



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:
Knowsley and St Helens PDU
The Probation Service – North West region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, June 2023



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Acknowledgements

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. We report on the effectiveness of probation and youth offending service work with adults and children.

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.

Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

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Foreword

The results from this inspection were disappointing. Although the leaders of this service have worked hard to build a strong, committed team, relationships are strong with many key partners, and staff morale is positive, the impact of this is yet to be seen in effective delivery of services. In too many of the cases we assessed, there was little meaningful service delivery and not enough offence focused work was taking place. The quality of work delivered to manage people on probation was insufficient across all four of our standards for casework. Overall, we have rated this Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) as 'Inadequate' As with several other PDUs we have inspected since unification, Knowsley and St Helens PDU had high staff vacancy rates. Although these are improving, vacancies remain at 22 per cent for Probation Officers (POs). Positively, there was good recruitment and no vacancies at the Probation Services Officer (PSO) grade, however, the newness of staff at this grade, without adequate learning opportunities, was impacting significantly on the quality of service delivery.

In common with other recent inspections, we were particularly concerned about the poor quality of the work to assess and manage the risks that people on probation may present to the wider community. Only 24 per cent of cases inspected were sufficient in the delivery of services to effectively support the safety of other people, and assessments around the risk of harm were equally concerning, with only 24 per cent of cases being sufficiently assessed.

Practitioners were hindered by delays in accessing full domestic abuse information from police records, and we saw concerning examples where this led to inadequate assessment and management of risk. At the point of our inspection, there was a backlog of 1,350 domestic abuse follow-up enquiries awaiting a response from the police across the Merseyside PDUs, where an initial enquiry had confirmed previous intelligence was held but a further enquiry was required to request the detailed information.

There was a lack of professional curiosity and understanding of indicators of risk relating to both domestic abuse and child safeguarding. Contact with children's services in relation to child safeguarding concerns was variable. It happened in less than one-third of the cases we inspected where we considered it necessary.

Strategically, there are clear delivery plans and although the leadership of this local service recognise they are on a journey of improvement significant improvements are still needed to ensure the risks posed by individuals on probation are sufficiently understood and safely managed.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

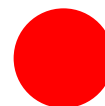
Ratings

Knowsley and St Helens
Fieldwork started April 2023

Score **2/24**

Overall rating

Rating



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Case supervision

2.2 Assessment

Inadequate



2.3 Planning

Inadequate



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Inadequate



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.

Knowsley and St Helens PDU should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
2. ensure information relating to domestic abuse history is obtained promptly and sufficiently analysed to support the management of risk of harm to others
3. ensure information relating to child safeguarding is routinely obtained and used to ensure risks to children are understood and safety arrangements are in place
4. provide the necessary training and learning opportunities to support practitioners to apply professional curiosity
5. ensure managers are providing effective management oversight, focusing on the quality of work relating to risk of harm
6. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases.

North West region should:

7. ensure police information relating to domestic abuse is accessible and of sufficient quality at the earliest stage in the assessment process.

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

8. improve the vetting timescales for the recruitment of staff
9. ensure all probation offices have reliable Wi-Fi access
10. review the national training offer for PSOs to ensure a consistent and equitable offer of learning and development across all regions.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Knowsley and St Helens PDU over the period of a week, beginning 17 April 2023. We inspected 46 cases where sentences and licences had commenced between 12 September 2022 to 18 September 2022 and 03 October to 09 October 2022. We also conducted 45 interviews with probation practitioners.

Prior to the unification of public and private probation service providers in June 2021, the Knowsley and St Helens PDU was covered by Merseyside CRC and NPS North West. It is a newly formed delivery unit and is one of 13 PDUs in the North West region, and one of five in the Merseyside area. The PDU operates from two offices, Huyton, where the Knowsley team are based and Prescott, where the St Helens team are located.

The PDU covers two local authorities, Knowsley and St Helens and operates within the Merseyside Constabulary area. The PDU leadership team have forged good relationships with strategic partners and was actively involved in a wide range of partnership and safeguarding boards.

Knowsley is the second most deprived local authority in the country, with St Helens also having significant areas of deprivation. Serious Organised crime is a significant issue in Knowsley. It has the second highest organised crime gang and county lines offences in Merseyside. To address these significant issues, a serious violence team had been set up, working in conjunction with the local police to manage the risks of this cohort.

The PDU is serviced by a court outside the area, and as such, the quality of court work was not inspected. There are no prisons or approved premises in Knowsley and St Helens PDU.

Community and resettlement commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) are provided by: Seetec for accommodation; Maximus for employment, training and education (ETE); The Growth Company for Personal Wellbeing and St Giles Wise for finance, benefit and debt and people on probation engagement. In addition, dependency and recovery services are provided by Change Grow Live.

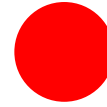
Some delivery of services is undertaken sub-regionally across Merseyside and is led from within other PDUs, such as the supervision of women and unpaid work. There were two specialist teams within the PDU, including the Merseyside Sex Offender Learning and Desistance team, working jointly with the Merseyside sex offender police unit to manage the highest risk and complex cases in the area. In addition, there is a jointly managed Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team.

When fully staffed the PDU will have 98 full-time equivalent staff. Although improving, there are some significant staffing vacancies at the PO grade (22 per cent). There are eight Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) reporting to the Head of PDU, and no deputy is allocated to this unit.

The PDU manages 679 people on community or suspended sentence orders and 474 people who are being supervised in the community on licence and post-sentence supervision. At the time of the inspection, the PDU was rated green on the probation prioritisation framework.

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.

Inadequate

In this inspection, all four domain two casework quality standards were rated 'Inadequate', which resulted in an overall Inadequate rating for leadership under the HM Inspectorate of Probation's decision rules.

Strengths:

- The PDU delivery plan set out the vision and priorities and aligned to the regional strategy. About 91 per cent of staff in the 2022 people survey said they understood the organisation's objectives and purpose, and 89 per cent of staff surveyed in the inspection reported that the PDU prioritised quality and adherence to evidence.
- Staff engagement activity to develop and communicate the PDU delivery plan was undertaken. There were mechanisms in place for regular constructive communication with staff that aimed to support the delivery of the vision and strategy.
- The senior leadership team had worked to embed a culture of open and constructive communication with staff, and morale was positive. Staff across the PDU were largely positive about the leadership.
- There was an Engaging People on Probation (EPoP) strategy for the PDU. Of the people on probation who completed the User Voice survey, 60 per cent reported they felt they had a say in how probation was delivered and that there was recognition of their achievements.

Areas for improvement:

- Despite efforts to support the delivery of the PDU's vision and strategy, Middle managers and staff were not fully engaged with the delivery plan. Whilst staff spoke about examples of effective practice and a strategy to improve the quality of practice, this was not seen in the cases inspected.
- Despite leaders embedding a culture of learning and focusing on staff engagement, in the cases inspected, the impact of this was not evident.
- The Quality Improvement plan was not being delivered sufficiently given the quality of public protection work across all areas; assessment, planning, implementation and delivery and reviewing was the weakest area of practice in the cases inspected, raising concerns of the arrangements to keep people safe.
- There was a significant backlog (approximately 1,350 requests across Merseyside) of police information requests in relation to domestic abuse. As a

result, the level of risk information available to inform service delivery and keeping people safe in the cases inspected was a concern.

- Systems in place for domestic abuse information sharing were disappointing, particularly given that the majority of cases had domestic abuse factors. The process in place provided some, but not enough, information relating to a history of domestic abuse, and required practitioners to request more detail to understand the context of police intelligence. These further enquiries experienced up to a 12 week delay in response time. This presented practitioners with a significant challenge of assessing and trying to manage risk of harm without relevant information, leaving potential and actual victims exposed and unsafe.
- The risks associated with the police information sharing of domestic abuse intelligence was identified at a sub-regional level. However, we were told recruitment by probation to resource the process sufficiently was held up by significant delays with police vetting. This was not sufficiently prioritised as a local business risk, despite its importance to the work of practitioners.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

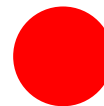
- The support and wellbeing of staff was a priority for the leadership team. Workloads were routinely reviewed and were, on average, better than other PDUs we have inspected.
- Decisions in relation to the redeployment of staff in multi-agency roles (for example, the young offender service secondee) were made in collaboration with the relevant senior partners and mitigated with the use of agency staff.
- Administrators were extremely passionate about their role and had a solution-focused approach to staff shortages in the team. There was a probation operational delivery structure model in place, which was effective in supporting manageable administration workloads.
- To address the workloads of managers, the head of service put forward a business case for an additional SPO to oversee Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees and redeployed resources across the management team, which was also supported by dedicated administration.
- Sickness levels stand at 7.1 days per annum, which was better than the region, and below the organisational target.
- Two per cent of staff were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background, which was representative of the PDU's caseload, which was reported to be 1.27 per cent.
- Opportunities for development and progression were available, for example the creation of a senior administration performance lead role, the PO and PSO senior practitioner role and the SPO partnerships lead role.
- Despite challenges with staff shortages and increased demands due to inexperience in the practitioner group, staff were highly motivated and morale was high.
- Staff welcomed the engagement events with the head of the PDU, which provided opportunities for two-way discussion and feedback.
- Reward and recognition were used widely, which was appreciated by staff. The PDU actively participated in staff awards, with 18 awards made across various grades in the PDU over the last year.

Areas for improvement:

- The main staffing shortage was at the PO grade, with 9.38 full-time equivalent vacancies. The PDU needs more experienced staff and managers to support and provide oversight to staff with learning and development needs.

- Staff attrition was 15 per cent, with PSO attrition at 22 per cent, although some is due to PSOs moving into the PqiP role.
- In the cases inspected, staff did not have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience required, evidenced by examples of significant gaps in knowledge and understanding in key areas of practice, such as safeguarding, serious organised crime and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).
- Leaders recognise there was a gap in the skills and experience of the PSO staff group. Staff described PSO training as poor and while there are local initiatives in place, the national training provision was not effective.
- While 69 per cent of staff who completed the staff survey told us they received regular supervision, staff interviewed during the inspection reported an inconsistent experience of supervision and activity to support their development. This was mostly attributed to the workloads of the middle managers.
- The quality of management oversight varied significantly in the cases inspected, with numerous examples of actions set, not completed, and not followed up. In 62 per cent of the cases inspected, management oversight was insufficient.
- Learning and development needs were identified and considered a key priority by leaders who were trying to embed a culture of learning and continuous improvement. However, practitioner feedback about the style of delivery of learning was not always positive and the learning delivered was not reflected in the cases inspected.

1.3. Services



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

Inadequate

Despite some strengths, this had not translated into the casework, evidenced by the inadequate domain two scores, where services delivered to effectively support the safety of others were judged sufficient in only 24 per cent of cases inspected.

Strengths:

- Managers and staff were generally positive of the provision provided by the CRS, substance misuse and other commissioned services. The Growth Company (CRS) provision was innovative and provided a holistic offer of personal wellbeing support.
- Co-location arrangements across multiple services worked well to support referrals and communication, particularly with substance misuse providers.
- Strategic needs analysis had been undertaken to inform the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF) and co-commissioning agreements, which led to various provisions being available relating to neurodiversity, violence reduction, increased domestic abuse provision for victims, ETE, dedicated provision for both black, Asian and minority ethnic and male prison leavers.
- Building Better Relationships (BBR), Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) and Structured Interventions were delivered at both PDU offices. There were no backlogs and waiting lists were pro-actively managed. TSP was delivered on a rolling basis, with no waiting lists and BBR was starting within 16 weeks of sentence.
- Unpaid Work (UPW) teams had positive interface arrangements in place between managers and practitioners to support compliance. Laptops were available to undertake ETE as part of the requirement. In the cases we inspected with an UPW requirement, there was good completion of the hours required. UPW only cases had strong focus engagement and desistance.
- The Sex Offender Learning and Desistance team model was unique to Merseyside Constabulary and the Probation Service PDUs across Merseyside, where positive joint working was taking place.

Areas for improvement:

- The implementation and delivery of services were not sufficiently coordinated or strengths-based, with little focus on building protective factors. Services and necessary interventions identified to address offending and harm at the assessment and planning stages were not delivered in sufficient numbers.

- Whilst domestic abuse enquiries were made in 83 per cent of the cases inspected, the wider detail of the intelligence was not shared for several weeks. This meant in too many cases, there was an unacceptable level of analysis of risk of harm. Whilst this was acknowledged and an action plan was in place, the level of priority and clear direction to resolve the issues were insufficient. Which meant there were gaps in accessing relevant services to ensure risk of harm was sufficiently managed.
- There was a lack of professional curiosity regarding safeguarding children and associated risks with serious organised crime, substance misuse, and domestic abuse. There was acknowledgement from senior leaders that quality and professional curiosity was on a journey of improvement and was a priority in next year's quality improvement plan.
- Of the 14 post-sentence supervision cases inspected, ten had insufficient contact from the practitioners prior to their release, impacting effective arrangements being in place for their resettlement into the community.
- In 70 per cent of cases inspected, services being delivered were not focused on reducing reoffending or supporting desistance. Many practitioners reported a lack of confidence in delivering available toolkits and therefore contact with people on probation was not effective.
- Despite service provision being available, local partners were not routinely involved in delivering the necessary provision, which was reflected in the cases inspected.
- While there were some strengths in the services available for women, arrangements for supervising women were different to other PDUs in the Merseyside area. There was a dedicated Women's centre in other PDUs and although there was provision of a dedicated women's space within the Knowsley office, the provision offered is different.

Resettlement work

Work focusing on the assessment, planning and delivery of services for resettlement cases requires attention in Knowsley and St Helens PDU.

Strengths:

- We found that reviewing activity for resettlement cases was overall better across work to focus on engagement, desistance and keeping people safe, than it was for those people subject to community sentences. In particular, practitioners were working well to engage and support the compliance of people following their release from prison.

Areas for improvement:

- On too many occasions, there was insufficient focus on the assessment and planning required to keep people safe prior to release from custody. Our inspectors found only 14 per cent of resettlement cases to be sufficiently assessed and only 29 per cent of resettlement cases to have sufficient plans to keep people safe. This led to factors linked to risk of serious harm not being managed appropriately and placing people at risk.
- Domestic abuse, 72 per cent, and child safeguarding enquiries, 58 per cent, were made in too few of the resettlement cases we inspected and were overall completed less frequently than in community cases. This inevitably impacted the quality of assessment and planning necessary to manage risk on release from custody.
- There was insufficient contact with people on probation prior to release, with this being judged as sufficient in just 29 per cent of the post-release cases. This was a missed opportunity to start the period of supervision well and set a positive foundation for further work, particularly when practitioners focus so well to engage with people on probation immediately following release.
- Not enough work was completed to address the key resettlement and desistance needs of people on probation prior to being released from custody, with under half of the cases judged as sufficient (36 per cent). This resulted in people on probation being released without supportive plans in place.
- In over two-thirds of the cases, the implementation and delivery of services was not effectively delivered to support desistance (79 per cent) or the safety of other people (71 per cent).

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

Information sharing arrangements with the police's domestic abuse unit were insufficient which resulted in significant limitations in the assessment of risk where only 24 per cent of cases were assessed to have sufficient focus on keeping people on probation safe. This has contributed to an overall rating for information and facilities of 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths:

- The regional performance and quality team allocated a duality and development officer and performance and quality manager to the PDU, with responsibility for completing audits, analysis, and identifying improvements.
- Bi-monthly protected learning days were embedded within the PDU. These learning events were informed by the needs identified in audits, SFO and practitioner feedback.
- There was evidence of a commitment to learning and development. For example, practitioners and managers attended a multi-agency domestic abuse learning event and a joint MAPPA learning event delivered across probation service and police.
- Work to commission services to improve access for 18–25-year-olds was ongoing. This included widening the provision of drugs services to include interventions specific to the trends of young people's drug use (recreational ketamine use), as well as the newly established serious violence team.
- The EpoP strategy was driving actions to review and improve the effectiveness of service delivery, which was being led by a band 5 EpoP Manager together with oversight from the PDU.
- The Sex Offender Learning and Desistance (SOLD) team received learning at a sub-regional level with opportunities to share the learning across the PDU.
- Information exchange between practitioners in specialist teams (SOLD and IOM) and the police was working well. Practitioners and partners described quick and effective communication to check and respond to emerging risks within these teams. We saw some evidence of this in the cases inspected.
- The police in the SOLD team described an impressive use of Violent and Sex Offender Register by practitioners to share information and ARMS informed OASys assessments.
- Co-located Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements were in place, and the PDU had taken a decision to put a PO into the MASH to support timely and enhanced information sharing and analysis of risk.

Areas for improvement:

- The MAPPA audit process had been paused due to the region waiting for the new national audit tool to be launched. Subsequently, there was no MAPPA Level 2 or Level 3 audit data available at the time of inspection.
- Staff described a mixed response to the protected learning days, which was largely due to feeling under pressure with workloads, and the delivery which some described as negative.
- Diversity information for women was collected at Merseyside level, which made it difficult to drive improvement specific to the needs of local people in Knowsley and St Helens.
- While there was some local activity to identify learning from audits, which included a focus on wider learning from high-profile reviews. However, there were clear similarities with some of the issues identified in these reviews found in the cases we inspected. This was concerning and needs urgent attention.
- The PDU has processes in place for internal audit of cases to support quality and improvement. Whilst themes from quality audits were used to inform learning events, the impact of this learning was not seen in the cases we inspected.
- The St Helen's office was based in Prescott and not within the St Helens local authority area. There were concerns regarding the impact of EPoP with wider services. The geography of St Helens meant that some people on probation were required to undertake lengthy journeys in order to attend appointments. This presented some difficulties for those with an UPW requirement, particularly on Sundays when transport routes were less frequent.
- Staff and people on probation explained that the travel card issued to attend appointments did not cover the transport provision available.
- Staff in the Prescott office described feeling unsafe in the reception area despite mitigations in place, including a health and safety plan in the event of an incident and increased reception cover to reduce incidents of lone working.
- Wi-Fi was not available in the Knowsley office, which meant that staff had to either hotspot on their mobile phones or use cables to connect to the internet.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 88 people on probation as part of this inspection. There was an almost even split of people on community sentences and those that had been released from prison. The respondents were largely representative of caseload demographics in terms of gender and ethnic diversity.

Strengths:

- People on probation felt safe accessing probation services (88 per cent) and were able to have private conversations with their probation practitioner (90 per cent).
- 13 per cent of respondents stated 'reception' as what has been good about tier probation experience, which is more than twice the national average of six per cent.
- Overall, people on probation were largely positive about the support they receive from probation, with 81 per cent of respondents reporting to be happy.

"I have never been given help as much as this time around being convicted. I was able to be given a wellbeing coach. Also I was given a counsellor. Without these two key ingredients, I would probably be in jail."

Areas for improvement:

- Travel was the second biggest issue for 20 per cent of those surveyed. This is high compared to other regions and the national average is nine per cent. The majority of those reporting travel as their biggest issue attended the St Helens office.

"The location is difficult to find and a nightmare to get to."

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

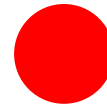
- 1.27 per cent of the people on probation in Knowsley and St Helens were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background, which was representative of the staff group, which was at two per cent.
- The PDU head was sensitive to the needs of people on Probation with neurodiversity needs. The ROIF had been utilised regionally to commission services from the National Autistic Society for neurodiverse people on probation and probation practitioners to improve their understanding of neurodiversity.
- Services from the Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Foundation for young people on probation in the PDU were also commissioned. The purpose was to assist young people on probation to understand their condition, how it related to their choices and to provide them with tools and understanding to better manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- Practitioners in the case inspections spoke positively about the services available in relation to neurodiversity and ADHD.
- In relation to domain 2 case inspection, in the three female cases we inspected, the practice relating to assessment, planning, implementation and delivery and reviewing was notably better across engagement, focus on desistance and keeping other people safe.

Areas for improvement:

- In the cases inspected, analysis of people on probations' diversity factors and consideration of the impact of these on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery was considered in 48 per cent.
- Women in Knowsley and St Helen's report to the Knowsley office. Whilst there was a dedicated women's room with co-location of CRS provision, women did not have a dedicated women's only space. Disappointingly we found there to be a disparity with the provision available for women in the Wirral and Liverpool North, where there are Women's centres in place, compared to Knowsley and St Helens.
- The staff group was made up of 87 per cent women. However, 100 per cent of the caseload in the PDU is male due to the sub-regional arrangements for the management of women in the region.
- Although was a regional equality, diversity and inclusion plan in place, there were no diversity-lead staff or forums in place to discuss issues of diversity or delivery of the regional plan. The PDU leadership team told us they made the decision that equality, diversity and inclusion should be every manager's responsibility, and there were mechanisms in place to enable a continuous focus on diversity within teams. We did not find equality, diversity and inclusion being championed in the PDU during domain 1 and domain 2 meetings. We felt that opportunities were missed to improve.

2. Case supervision

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?	54%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	72%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	24%

Knowsley and St Helens PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for assessment as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 24 per cent. Concerningly, this lowest score relates to whether there was sufficient focus on keeping other people safe, with this only being demonstrated in the minority of cases, regardless of sentence type.

Strengths:

- Positively probation practitioners work to identify and analyse offending-related factors, including the strengths and protective factors of people on probation. In the cases we inspected, this was a strong aspect of the assessment process.

Areas for improvement:

- In 70 per cent of cases, risk factors were not clearly identified. Where the was information known in relation to increased drug and alcohol use, new relationships, other potentially risky behaviour and child safeguarding concerns, too often, this was missing from risk assessments.

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.](#)

- Whilst domestic abuse enquiries were made in 83 per cent of cases, this meant there were eight cases without any checks completed. We found the information received provided no context and was not of sufficient detail to enable a sufficient analysis of risk of harm. There was a significant delay of up to 12 weeks to receive detailed intelligence in relation to domestic abuse. This meant that without the necessary detailed information, assessments were not accurately identifying all potentially harmful behaviours.
- Child safeguarding enquiries were completed in too few of the cases inspected where they were required, and there were 12 cases where enquiries were not completed where required. There was little professional curiosity into the potential risks to children associated with complex offending behaviour such as substance misuse, organised crime and domestic abuse.
- In 30 cases, the assessment was not informed sufficiently by available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and did not involve other agencies. This resulted in unsafe decisions regarding electronic monitoring arrangements and the approved release address of people on probation with a significant history of domestic abuse.

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?	61%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	65%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	43%

Knowsley and St Helens PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for planning as the lowest score of the three key questions was 43 per cent. Similar to assessment, it is concerning that planning to keep other people safe was not given enough priority.

Strengths:

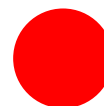
- Practitioners were engaging with people on probation with strong analysis of the readiness and motivation to change throughout the planning process. Planning practices were, in the reasonable majority, desistance focused, with 69 per cent of cases sufficiently reflecting offending-related factors and prioritising those which are most likely to support a reduction in offending.

Areas for improvement:

- Similar to assessment findings, too few of the cases had sufficient consideration of the critical factors linked to risk of harm to others. As a result of information not being available at the point of assessment, there were limitations in the plans that were in place to manage the risks posed by individuals.
- Contingency arrangements to keep people on probation safe was poor in the cases inspected. A reasonable inevitability of limited identification and analysis of risk based on multi-agency information was seen. In the cases inspected, only 37 per cent had sufficient contingency plans.

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?	43%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	30%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	24%

Knowsley and St Helens PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery in all three areas we assessed, with services to support the safety of other people having the lowest score.

Strengths:

- Probation practitioners worked flexibly in their approach to support the engagement of people on probation and took into account their needs.
- Practice within the SOLD team reflected positive multi-agency work. The assessment and planning of these cases was done well, as was the delivery of services to manage risk of harm to others and support a reduction in offending. Practitioner skill, experience and positive relationships allowed for effective information sharing.

Areas for improvement:

- Implementation and delivery of personalised and coordinated services was the lowest scoring area across the case inspection process, with the minority of cases receiving sufficient delivery of services to support the person on probation needs, and achieve positive change in offending behaviour.
- Too few of the cases, 50 per cent, were commenced timely, and we found that not enough offence focused work was being completed. Services to address offending behaviour needs and support a reduction in reoffending were delivered in 14 of the 46 cases, and these interventions were not sequenced sufficiently well. We found very little toolkit delivery.

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.](#)

- Focus on the delivery of services that keep actual and potential victims safe was sufficient in 13 of the 46 cases. Contact with children's services in relation to child safeguarding concerns was found to be variable, and only one-third of cases, six of 21 cases identified as having current child safeguarding concerns, were delivered sufficient services to support the management of this risk.
- Home visits were completed in 56 per cent of the cases. There were cases where a home visit or increased home visits would have supported the practitioner's professional curiosity and understanding of the person on probation's lifestyle to better inform the risk assessment and plans in place to reduce reoffending and manage risk of harm.

2.5. Reviewing



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

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?	50%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	43%

Knowsley and St Helens PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for reviewing while there was a good focus on supporting engagement and compliance, only the minority of cases were sufficiently focused on keeping other people safe.

Strengths:

- Practitioners worked hard to build relationships and keep people engaged. There were examples of practitioners appropriately enforcing requirements to aid compliance and maintaining relationships with the person on probation.
- Information exchange with the police in relation to people on probation subject to IOM, and reviewing risk to others, was positive in the cases inspected and was used to meaningfully review risk assessment plans.

Areas for improvement:

- People on probation were not involved meaningfully in reviewing their risk of harm to others. Intelligence from other agencies to inform risk of harm reviews took place in less than half of the cases. In 14 cases, there were either no-repeat checks made in relation to domestic abuse and child safeguarding, where there was evidence of a concern, or the checks made had not been returned to enable analysis of risk of harm to others. This inevitably impacted the ability to focus sufficiently on keeping people on probation safe.

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.

- Adjustments were not made to risk management plans in 25 of 40 cases where there had been a change in factors related to risk of harm. Professional curiosity to follow up on disclosures made relating to significant changes in circumstances like new relationships, child safeguarding concerns, drug supply, and the implications of increased alcohol and drug use was lacking.
- Contingency arrangements, such as the use of home visits to inform risk assessment, were lacking in some cases. Too often, significant information that was known to practitioners was missing. This was a missed opportunity to improve the quality of work and put in place plans to sufficiently manage risk of harm to others.

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?	28%

Strengths:

- In 34 of the 46 cases reviewed, there had either been a reduction in offending or no change, and only seven cases having had an increase in offending. Given the challenges identified across all areas of the case inspection, and the resource issues within the PDU, it was positive to see the reoffending rate on the cases we inspected was relatively low.

Areas for improvement:

- In congruence with the findings relating to the implementation and delivery of services to support the safety of other people on probation, insufficient work was undertaken to address and reduce the risk of serious harm posed by individuals. Early outcomes demonstrated there had been a reduction in factors most closely related to risk of harm to others in only two of the cases inspected.
- There had been improvements in factors most closely linked to offending, both in developing strengths and addressing needs, in just five of the cases we inspected. There was a similar finding where only 16 cases had identifiable progress made against those factors identified as linked to risk of harm. Whilst the early stage of the orders and licences inspected is acknowledged, this figure is disappointing.

Annexe one – Web links

Full data from this inspection and further information about the methodology used to conduct this inspection is available [on our website](#).

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