary controls and measures to manage risk of harm, and in 50 per cent of cases, there were insufficient contingency arrangements to protect victims and safeguard children.

² 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.

Inadequate

Our rating³ 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?	53%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	35%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	41%

Cheshire West PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery because there was insufficient evidence in the cases inspected that interventions had been delivered to reduce people on probation's risk of reoffending and harm.

Strengths:

- Probation practitioners adjusted the timing and location of appointments to promote regular attendance. Home visits to improve compliance and support the management of risk of harm were undertaken in 65 per cent of inspected cases.
- In 87 per cent of the cases inspected, probation practitioners said they had access to an appropriate range of services. There were examples of appropriate referrals and effective liaison with providers delivering services to address substance misuse and improve employability and personal wellbeing.

Areas for improvement:

- The requirements of the sentence started promptly in less than half (47 per cent) of the inspected cases, with delays in starting accredited programmes, UPW and rehabilitation activity requirements.
- In 13 out of 28 inspected cases where there were risks of non-compliance probation practitioners provided too much flexibility, and as a result, the issues were not effectively addressed in a timely manner to reduce the need for enforcement action.

³ 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.](#)

- There was a lack of consistent practice in relation to ongoing domestic abuse enquiries and liaison with children's social care to ensure that risks to partners and children were monitored and managed effectively.
- It was disappointing that in 71 per cent of cases, services delivered were not aimed at addressing offending behaviour or supporting desistance.

2.5. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁴ 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?	74%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	74%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	59%

Cheshire West PDU is rated as 'Requires improvement' for reviewing, which reflects the ongoing positive engagement with people on probation, coupled with a greater focus on risk of harm than was seen during earlier stages of the inspected cases.

Strengths:

- Probation practitioners undertook regular informal reviews of progress with the person on probation to acknowledge their progress, reflect on changes in circumstances, and adjust the ongoing plan of work.
- People on probation were meaningfully engaged in reviewing their progress in 68 per cent of cases.
- Reviews were also used to facilitate re-engagement with people on probation and reiterate expectations of attendance and engagement following enforcement activity.

Areas for improvement:

- In more than a third of inspected cases (35 per cent), reviewing activity did not identify and address changes to the risk of harm posed.
- In 12 cases where reviews were undertaken, information was not sought from other agencies involved in managing risk of harm.
- There was a lack of formal reviews of the risk of harm posed by people on probation, which resulted in missed opportunities to review and strengthen risk management plans and contingency plans.

⁴ 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?	53%

Strengths:

- In 28 out of 34 cases, there had been no further charges or convictions since the start of the order or licence being inspected. This signified a reduction in reoffending for 35 per cent of the people on probation within our case sample.
- There had been a 41 per cent improvement in relation to people on probation addressing the factors most closely linked to their offending and a 29 per cent reduction in factors most closely related to the risk of harm they posed to others.
- Compliance had been sufficient in 65 per cent of the inspected cases, which was a positive reflection of the quality of work undertaken by probation practitioners in relation to effective engagement.

Areas for improvement:

- Breach action should have been initiated in four out of 15 cases where compliance had fallen below what was expected from people on probation. Assessors found that some probation practitioners were overly lenient in dealing with issues of non-attendance.
- The PDU needs to increase the amount of intervention delivered to people on probation as there were delays in relation to people on probation accessing UPW and accredited programmes. There was also a lack of progress in relation to the completion of rehabilitation activity requirements, which could be attributable to the fact that only 50 per cent of the people on probation in our case sample had received interventions from CRS providers.

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://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/glossary)