



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

Offender Management in Custody – post-release

A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation

March 2023

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Foreword

The Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model was implemented from April 2018 to coordinate a prisoner's journey through custody and into the community. In our joint thematic inspection *Offender Management in Custody – pre-release*, published in November 2022, we examined 100 cases across eight different prisons. We found that the model was not working as intended and recommended a fundamental review of current practice. In this follow-up inspection, we have tracked the same prisoners into the community, for up to nine months after release, to examine how well the resettlement and rehabilitation aims of the model are being achieved.

Our findings were disappointing. Only four out of every 10 prisoners in our case sample went into settled accommodation on release from custody, and just eight per cent of those available for work went into employment. Recall rates were high, with 30 per cent on average being returned to custody – four in 10 of these within 28 days of release. In some probation regions almost half were recalled to prison.

Work to reduce the risks posed to other people after release fell well short of our expectations. Domestic abuse checks were completed in just under half of the cases where they were required, and child safeguarding checks were completed in only six out of every 10 cases in which they were needed. In many cases, there were delays in receiving information from the police and children's services. Some practitioners lacked the professional curiosity to understand the prison leaver's personal circumstances and who they were in contact with.

Probation services face several challenges, including a significant shortage of staff. On average, probation regions have 30 per cent fewer practitioners than they require to carry out resettlement work with prison leavers. This situation is compounded by shortages of probation services officers and administrative staff. As a result, there is insufficient capacity to build relationships with prisoners before they are released, or to complete timely referrals for housing support.

Some referral processes are lengthy and require practitioners to complete the same information repeatedly. For example, referrals to approved premises and community accommodation services are time-consuming to complete, and do not necessarily result in a successful outcome. This has a direct impact on the time available for overstretched practitioners to engage with people on probation, which, as our lived experience consultants found, is key to successful resettlement.

The availability of new community accommodation services (CAS3) is positive. In the five probation regions where CAS3 is fully available, prison leavers are placed in temporary supported accommodation for 84 nights, directly on release from prison or following an initial placement in an approved premises. This significantly reduces homelessness on release from custody or approved premises in the regions where it operates. Finding a place to live thereafter remains challenging.

Most recalls to prison were for non-compliance with licence conditions, resulting from homelessness, relapse into substance misuse, and a lack of continuity of care between pre- and post-release service provision. In the light of our findings, we have made several recommendations, including improving staff retention and ensuring continuity of care for prisoners pre- and post-release, which, if followed, will improve resettlement support and help reduce the high number of prison leavers being sent back to prison.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation
March 2023

Contextual facts

Offender management statistics¹

81,309	Prisoners in England and Wales as of 30 September 2022. This represents a rise of three per cent compared with the same period in the previous year.
5,726	Licence recalls between April and June 2022. This is a seven per cent increase on the same quarter in 2021.

OMiC dashboard²

243,127	Offenders on probation at the end of June 2022. This number increased by five per cent compared with the number of offenders supervised as of the end of June 2021.
8,137	Prisoners handed over from prison offender managers (POM) to community offender managers (COM) between August 2021 and May 2022. ²

Probation service workforce³

4,371	Full-time equivalent (FTE) band 4 probation officers in post as of 30 September 2022. This number has fallen by 170 FTE (3.8 per cent) probation officers since 30 June 2022.
6,374	FTE band 3 probation services officers: an increase of 563 FTE (9.7 per cent) since 30 June 2022. A proportion of the probation services officers in post will be working towards the professional probation officer qualification.
1,309	FTE band 5 senior probation officers, an increase of 49 (3.9 per cent) since the last quarter.
1,846	Shortfall of FTE probation officers in post against the required staffing level of 6,160 (30 per cent).
7.5 per cent	Resignation rate for the Probation Service in the year ending 30 September 2022. This represents a slight increase, of 0.5 percentage points, compared with the year ending 31 March 2022.

¹ *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2022*. GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² OMiC dashboard, HM Prison and Probation Service, unpublished – June 2022.

³ *HM Prison and Probation Workforce Quarterly: September 2022*. GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Executive summary

Introduction

The vision of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)'s Offender Management in Custody model is that 'everyone in prison should have the opportunity to transform their lives by using their time in custody constructively to reduce their risk of harm and reoffending; to plan their resettlement; and to improve their prospects of becoming a safe, law-abiding and valuable member of society'. Our joint thematic inspection of OMiC pre-release found that OMiC was not working as intended.

Part two of this thematic inspection focused on outcomes for prisoners after they are released. Inspectors considered how practitioners assessed, planned and reviewed the work required to support successful resettlement. We also considered the extent to which key outcomes were achieved when an individual was released from prison, including whether they secured settled accommodation and education, training and employment.

Methodology

Our post-release fieldwork was completed in seven probation service regions across England and Wales. Of the 100 cases inspected in custody, 96 were examined in detail up to nine months after release from custody. The range varied from two months (four cases) to nine months (one case) after release, with most cases (77) between three and five months. Four cases were excluded from the community sample as they had not been released from prison. Lived experience consultants from the organisation Doing What Really Matters (DWRM) interviewed 53 individuals from our sample. This included four who had been recalled to prison following their release.

In addition to our sample in each probation region, we considered evidence on staffing levels and caseloads; the services and interventions available in the community; the characteristics of caseloads; strategic documents; and delivery plans.

In each probation region, we held meetings and focus groups, including with senior probation leaders, service providers and community offender managers (COMs). We concluded with a week of meetings with senior HMPPS leaders with responsibility for delivering sentence management post-release.

A detailed breakdown of our methodology can be found in Annexe 2.

Leadership and staffing

OMiC governance arrangements are in place at a regional and local level, through senior leadership forums and local implementation boards, which bring together prison and probation leaders. Such arrangements primarily focus on pre-release work, and responsibilities are sometimes unclear, particularly where prisons are a national resource and prisoners are released to different probation regions.

As in part one of our inspection, we found that probation leaders were committed to making OMiC work. Some senior leadership teams were considering adopting a more flexible approach in order to achieve success with limited staff. For example, the London region was considering refocusing the probation prison offender manager (POM) role so that POMs completed pre-release work in regions where there was a significant shortage of COMs in the community.

Insufficient attention was given to addressing inequalities in the OMiC prison and probation population. Individuals with a disability and individuals from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are over-represented in sentenced prisoners. While probation leaders acknowledged that this reflects wider trends in the criminal justice system (i.e., sentences passed at court), we found limited evidence that they had attempted to identify and address this disproportionality.

There is a significant shortage of staff in probation regions, and this leads to high workloads for many probation practitioners. This has a direct impact on the quality of work, with many

practitioners lacking the capacity to undertake structured offence-focused work with prison leavers. Staff shortages are widespread, including at probation services officer and administrator levels. The current shortages are further exacerbated by difficulties in retaining staff.

The impact of current shortages includes cases having to be reallocated when practitioners are promoted to senior probation officer level, and housing referrals being delayed because there are not enough staff available to progress them. We also found that lengthy referral processes, such as for approved premises or tier 3 community accommodation services (CAS3), reduced the time available for practitioners to engage directly with people on probation.

Services

Needs analysis is carried out at a regional level to inform the commissioning of services to meet the needs of people on probation. We found that there was a mismatch between the services needed and those that were provided. For example, accommodation services were oversubscribed, leading to long waiting lists, while other services, such as personal wellbeing, were undersubscribed.

Many practitioners found referral processes to be complex. Newly established digital processes, such as 'refer and monitor', were not well understood. Practitioners and service providers often made different assessments of the complexity level of the person on probation's needs and the outcomes required from the service intervention.

CAS3 is currently being rolled out in Wales and has worked well in the five probation regions where it has operated since July 2021. Those in our case sample accessed this either directly from prison or as move-on accommodation following a placement in an approved premises. Just under one in 10 of our case sample were homeless on release from prison, and these were mainly in probation regions that did not have CAS3 accommodation.

Services to address attitudes towards offending, family and relationships and drug misuse were delivered in only one in three cases. Similarly, insufficient services were delivered to keep other people safe. Services to address risks of domestic abuse to others, family and relationships, attitudes towards offending and drug misuse were provided in only one in five cases.

Following the unification of the Probation Service, providers of commissioned services to probation no longer have direct access to nDelius, the probation service record system. This means that practitioners are not always kept up to date on work completed by providers, and that providers do not have direct access to changes in information related to risk or safeguarding status.

Services worked well when they were co-located in probation offices. This gave practitioners a better understanding of the services available and the different levels of need that could be met through them. It also enabled practitioners to provide more accurate information for referrals. The referral process worked best when it was completed through three-way meetings between the practitioner, provider and person on probation.

Approved premises are an option for a small proportion of prison leavers who require the highest levels of community-based public protection placements on release. Staff there provided good resettlement support to prison leavers. There was, however, scope for practitioners and approved premises staff to work more closely as a team to ensure that move-on housing referrals could be completed in a timelier manner.

People on probation

The importance of the relationship between the practitioner and person on probation was highlighted by our lived experience consultants. People on probation experienced probation induction following release on licence as 'one way'. As with pre-release work, they felt that sentence management was 'done to' them, rather than 'done with' them. All too often, practitioners had not been able to establish a good working relationship with the person on probation, and then had to deliver unwelcome news about the licence restrictions that were now required. The reasons for these restrictions were often not fully explained to the person on probation, or well understood by them.

Where people on probation felt that their COM had engaged with and understood them, they could be more open in their licence supervision sessions. In some cases, however, frequent changes of COM prevented trusting relationships from being built. A clearer sense of being in a contract, with transparent responsibilities allocated to each side, would give the person on probation a much clearer sense of working with probation to make progress towards a crime-free life in the community.

Outcomes

Overall, inspectors found good levels of engagement with people on probation. Many COMs took a supportive approach, cemented by regular, and often weekly, contact. They took enforcement action appropriately when licence conditions were not being adhered to. Examples included issuing managers' warning letters, and these often worked well to re-engage the person on probation and to secure compliance with their licence.

Not enough improvements were made in the factors most related to reoffending. In only one in four cases was sufficient progress made regarding family and relationships, lifestyle and associates, attitudes towards offending and substance misuse. Improvements in the key factors related to managing the risks of harm to other people were made in only half of cases.

As we found in our pre-release inspection, there was a significant shortfall in the information received from other agencies, such as police intelligence, and in domestic abuse and child safeguarding checks, to keep other people safe. Practitioners experienced difficulties in getting responses to their requests for this information, and in some cases had stopped trying. Some practitioners lacked the professional curiosity to fully understand the person on probation's personal circumstances. This meant that they did not always know who was of risk of harm. Inspectors found some cases where the practitioner had underestimated the level of risk or reduced it too quickly following the person on probation's release from custody.

Recall rates were high, with 30 per cent of the case sample recalled to custody within nine months following their release. The main reasons for recall were non-compliance with licence conditions, and this stemmed mainly from homelessness and/or relapse into substance misuse. There was a lack of continuity of care before and after release, which led to prison leavers not being able to access the right levels of support to sustain their resettlement.

Only four in 10 of the prison leavers in our case sample entered settled accommodation on release, and just eight per cent went into full-time employment. Some improvement was made in the first few months on licence, though, at the point of inspection, four in 10 prison leavers were in temporary accommodation, and four in 10 were unemployed.

Recommendations

Our November 2022 joint report on *Offender Management in Custody – pre-release* included 16 recommendations. HMPPS has published an action plan in response.⁴ The recommendations below are made in addition to our previous recommendations to strengthen the work undertaken after offenders are released from custody.

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

1. in line with established practice in other sectors, introduce a senior practitioner role, to improve staff retention, continuity of case management and management oversight
2. reduce duplication in referral processes, for example to approved premises and CAS3, to reduce delays and increase the time available for practitioners to engage with people on probation
3. ensure that every person leaving custody needing ongoing substance misuse treatment receives it and that there is continuity of care, to prevent relapse
4. review the provision of services delivered by commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) providers to ensure that these are adequately resourced for the volume of referrals being made in each probation region
5. provide CRS providers with direct access to probation service records so that they are aware of relevant public protection considerations
6. ensure that prisoners' accommodation needs are addressed before release and that support to secure settled accommodation continues after release.

Regional probation directors should:

7. work with local partners to ensure that domestic abuse and safeguarding information-sharing is timely, at the pre- and post-release stage
8. take action to improve the quality of work undertaken on release from custody to keep other people safe
9. ensure that probation practitioners are supported by administrators and probation service officers e.g. in an integrated Probation Operational Delivery (POD) structure, to enable them to deliver high quality resettlement work
10. provide guidance to ensure staff understand how to make informed and appropriate referrals to service providers.

⁴ *Action plan in response to the joint thematic inspection of Offender Management in Custody*. November 2022. GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Basic resettlement needs on leaving prison or moving on from approved premises include somewhere to live, a way of supporting oneself through paid employment, and access to benefits.

The six principles of effective resettlement practice are outlined in our recent academic insights paper (Cracknell, 2023). They highlight a common theme: individuals released from custody need practitioners who:

- can demonstrate commitment and genuine care
- have knowledge of and access to a 'thick' network of community resources (Dominey, 2019)
- have the skills and confidence to balance monitoring and risk management with genuine rehabilitative and reintegrative support.

HMPPS developed its approach to resettlement under the new target operating model.⁵ The model established a link between OMiC, resettlement and the previous Enhanced Through the Gate (ETTG) service. Most former ETTG staff were transferred into probation service regions to support community offender management.

The target operating model aims to ensure a resettlement service that starts in prison and continues into the community (Through the Gate), by providing reach-in and preparation for release services that offer continuity for individuals. The new resettlement model is being developed alongside the OMiC model. Under OMiC, for determinate sentenced prisoners with more than 10 months left to serve at the point of sentence, the transfer of responsibility currently happens either seven and a half months before release for legacy National Probation Service (NPS) cases or 12 weeks before release for legacy Community Rehabilitation Company cases.

On the handover to the community, the COM should complete a pre-release risk and needs assessment. This is intended to build on and incorporate the work and plans completed in prison. The COM is required to have at least three contacts with the prisoner before release to help build a good relationship with them. This includes the OMiC handover meeting and at least two additional meetings, as required in the Probation Operating Model.

The HMPPS Business Strategy⁶ commits to working across HMPPS, and in partnership with commissioned rehabilitative services providers and other key bodies and agencies (including the NHS), to deliver the right interventions and to support better integration into communities for those subject to probation services.

Most rehabilitative and resettlement interventions are provided by commissioned rehabilitative services. Regional probation directors are responsible for identifying the key offending-related needs in their region and commissioning specific services to meet those needs.

Service categories include: accommodation, to prevent homelessness; education, training and employment, to remove barriers to employment; finance, benefits and debt, to support access to lawful income; dependency and recovery, to provide access to specialist substance misuse support; personal wellbeing, to support successful transition from custody to the community; and women's services, to provide tailored services to meet the specific needs of sentenced prisoners.

⁵ HMPPS. (February 2021). The Target Operating Model for Probation Services in England and Wales, Probation Reform Programme, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk.

⁶ HMPPS. (February 2020). *HMPPS Business Strategy: Shaping Our Future*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmpps-business-strategy-shaping-our-future>.

The services that are currently delivered pre-and post-release are accommodation, social inclusion and women's services. Other key services, such as education, training and employment, and dependency and recovery, are only available in the community. The intention is that people being released from prison will receive place-based services. This means that, where possible, services are delivered where the person on probation is living in the community, with some flexibility to enable services to be delivered during the pre-release process or from the prison gate.

There are gaps in substance misuse and recovery services, due to the need to link together pre-release prison healthcare and substance misuse treatment for the prison leaver on their release into the community. Prison leavers can access treatment through the NHS and specialist providers working with probation regions, though this support is not always immediately available on release.

Similarly, there are gaps in provision to support prison leavers who have mental health difficulties. Personal wellbeing services provide support with relationships, wellbeing, mentoring and release planning, but not with mental health support.

Community accommodation services tier 3 (CAS3) provide temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and for those moving on from approved premises, as well as assistance to help move on into settled accommodation. CAS3 is currently fully available in five probation regions, providing temporary accommodation for approximately 3,000 people on probation at risk of homelessness on release from prison.

1.2. Aims and objectives

This follow-up inspection sought to answer the following questions:

- Do leadership and facilities management support the effective delivery of sentence management on post-release licence?
- Are staff working in sentence management empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service to individuals?
- Is a comprehensive range of high-quality services in place to support a tailored and responsive service to individuals who are subject to sentence management on post-release licence?
- Does sentence management on post-release licence support individuals' desistance effectively?
- Does work done under sentence management on post-release licence support the safety of other people effectively?
- Are services delivered under sentence management on post-release licence personalised and coordinated, and do they address individuals' resettlement needs?

1.3. Report outline

Chapter	Content
2. Leadership and staffing	This chapter considers the effectiveness of resettlement delivery plans and the extent to which OMiC delivery takes account of diversity factors. It reviews staffing and workload levels and the impact these have on sentence management on post-release licence.
3. Services	This chapter examines the key resettlement needs and the volume, range and quality of services in place to meet those needs. The chapter concludes by considering the effectiveness of the relationships between probation services and service providers.
4. People on probation	This chapter has been prepared by our lived experience consultants. It considers the contract between practitioners and people on probation and the consistency of relationships between them.
5. Initial outcomes	This chapter considers the initial outcomes achieved in relation to desistance, keeping other people safe and resettlement.

2. Leadership and staffing

This chapter considers the effectiveness of resettlement plans and the extent to which delivery of OMiC services takes account of diversity factors. It reviews staffing and workload levels and the impact these have on sentence management on post-release licence.

2.1. Leadership

Current OMiC governance arrangements do not fully support effective resettlement.

Implementation of OMiC is overseen by senior leadership forums (SLFs) and joint governance bodies led by regional probation directors and prison group directors. Some prison governors attend SLFs, although governance arrangements were described to inspectors as primarily focused on pre-release work. Local implementation boards oversee prisoners who are released to different probation regions, particularly where they cover prisons that are a national resource. In these instances, local boards do not have sufficient knowledge of the services available in different probation regions to inform arrangements to support such prison leavers.

Overall, leadership teams are working hard to translate the OMiC vision into practice and to be responsive to the challenges presented by the staff shortages that many probation regions are experiencing. In London, a more flexible approach was being considered by refocusing the probation POM role to support a wider range of pre-release work. When staffing levels were below those prescribed by the OMiC model, POMs would complete referrals to, for example, approved premises and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), rather than relying on COMs to do this.

Dedicated roles have been established within probation senior leadership teams, and this has been helpful in supporting OMiC and delivering resettlement services. Notable examples include the newly established head of service in the London Probation Service region, who has strategic responsibility for OMiC, and the resettlement lead in the North West region, who provides strong leadership in bringing probation and prisons together.

People on probation with a disability, and individuals from black, Asian and ethnic minority groups, are overrepresented in sentenced prisoners, and there is a need to address this disproportionality. Leaders recognised that this imbalance may reflect wider difficulties in the criminal justice system, including sentencing. However, one senior leader told us they were not doing enough to tackle inequality by enabling staff to become more confident in discussing the experiences of people on probation, including discrimination and differential treatment.

Twenty-one per cent of our sample were from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Overall, assessment and planning work was better with individuals of a white ethnicity. We frequently saw that the person on probation's experience as an individual from a black, Asian or minority ethnic group was not explored or understood well enough in assessments. Some plans were pulled through from previous assessments and not enough plans specifically addressed diversity factors related to ethnicity.

There were fewer differences in the implementation and delivery of work, and reviews were better for individuals from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. The achievement of initial outcomes was generally the same. HM Inspectorate of Probation will take a closer look at race equality in probation through a follow-up inspection to be published later in 2023.

In one probation delivery unit (PDU), only 42 per cent of staff were in place, and further resignations and a retirement were imminent. The PDU was struggling to allocate any cases, and OMiC cases were allocated to COMs just three months before release. Limited staff meant that work

needed to be re-prioritised. Leaders were also considering redirecting probation POMs in local prisons to resettlement and training prisons, to ensure that they were using limited resources more effectively.

Some practitioners were struggling with workloads, although many said they felt supported, including by being given time off to manage difficulties outside of work. Managers were visible, accessible and concerned about staff wellbeing. Nevertheless, some practitioners still felt that much of the work required of them was target-driven, rather than being focused on quality.

2.2. Staffing

Staff shortages and high workloads do not support the delivery of a high-quality service.

Fifty-seven per cent of the practitioners we interviewed stated that their workload was not so, or not at all, manageable. Practitioners told us that high workloads have a significant impact on the quality of practice and leave them little time to plan and complete structured offence-focused work. Some were visibly stressed and reported working long hours to try to manage their workload.

Examples provided to inspectors included counselling as a way of being able to stay in work, resignation due to workload pressures, and staff returning from stress-related sickness absence to find that their work had not been covered. One senior leader told us that they were fully aware of the pressures on staff but felt *"impotent"*, given the difficulties in recruiting enough practitioners to do the work required.

There are significant difficulties with staff retention. Inspectors were told that experienced, newly qualified and trainee probation officers leave for a variety of reasons, including finding the work too stressful, moving to better-paid work, taking retirement and being promoted. When qualified probation officers progress to senior probation officer (SPO) roles, this often leads to immediate pressure on frontline workers, as caseloads have to be reallocated to the remaining practitioners.

Although progression is welcome and necessary for individuals and organisations, in probation, a person promoted to SPO will no longer work directly with people on probation. This is not the case in social work and youth justice (which is now usually integrated with children's social services), where there is a promotion route to 'senior practitioner'. This is a middle management role, focused on staff and practice development, where some casework is retained.

HMPPS (2022) describes effective management in probation as a combination of management oversight and reflective practice supervision. In practice, SPOs in our survey for the NPS central functions inspection (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020) told us that they had little time for case and practice oversight and that their role focused on human resources issues and performance management. In this inspection, we found management oversight to be effective in only 35 per cent of the cases inspected, indicating that many SPOs were unable to prioritise quality assurance of case management.

There continues to be a major focus on recruitment to fill the high number of vacancies in probation services. TV campaigns and targeted recruitment are being considered to address the current shortfalls. Practitioners in Wales found their workloads quite or very manageable, and this may reflect the healthier staff complement against the regional target staffing model. While current and future recruitment campaigns may pay dividends, success in recruiting new staff is somewhat undermined by the high levels of staff leaving. As one practitioner put it: *"probation keeps pouring water into a bucket full of holes"*.

Shortages of probation services officers and case administrators delay referrals to services, including housing referrals. We found little evidence of probation staff working collaboratively with colleagues. In some cases, approved premises staff were waiting for busy practitioners to complete housing referrals, which led to delays in securing move-on accommodation.

Some referral processes, for example for accommodation, are lengthy and time-consuming. This has an impact on the time available for practitioners to engage in structured work with people on

probation. Practitioners told us that referral documents for MAPPA, approved premises and CAS3 accommodation run to at least 16 pages and require the same information to be completed repeatedly, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. We understand that the approved premises central team is looking to improve referral processes. In 2023, it is piloting a digital solution that will reduce duplication of effort by automatically populating some of the referral information required.

The Prioritising Probation Framework (PPF) was introduced at the beginning of 2022 to help probation service regions adapt how they deliver probation services locally according to the numbers of staff available. However, PPF has had little impact on licence cases, as there is less scope to stand down activities on them than community orders. As one practitioner told us: *"PPF makes no difference to me, as all my OMiC cases are high risk"*.

The HMPPS workforce programme has encouraged local areas to take a 'one HMPPS' approach to resourcing decisions. Some prisons are understaffed in relation to probation POMs, while others are over-resourced, with more practitioners in prisons than the model dictates. In one probation region, all OMiC pre-release work is carried out by a practitioner in a dedicated probation POM role. This leads to some high-quality pre-release work. However, handover to the community takes place just before release, which prevents relationship-building between the COM and the person on probation.

2.3. Conclusions and implications

Leadership teams remain committed to translating the OMiC vision and strategy into practice, and understand that high-quality pre-release work has a direct impact on successful resettlement. Senior leadership teams include dedicated strategic resettlement roles, and some regions are considering how to improve delivery by extending the scope of the probation POM role in pre-release work, to cover the shortage of COMs in the community.

Current staffing and workload levels in the probation service do not support the delivery of high-quality sentence management post-release. The impact of staff shortages includes cases being allocated to COMs at a late stage; delays in making referrals to accommodation providers, which can hold up move-on from approved premises; and high workloads, which prevent practitioners from completing structured offence-focused work with people on probation to support their desistance and to keep other people safe.

Practitioners and inspectors identified several potential ways of reducing current workload pressures, through discussions with probation service regional leaders and national leads. These included reducing duplication in referral processes; improving team working between probation officers, probation service officers, administrators and approved premises staff; and introducing a senior practitioner role to improve staff retention and reduce reallocation of caseloads to already overstretched practitioners.

3. Services

This chapter examines the key resettlement needs and the volume, range and quality of services in place to meet those needs. It concludes by considering the effectiveness of the relationships between probation services and service providers.

3.1. Resettlement needs

Needs analysis is carried out at a regional level to inform the commissioning of services to meet the needs of people on probation. We found that there was a mismatch between the services needed and those that were provided.

The implementation of Community Rehabilitation Services (CRS) has been challenged by frontline demands, and practitioners were not fully aware of how to make the best use of these services. The level of referrals for some services, in particular women's and accommodation services, has been higher than anticipated. The number of referrals for other services, such as the personal wellbeing pathway, has been lower than predicted.

Referrals were sometimes made too quickly, because they were made by the duty officer, rather than as intended once the initial sentence plan had identified two or three key needs. We saw some referrals that were not for offence-related work. This is not an appropriate use of CRS services, as the appointments are enforceable. Referrals for women's services, for example, should focus on pathways out of offending. There is a need for practitioners to develop a better understanding of people on probation's needs at all levels, to ensure that the right services are delivered to support desistance and keep other people safe.

At the time of inspection there were beds available to accommodate suitable referrals in approved premises. Our inspection of pre-release work noted that late referrals prevented people from being placed in approved premises. HMPPS forecasts a wait of eight to 12 weeks for a bed, although six months is realistic, given the current timeframe for the referrals. Resettlement services are provided through a 12-week placement in an approved premises that includes support for progression into the community. There is some scope to vary the length of placements according to need. For example, a placement in a psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) approved premises can last up to six months. Approved premises places in the female estate are not just for people on probation who pose a high risk of harm.

3.2. Relationships with service providers

The practitioners we interviewed found referral processes complicated and, in some cases, this had led to delays in people on probation accessing services.

'Refer and monitor' is the digital service through which probation practitioners can find suitable services and refer individuals on to an intervention. Providers record and share information about services and about the progress made by the person on probation. Practitioners had different views on the usefulness of the 'refer and monitor' process, and varied levels of understanding of its purpose.

Following unification of the Probation Service, commissioned service providers no longer have direct access to nDelius, the probation service records system. This causes some difficulties, as providers cannot fully record their work with the person on probation. As a result, practitioners do not have direct access to up-to-date information. Conversely, providers cannot easily access any changes in risk or safeguarding information, which they need to be aware of when working with the people on probation.

When making a referral to a service provider, practitioners set a complexity level to determine the level of intervention required, and specify the outcomes required. We found that practitioners and service providers often had differing views on the level of complexity and the outcomes that could be achieved with the person on probation. This was particularly the case with women's services, with providers having a different perspective to COMs.

For example, some low complexity referrals were viewed as high complexity by the provider, as the provider was more likely to take a whole-person perspective. This was sometimes informed by CRS staff, who had lived experience of the criminal justice system and a wider view of the person on probation's needs and difficulties.

Joint working operated well where providers were co-located in probation offices. Co-location provides an opportunity for three-way meetings between the practitioner, provider and person on probation. This gives them a better understanding of the purpose of the intervention and ensures that all involved have clear expectations of the service to be provided.

Good practice example – North West

There is an effective working relationship between the Cheshire PDUs and Seetec, ETE services. This is maintained through regular contact with contract managers, PDU heads, managers and practitioners. The employment adviser is co-located in probation offices. This helps the practitioner to gain a good understanding of referral processes, and leads to closer working relationships and more targeted support for people on probation.

Good practice example – London

Induction in Uxbridge and Hillingdon probation offices is carried out jointly by the probation service and Jigsaw, the police public protection team. This ensures that registration of sexual offenders is completed, provides effective joint management to keep other people safe, and reduces uncertainty for the person on probation.

Good practice example – London

Michael served a long custodial sentence for wounding with intent.

He was referred to the National Careers Service in custody and completed a level two personal training course. Michael expressed a wish to complete the level three qualification and eventually secure employment as a personal trainer. The COM referred him to the Shaw Trust for education, training and employment support, and an appointment was arranged promptly once he had been released. The Shaw Trust offered to help Michael find and enrol on a course. It also agreed to pay his travel expenses and help him to find gyms where he could undertake practical work. The Shaw Trust later helped Michael to secure part-time work in an unrelated field. This supported his engagement, desistance and resettlement into the community.

3.3. Service delivery

The table on the next page illustrates the inspectors' judgement of the sufficiency of services delivered against identified need, to address the factors leading to offending.

Were sufficient services delivered after release for the factors identified as linked to offending?	Number	%
Accommodation	27	69
Education, training and employment	14	52
Finance, benefits and debt	23	50
Family and relationships	15	28
Lifestyle (including friends and associates)	20	32
Alcohol misuse	8	32
Drug misuse	12	24
Thinking and behaviour	22	33
Attitudes to offending	14	22

The table below illustrates the inspectors' judgement of the sufficiency of services delivered against identified need, to keep other people safe.

Were sufficient services delivered for the factors you identified as related to the risk of harm?	Number	%
Accommodation	39	56
Education, training and employment	18	33
Finance, benefits and debt	35	40
Family and relationships	58	21
Lifestyle (including friends and associates)	59	31
Alcohol misuse	21	24
Drug misuse	41	20
Thinking and behaviour	65	31
Attitudes to offending	58	17
Current domestic abuse concerns	17	18
Current child safeguarding concerns	31	42
Hate-based behaviour	1	0

Accommodation

Where a need had been identified, sufficient accommodation services were delivered after release to support desistance in almost seven out of 10 cases, and to keep other people safe in just over half.

Community accommodation services tier 3 (CAS3) provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and for move-on from approved premises. We found that CAS3 provision is used well for prison leavers and for approved premises move-on, although it is difficult to secure settled accommodation once CAS3 has ended. Placement into approved premises on release from prisons, followed by placement into CAS3 accommodation, provides up to six months of supported housing when a prisoner is released. HMPPS estimates that 35 to 40 per cent of people on probation move on to settled housing once they have left CAS3 accommodation.

Good practice example – East of England

Stephen was sentenced to a long custodial sentence for supply of class A drugs.

He was released from custody without ID, so it took four months for him to receive any benefits. This made it difficult to secure move-on accommodation, and approved premises staff commented that he had been “set up to fail”. Approved premises staff were persistent in advocating on his behalf and offered daily support until he secured benefits. He was then placed into CAS3 supported accommodation.

Access to accommodation on release from prison varies across England and Wales. In Greater Manchester, for example, the probation service has good links with local authorities, which helps to prevent homelessness in this region. In other probation regions, we found that some people on probation were released from prison or approved premises with nowhere to live. In our case sample, one in every 10 prisoners were released as homeless, and these were primarily from the probation regions that did not have CAS3 provision.

Inspectors found that practitioners and approved premises staff did not always work together sufficiently well. High workloads meant that some practitioners relied too much on approved premises staff. Move-on housing referrals are the COM’s responsibility, and we found cases where referrals were delayed because the practitioner was too busy to complete this work. In our view, such delays could be overcome by practitioners and approved premises staff working more closely together to share information on risk and to share tasks to ensure more timely completion of housing referrals.

Education, training and employment

Sufficient education, training and employment services were delivered after release to support desistance in just over half of the cases where this was required, and to keep other people safe in only a third of cases. In many cases we saw little content in supervision other than ‘check-in’ appointments. Insufficient CRS education, training and employment referrals were completed, which meant that people on probation were sometimes left to find employment themselves.

Finance, benefits and debt

Sufficient finance, benefits and debt services were delivered to support desistance in only half of cases where this was required, and to keep other people safe in only four out of 10 cases.

CRS finance, benefits and debt support is not available in most probation regions, and such services are usually only offered in the community. There are currently two probation regions where support is provided before and after release. Currently, only prison governors can sign off ID. As noted in our pre-release report, many of the prisoners in our case sample left custody without ID, which prevents them from setting up bank accounts on release, or accessing legal sources of income, such as jobs or benefits.

Family and relationships

Sufficient family and relationship services were provided to support desistance in less than a third of cases, and to support keeping other people safe in only one in five. We did not see sufficient evidence of offence-focused work, or a sufficient understanding of how women on probation can be vulnerable to family members and some men in their local communities.

Lifestyle and associates

Sufficient lifestyle and associates services were delivered to support desistance and keep other people safe in just under a third of cases. We found limited evidence of practitioners building on people on probation’s strengths and supporting them to adopt a prosocial lifestyle. Inspectors found

insufficient evidence that practitioners monitored risk, for example when individuals' escalating drug use had led to chaotic lifestyles.

Substance misuse

Sufficient alcohol misuse services were delivered after release to support desistance in under a third of cases, and to keep other people safe in just under one in four. Similarly, drug misuse services supported desistance in just under a quarter of cases and supported keeping other people safe in only one in five.

Most services do not provide continuous support before and after release. This can make resettlement more difficult and can lead to a relapse into substance misuse. Substance misuse services are contracted and commissioned separately before and after release. This leaves many prisoners vulnerable to a relapse on release from prison and a quick return to reoffending. Consistent service provision by the same provider before and after release could provide the glue to link services for the person on probation, by providing immediate access to the right substance misuse treatment on release from custody.

Poor practice example

Ryan was released from a custodial sentence for burglary.

He has an entrenched pattern of acquisitive offending to fund substance misuse, leading to repeated periods in custody. He was released to an approved premises, and on the day of release disclosed that he feared relapse. Ryan was advised to self-refer for relapse prevention support. He relapsed after seven days in the community and was recalled to custody.

Thinking and behaviour, and attitudes towards offending

Sufficient thinking and behaviour services were delivered to support desistance in just a third of cases, and to keep other people safe in just under a third of cases. Similarly, services that focused on attitudes towards offending supported desistance in just over one in five cases, though they supported keeping people safe in less than one in five.

Inspectors found few formal planned interventions. Much of the engagement with people on probation focused on crisis management rather than exploring patterns of thinking and their impact on desistance and keeping other people safe. Many COMs reported that they were unable to prioritise work on offending behaviour, because of high workloads. Inspectors found that insufficient offending behaviour programmes were delivered to support desistance.

Current domestic abuse concerns

Services to address current domestic abuse concerns were delivered in less than one in five cases. Insufficient intervention work was delivered to address abusive behaviour towards partners and family members, or to address patterns of domestic abuse behaviours. Practitioners did not carry out enough home visits to verify the information provided by people on probation.

Poor practice example

Jack was convicted of manslaughter and had a history of aggressive behaviour in the family home before he went to prison.

Jack was known to be visiting his family home. However, no safeguarding or domestic abuse checks had been carried out because his initial release was to an approved premises. As Jack was not living at the address, it was wrongly concluded that risk was being sufficiently managed.

Current safeguarding concerns

Sufficient services to manage current safeguarding concerns were delivered in just four out of 10 cases. Practitioners did not effectively and independently monitor potential safeguarding concerns. Some practitioners relied too much on the person on probation's own report of safeguarding arrangements. Safeguarding information was often not fully identified or shared with relevant agencies, such as children's services. As a result, services were not doing enough to keep children safe.

3.4. Conclusions and implications

Each probation region has a needs analysis to inform the commissioning and targeting of services to meet the resettlement needs of people on probation. We found that there is a mismatch between the services provided and the needs of the people in the case sample. For example, accommodation services were oversubscribed, while personal wellbeing services were undersubscribed. The impact of this 'disconnect' included delays in people on probation receiving support to secure accommodation.

The overall volume and range of services in place did not sufficiently meet the resettlement needs of the people in the case sample. CAS3 services were an exception to this and worked well to provide supported housing on release from prison and as move-on accommodation from approved premises. Well over half of all other services did not sufficiently support desistance or keep other people safe, leaving the resettlement needs of people on probation largely unmet.

Relationships between practitioners and service providers varied. Referral processes were often not well understood, and probation and provider staff had different views on the level of intervention needed for people on probation, especially for women. This led to delays in accessing the most appropriate services. Providers did not have access to probation records, which meant that the latest information on risk and safeguarding was not always available while they were undertaking work. Relationships worked best when services were co-located in probation offices. This led to a better understanding of the services offered by probation staff and more productive joint working between the practitioner, provider and person on probation. Approved premises staff and probation practitioners did not work sufficiently well together as a team, and this led to unnecessary delays in move-on housing referrals.

4. People on probation

This chapter is prepared by our lived experience consultants, DWRM. It considers the contract between practitioners and people on probation and the consistency of relationships between them.

4.1. Summary of findings

It is inevitable that the relationship between the COM and the person on probation will have a power imbalance. One way to address the power imbalance is to cement robust relationships based on mutual respect and to create a contract with strong buy-in so that people on probation do not feel completely disempowered. It can be helpful to frame probation supervision as a continuation of the sentence, which enables the individual to be released from custody.

DWRM identified the themes below from their discussions with 53 individuals subject to licence supervision.

The contract

The contract that is signed at the start of probation supervision sets the tone for the whole relationship and for its success or failure. As identified in part one of the inspection, sentence, release and resettlement planning should be done *with*, not *to*, a person. This will encourage the individual to complete their sentence plan and to make the necessary changes to support a prosocial lifestyle on release. This is the foundation of a contract that can ensure buy-in on both sides, and not one that is either just to *"get through [a] sentence the easiest way"* or to *"make it to open conditions as quickly as possible"*. Without belief, there is no commitment, and without commitment, desistance will not be sustainable.

Attaching meaning

Often the first contact a prisoner has with their COM starts with what they will perceive to be bad news about what they are not allowed to do in the community after release. This means that the relationship tends to get off on a difficult footing. This can result from the 'handover' (from POM to COM) happening at a late stage prior to release. A longer period of 'joint working' to enable proper planning for release, including discussion about licence conditions, accommodation and other key arrangements, provides a greater chance of success. This would also contribute to the building of a robust relationship from a much earlier stage, rather than waiting until the moment of release.

Many people DWRM spoke to were able to explain at least parts of the OMiC model, and had a clear understanding and acceptance of the purpose of probation. Forty per cent of the participants described good relationships with their COM, although most had very low expectations of the support available and expressed concerns about how workload affects the process. The people who seemed to be doing well largely attributed this to their own determination and personal circumstances rather than to any specific action on the part of the COM. One participant told us:

"It's the luck of the draw, you don't get a choice of who your probation officer is, just as probation officers don't get a choice of which prisoner they get."

A professional, not personal, approach should be at the heart of the relationship, allowing the service to be a consistent experience for an individual and not dependent on a practitioner 'liking' their client – or not, as the case may be.

One individual said that he wants to make his COM's life easier because it results in a better outcome for him:

"How can I make their life easier, so that it's more likely to happen ... it's all about trying to work with them".

This 'people pleasing' mentality towards the COM is a feature DWRM have seen in a majority of those who have so far managed to maintain their release, despite experiencing a lack of support from their COM.

Conditions of supervision

As people in prison transition to the community, they are often released without clear expectations about what comes next.

"I thought I would be able to live with my family to help me get back on my own feet. I am adamant about following 'better lifestyle' choices that I learned in custody [eating, sleeping, exercise etc.]"

There is the potential for much more to be done prior to release in terms of preparing prisoners for their return to society. Several participants reported being made aware of their licence conditions only as they were leaving prison, and some also reported leaving prison without having ID or a bank account in place. These practical arrangements should always be completed before the person is released and should be part of the statutory provision.

Some participants who were already in work reported that they were finding it difficult to fit their appointments in with their work schedule. One had moved to late shifts to accommodate this. Another said they had almost lost their job because they were trying to juggle their work schedule with probation appointments and the COM's part-time hours. Both reported that their employers were very understanding of the situation.

Several participants felt that their licence conditions were too strict and that, even after some weeks of compliance, their COM was not willing to reconsider or explain decisions. One said that he had been told he was too 'pushy' when he asked what he needed to do to get his curfew times reviewed. He said he felt anxious and frustrated, but unable to speak up in case it led to more problems.

DWRM also heard positive reports about constructive engagement:

"They've offered loads of support because I have been willing to turn my life around. I've got nothing but good to say about them ... they are really interested. Before it just felt like I was there to tick a box ... this time it feels like they care."

Understanding and acceptance

Participants told DWRM that they would be much more able to accept and comply with the conditions set for release if these were explained early enough in their sentence so that they could be incorporated into their sentence and release plans. The problem, they were told, is that people in prison are encouraged to be proactive throughout their sentences and find ways to do things for themselves.

Many participants stated that they did not understand the conditions they were subject to and, when they asked for explanations that were relevant to their individual circumstances, none were forthcoming. All participants DWRM spoke to said they understood the need for conditions to be applied to their release, and in some cases even welcomed them. Participants wanted to be involved with the process and not informed after it had been completed.

Several people said they would like greater clarity about how to comply with their licence conditions, which they thought were vague and open to interpretation. They stressed that they were keen to comply and did not want to make trouble, but felt confused about what was required of them.

We found that many staff struggled to understand OMiC and the resettlement model (such as the roles of the POM, COM, keyworker, housing provider and pre-release team), and it was not surprising to find that people in prison and on probation did not understand it either.

The question of recalls is especially relevant here. Although DWRM spoke to only a few people who had been subject to recall, several others had bounced between prison and community on a few occasions, and they all expressed confusion about the circumstances of their return to prison.

It may be that some of this relates to the perception that people are labelled 'hard-to-reach' (as described by some COMs), which can be re-interpreted as people not being able to connect or comply with the COM's way of working.

Consequence

For some people, licence conditions can feel overly restrictive. However, DWRM also heard from people who said that they can be enabling. If there is a clear purpose for the condition, then it can enable the individual to move forward, and will act as a protective factor for both the public and the individual.

One person on probation said that he could talk to his COM about anything, including personal relationships and past trauma. He said that he "utterly" trusts his COM:

"I talk to her about a lot of things, personal things and that. She keeps me on the straight and narrow."

However, we also heard from people who had the opposite experience:

"My new COM did not fill me with confidence because at my first meeting she had not read my case notes, did not know anything about my risk factors".

This person said that he would like his COM to be more closely involved with his life. He felt that, because he is not 'high risk', he does not merit close attention.

A clear purpose for a licence condition may only exist in the mind of an individual when it can be explained. It is a reasonable expectation for anyone subject to conditions that restrict their movement, freedom or liberty to want to have a reason that directly correlates with their personal situation. Practitioners look to impose conditions that are in the best interests of public safety; however, the reasons are often not fully communicated, and the individual can be left to make sense of the condition, which can then be felt as further punishment.

One of the participants said that there were differences between a co-defendant's licence conditions and their own, even though there was a shared offence. There will be reasons why restrictions differ in these and similar circumstances, and this should be the case, as conditions and restrictions must be bespoke to the individual. The issue for participants is that a lack of understanding of these processes means that the restrictions are felt as punishments, especially when this means that they impede other seemingly unrelated wants and needs. Taking the time to explain the reasons for the conditions/restrictions can inspire a relationship built on respect, trust and, ultimately, compliance. Feelings of resentment can be predicated on poor or non-existent communication.

Consistent relationships

Often there had not been enough time to establish a consistent relationship between the person on probation and their COM. One participant said they felt they were being judged based on a single 10-minute meeting with their COM. Another was worried that, if they asked for anything or complained, then this would be detrimental to their situation. Some were very wary of the threat of recall, and one felt he had to put on an act of subservience to be seen as compliant. Often people said they were simply striving to be a 'normal' person in society.

A key issue affecting consistency is the frequent change of COM. Several people told us about having three different COMs in less than four months, meaning that they had to keep repeating key information and trying to establish new connections.

Conversely, another participant, who told us he had been advised by fellow prisoners to persist if he wanted to get anything done, said:

"You have to just keep on asking questions, your probation officer will be annoyed but they'll be happy you're doing it, it means you're engaged ... so I asked them so many questions ... eventually things get done ... it's slow ... it's really annoying, but it works."

DWRM also saw that, when the relationship is clearly set out in a contract and is adhered to by both parties, it can be a fruitful and supportive experience for both. Practitioners who see clients doing well because of their engagement will feel the benefits of a clearly bound, strong bonded and trusting partnership with equal buy-in. People on probation will also feel these relationships as sources of strength and support, encouragement and positive reinforcement.

"I have got a fantastic PO. He is there to listen. Probation service on the inside is diabolical. I am one of the lucky ones. I have a PO who does his job properly. There's a lot of POs who just push paper around. I am not a problem case, I always report, I stay out of trouble."

During their interviews, 21 people (40 per cent) reported good relationships with their COM. They stated that their COMs were responsive, reliable, and willing to help, within their capacity. None of these participants had any concerns about raising issues or requests with their COM. This was a marked change from the responses received when interviewing people in custody.

Creating a relationship that is sustainable for the duration of a licence period can enable people to complete the licence period without recall or reconviction. However, we also found that, for practitioners to have the capacity to do this, current issues with resourcing and recruitment into the probation service need to be resolved.

Protective factors

One person we spoke to recognised that probation supervision was part of their sentence of imprisonment.

"Well, I am still basically in prison, I got five years in prison and five years out, they are just monitoring the five years out. They monitor you and make sure you aren't misbehaving and taking drugs, stuff like that."

This characterisation of probation supervision is useful, as it acknowledges the continuing nature of supervision and recognises that it enables the person to be released from custody before the end of the sentence. Being honest about this process can help to create greater acceptance of the purpose of probation and the responsibilities of the COM.

Having settled accommodation after release from prison is a well-evidenced key protective factor and one that many people spoke to DWRM about, as they did not have settled accommodation and did not know how to arrange this. People spoke about the various barriers to getting benefits and accommodation, which had been difficult to navigate. Criteria for receiving support for housing are based on risk levels and complex needs. This means that a single young man who is healthy and has no addiction issues often has to rely on support from family and friends rather than statutory provision.

One participant who was offered housing through a Housing Association needed a risk assessment, but this was not completed in time due to a change in COM, and the accommodation was lost. The participant recognised this as a fault of the system rather than the individual. He was aware that the referral form was very long and time-consuming, and that his new COM was very busy and overstretched with a full case load. He was sympathetic to the situation, but this did not help him to find somewhere to live.

Almost everyone who spoke to DWRM about this issue believed that there was nothing probation could do about finding or supporting them into accommodation. We are aware that CAS3 accommodation is not available in all probation regions, though it appears to be effective at reducing recalls. However, it is only meant to be short term (for up to three months after leaving an approved premises) and only for those in emergency need. At present, there is an 84-day limit on CAS3 stays, and people in areas with very long waiting times for local authority accommodation face obstacles to finding long-term accommodation. The challenge here is about when the housing need is identified and a referral is made, which should be completed at the earliest opportunity before release.

4.2. Conclusions and implications

Probation supervision can offer a successful way to support reintegration into society, and we are encouraged by the examples we have seen of this working well. Where people had a clear understanding of the purpose and role of supervision, understanding first that this is still a part of their sentence, and had a way to frame it that felt acceptable, they were much more likely to engage positively.

Our lived experience consultants highlighted the importance of consistent relationships between probation practitioners and the people they are supervising, built on two-way contracts, to best promote engagement and compliance with licence supervision.

Where people on probation felt that their COM had engaged with and understood them, they could be more open in their licence supervision sessions and achieve better outcomes. In some cases, however, the reasons for licence restrictions were not fully explained and frequent changes of COM prevented trusting relationships from being built.

5. Initial outcomes

This chapter considers the initial outcomes achieved in relation to desistance, keeping other people safe and resettlement up to nine months after release. Most cases (77) were inspected between three and five months after release from custody.

5.1. Desistance

Assessment focused well on the factors most linked to desistance from further offending in 75 per cent of cases. Many assessments identified and analysed key areas of desistance and often included protective factors, such as strong family ties. There was evidence that the individual had been engaged in the assessment in 63 per cent of cases.

Practitioners engaged well with people on probation, and many who were interviewed spoke highly of their COM. Planning focused sufficiently on engaging the person on probation in 64 per cent of cases, and there was an effective focus on engagement after release in 75 per cent of cases. We saw examples where practitioners had maintained regular contact, and judicious use of managers' warnings to secure compliance and engagement.

While inspectors found good examples of positive engagement, there was sometimes a reluctance to ask difficult questions. Practitioners may need to intrude into people's lives, and some of the staff we met with were newly qualified and had not yet built the confidence to have more challenging conversations with the people on their caseload.

We saw some good enforcement practice. Examples included a person on probation on a trail monitoring tag who had not kept his battery charged, and another who had not attended his Thinking Skills Programme as required. Managers' warning letters were issued and these had a positive impact on subsequent behaviour and engagement in both cases.

Inspectors found evidence of sequencing of planned interventions. For example, when people on probation had a long period of licence supervision ahead, practitioners carried out stabilisation work with them on release, which focused on meeting the person's basic needs for accommodation, access to benefits and managing drug misuse. This prepared them for subsequent work on offending behaviour.

Many people on probation said they had built a good relationship with their COM, although, in some cases, they had only met them after release. They felt that the COM had listened to them and been receptive, and their anxiety about resettlement was reduced because they had built a good relationship.

The table below illustrates the inspectors' judgement of the extent to which there had been improvements in the factors most closely linked to offending:

Have there been improvements in the factors most closely linked to offending?	Number	%
Accommodation	20	51
Education, training and employment	14	52
Finance, benefits and debt	21	46
Family and relationships	12	23
Lifestyle (including friends and associates)	17	27
Alcohol misuse	5	20
Drug misuse	12	24
Thinking and behaviour	22	33
Attitudes to offending	16	25

Overall, inspectors found that there had been insufficient improvements in the factors most closely linked to offending. Accommodation, education, training and employment, and finance, benefits and debt had improved in around half of cases. Thinking and behaviour had improved in just a third of cases, largely due to the lack of any structured offence-focused work undertaken by practitioners. Improvements had been made in family and relationships, lifestyle, drug misuse and attitudes to offending in one in four cases, and in alcohol misuse in only one in five.

5.2. Keeping other people safe

Assessment, planning and reviewing focused sufficiently on keeping other people safe in just half of cases – 47 per cent, 52 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively. People on probation were not sufficiently involved in sentence planning to manage the risk they posed to others. Often there was a lack of professional curiosity about relationships, contact with children or the circumstances at home addresses to properly manage the risk of harm posed.

Domestic abuse checks were not carried out in 55 per cent of the cases where they should have been, and information on safeguarding was not shared in 41 per cent of the cases where this was required. Practitioners experienced significant difficulties and delays in receiving information from children’s services, and in some cases had stopped requesting it. For example, inspectors found cases where no checks were carried out when a person on probation disclosed that they were in a new relationship. In another example, the person on probation, who was living in an approved premises, was permitted to see family and to then take nieces to a fairground, but no safety checks were carried out, including with the children’s parents.

This lack of information-sharing may at times be due to a practitioner’s unwillingness to ask difficult questions. This could be a staff training and development issue, given that many staff are newly qualified and relatively inexperienced.

Inspectors had some concerns that risk levels are being reclassified downwards too soon, and some risk classifications did not sufficiently reflect the risk of harm posed. Practitioners told us that this could reflect the pressure to reduce workloads by reducing the level of contact required. We also identified some high risk of harm cases that should have been seen weekly but were not, because of workload pressures.

Risk may have been categorised inaccurately because practitioners and managers lacked experience. This includes not looking at a case thoroughly on allocation, and not sufficiently exploring the individual’s full offending history and behaviours. We found cases where resource pressures led to superficial assessments being undertaken and court risk assessments not being challenged when this was required.

Practice to keep other people safe varied, which is illustrated in the following cases:

Poor practice example

Emily was sentenced to custody for possession of a firearm. Her offending was linked to substance misuse and her lifestyle – neither of which were addressed.

Social care referrals were not completed for the children she was in contact with in her wider family. Emily did not like being categorised as presenting a high risk of serious harm, and the practitioner agreed with the senior probation officer that she could reduce her risk level. The risk of harm was changed to medium before she had spent sufficient time in the community to demonstrate progress, and without verification of her circumstances.

Good practice example – London

John was sentenced to custody for breach of a sexual harm prevention order.

He had previously demonstrated manipulative behaviour, and the COM had a good understanding of this, having previously worked with him in the community. The COM co-worked this case and directed and supported the trainee probation officer from the start. A co-working email set out expectations, concerns about manipulation and concerns about John's partner. In addition, the two practitioners worked closely with public protection police (Jigsaw). This ensured that the officers working closely with John delivered the same messages.

The table below illustrates the inspectors' judgement of the extent to which there have been improvements in those factors related to risk of harm:

Have there been improvements in those factors most closely linked to risk of harm?	Number	%
Accommodation	17	44
Education, training and employment	8	44
Finance, benefits and debt	17	49
Family and relationships	11	19
Lifestyle (including friends and associates)	13	22
Alcohol misuse	4	19
Drug misuse	11	27
Thinking and behaviour	20	31
Attitudes to offending	12	21
Current domestic abuse concerns	3	18
Current child safeguarding concerns	10	32
Hate-based behaviour	0	0

There was not enough, or no, reduction in factors linked to keeping other people safe in two-thirds of cases. The areas of most concern included domestic abuse, family and relationships and alcohol misuse, in many cases reflecting the absence of information-sharing with the police and children's services.

5.3. Resettlement

While we saw some good engagement with people on probation, reasonable progress had been made to support desistance, keep other people safe and enable people on probation to resettle into the community in only six out of 10 cases. Many cases were allocated late, and COMs did not have time to build a relationship with the person on probation. This also had an impact on the quality of the assessment, and people on probation were often reallocated to another COM soon after release.

Recall rates were high, at an average of 30 per cent of the case sample. They varied from 13 per cent in Kent, Surrey and Sussex to 45 per cent in the East of England and Wales. Most recalls were due to non-compliance with licence conditions, following homelessness and relapse into substance misuse. Release from custody with nowhere to live, and a lack of continuity in substance misuse treatment before and after release also contributed to recall.

Accommodation outcomes

The table below illustrates the individuals' accommodation status on the day of release:

Accommodation status (point of release)	Number	%
Settled, independent	2	2
Settled, with friends/family	21	23
Settled, hostel/supported accommodation	14	15
Transient, with friends/family	8	9
Transient, hostel/supported accommodation	37	40
Homeless	8	9
Unknown or unclear	3	3

The table below illustrates the individuals' accommodation status at the point of inspection (up to nine months after release):

Accommodation status (post-release)	Number	%
Settled, independent	11	14
Settled, with friends/family	26	33
Settled, hostel/supported accommodation	13	16
Transient, with friends/family	9	11
Transient, hostel/supported accommodation	11	14
Homeless	3	4
Unknown or unclear	7	9

Only four in 10 of the case sample were in settled accommodation on release. Of those that remained in the community, there was a welcome improvement in the proportion of people on probation who secured settled accommodation during their initial period on licence supervision (six in 10). Nevertheless, at the point of inspection, four out of 10 people in the case sample still remained homeless or in transient accommodation.

CAS3 achieved positive outcomes in the five regions where it fully operates: East of England; Kent, Surrey and Sussex; Greater Manchester; North West; and Yorkshire and the Humber. Most individuals accommodated in CAS3 enter straight from prison, but a significant proportion enter from approved premises. It is estimated that just under 40 per cent move from CAS3 housing into settled accommodation. This data is currently unverified.

Employment, education and training outcomes

The table below illustrates the individuals' employment status on the day of release:

Employment status (point of release)	Number	%
Full-time employed or self-employed	4	4
Part-time employed or self-employed	2	2
Full-time education or training	0	0
Part-time education or training	0	0
Unemployed	72	77
Not available for work	14	15
Unknown or unclear	1	1

The table below illustrates the individuals' employment status at the point of inspection (up to nine months after release):

Employment status (post-release)	Number	%
Full-time employed or self-employed	20	24
Part-time employed or self-employed	8	9
Full-time education or training	1	1
Part-time education or training	1	1
Unemployed	33	39
Not available for work	17	20
Unknown or unclear	5	6

Just eight per cent were in employment on release from custody. Employment hubs are beginning to be put in place in prisons to secure employment on release, though the full benefits of these arrangements have not yet been realised.

There was some improvement in the proportion of people on probation securing employment or training during their initial period on licence supervision. One in three were in full- or part-time employment, education or training. Four in 10 of the case sample remained unemployed. Of those who were not available for work (17), the primary reasons were substance misuse, and physical and mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression.

5.4. Conclusions and implications

Assessments focused well on engaging prison leavers with their licence supervision. Many people on probation spoke well of their COMs, and we found good examples of staff having regular contact with and being supportive of those in their care. However, this did not lead to sufficient improvements in the factors most closely linked to relapse and reoffending – family and relationships, lifestyle, drug misuse, attitudes to offending and alcohol misuse.

As we found in our pre-release inspection, there was not enough focus on keeping other people safe. In too many cases, police domestic abuse and child safeguarding checks were not carried out, and this was often because practitioners had given up trying to obtain information or because of a lack of professional curiosity about the personal circumstances of the person on probation. We had concerns in a number of cases that the risk of harm classification did not adequately reflect the harm posed, either initially or through being reduced too soon into the period of licence supervision. The impact of this is that several people in the case sample were not being monitored closely enough.

Late allocation of cases to COMs undermined efforts to support resettlement. Recall rates in the case sample were high. Most recalls to custody were due to non-compliance with licence conditions, triggered by homelessness and relapse into substance misuse. Too few prisoners were released into settled accommodation or employment, education and training. CAS3 worked well in providing temporary accommodation and support for those leaving prison and approved premises in the probation regions where it was available. Some progress was made with accommodation and education, training and employment outcomes for people on licence, though many in the case sample did not have settled accommodation and were unemployed. This does not sufficiently support desistance, keep other people safe and enable resettlement.

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Annexe 1: Glossary

Accredited programmes	Offender behaviour programmes and interventions that aim to change the thinking, attitudes and behaviours that may lead people to offend.
Approved premises	Residential units, formerly known as probation or bail hostels, that house ex-offenders in the community who require the highest levels of community-based public protection placements.
Community offender manager (COM)	COMs are based in the community and are also known as probation officers.
Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)	CRC was the term given to a private-sector supplier of Probation and Prison-based rehabilitative services for offenders
Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS)	Part of the Ministry of Justice’s new probation system, procured by regional probation directors to provide flexible, responsive services to help break the cycle of reoffending.
Community accommodation services tier 3 (CAS3)	Provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and for those moving on from approved premises and CAS2 (formerly bail accommodation support services), as well as assistance to help move into settled accommodation.
Digital prison system (DPS)	Operational database used in prisons to manage offenders.
Exceptional delivery models (EDMs)	Prison and probation service delivery of local regimes to meet the available staffing resources as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)	The single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services. See note below on NOMS.
Keyworker	Band 3 prison officers who, under the OMiC model, are allocated to promote rehabilitative and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners in order to foster positive behaviour.
Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)	MAPPA is where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others. Level 1 is ordinary agency management, where the risks posed by the offender can be managed by the agency responsible for the supervision or case management of the offender. Levels 2 and 3 require active multi-agency management.
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Responsible for major parts of the criminal justice system in England and Wales including courts, prisons, probation services and attendance centres.

National Delius (nDelius)	The approved case management system used by the NPS and CRCs in England and Wales.
National Offender Management Service (NOMS)	Was an executive agency of the MoJ responsible for correctional services in England and Wales. It was replaced by HMPPS (see above).
National Probation Service (NPS)	A single national service that came into being in June 2014. Its role was to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of offenders, including those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA. The NPS was replaced by the Probation Service in June 2021.
OASys	Offender assessment system currently used in England and Wales by the Probation Service to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision.
Offender Management in Custody (OMiC)	The framework that coordinates and sequences an individual's journey through custody and after release.
Psychologically informed planned environments (PIPEs)	Specifically designed environments where staff have additional training to develop a better psychological understanding of their work.
Prison offender manager (POM)	Responsible for assessing the person with a conviction's risks and needs and planning how their sentence should run. They may be a prison officer or a probation officer.
Regional probation directors (RPDs)	There are 12 probation regions in England and Wales, and 12 regional probation directors have been appointed to lead probation services in their region.
Thinking Skills Programme (TSP)	An accredited group programme designed to develop an offender's thinking skills to help them stay out of trouble.
Through the Gate	Through the Gate services were provided by Community Rehabilitation Companies in prisons to prepare prisoners for release and resettlement. Resettlement services are now provided in some prisons by commissioned rehabilitative services.

Annexe 2: Methodology

Fieldwork

Our post-release fieldwork was completed in seven probation service regions: the North East; Wales; East of England; North West; Greater Manchester; Kent, Surrey and Sussex; and London. We inspected 96 cases, as four of the pre-release case sample were excluded. One had been removed to Home Office detention and the remainder kept in custody until their sentence end date. In each of these cases, therefore, the individual did not spend any time in the community and was not subject to any post-release work.

Characteristics of case sample

Sex	Number	%
Male	85	89%
Female	9	9%
Not clearly recorded	1	1%

Race and ethnic category	Number	%
White	73	78%
Black and minority ethnic	20	21%
Not clearly recorded	1	1%

Sentence	Number	%
Case with more than 10 months to serve at point of sentence	90	95%
Determinate parole case	4	4%
Indeterminate sentenced prisoner	1	1%

Recalled to prison	Number	%
After 28 days	17	61%
Between 8 and 28 days and re-released	3	11%
Within 7 days of release	8	29%

Grade of current or last community offender manager	Number	%
Probation officer (member of staff with a recognised probation qualification)	77	82%
Trainee (member of staff currently on a formal training programme to achieve probation officer qualification)	6	6%
Probation service officer (member of staff working directly with service users, without a recognised probation officer qualification)	9	10%
Other or not clearly recorded	2	2%

DWRM lived experience consultants' methodology

The academic basis for the follow-up interviews drew on McNeill's (2012) multi-dimensional model of rehabilitation, including the domains of the personal, social, moral and judicial/legal. DWRM used the research questions below to inform our understanding of the depth of relationships between practitioner and prison leaver, and whether they have clear structures in place.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What do you think the role of probation is?
- What were your expectations about life outside before you were released?
 - How far have these expectations been met?
 - How has your supervision affected this?
- What are you able/not able to talk to your COM about?
 - Why?
 - How do they respond to requests from you?
- How has your relationship with your COM affected:
 - your risk management and/or restrictions?
 - your ability to connect with family and friends?
 - your engagement with education, training, employment, or other services?
- What are your aspirations for the future?

Who did DWRM speak to?

DWRM were able to speak to 49 people in the community, of which six were women. They also spoke to four of the people who had been recalled. Those they did speak to were able to cross-check their responses from the first phase of the inspection. It is important to note that, as DWRM only spoke to a small number of people who had been recalled, they witnessed a form of 'survivors' bias' and had to factor that into how they shaped these findings. DWRM identified that those in the community were over-represented in their sample. These people were more likely to be positive about their COM, as they hadn't been recalled to prison. Therefore, they decided to focus on what was working well and build on that. Each of the four recalled cases had been recalled for a breach of licence conditions rather than for a new offence.

Community case list	Men		Women		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
On list	89	100%	10	100%	99	100%
Interviewed	45	51%	4	40%	49	49%
Recalled and interviewed	2	2%	2	20%	4	4%
Recalled (no interview)	20	22%	1	10%	21	21%
Declined	4	4%	3	30%	7	7%
Did not answer (including previous declines)	20	22%	-	0%	20	20%

The total interview rate was 54%.

Annexe 3: Data tables

Assessment

Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the individual?	Number	Percentage
Yes	55	65%
No	29	35%

Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	Number	Percentage
Yes	62	73%
No	23	27%

Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	Number	Percentage
Yes	40	47%
No	45	53%

Planning

Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the individual?	Number	Percentage
Yes	54	64%
No	31	36%

Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting the individual's desistance?	Number	Percentage
Yes	57	68%
No	27	32%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	Number	Percentage
Yes	43	52%
No	39	48%

Implementation and delivery

Is the pre-release period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the individual?	Number	Percentage
Yes	64	75%
No	21	25%

Do the implementation and delivery of services and interventions effectively support the individual's desistance?	Number	Percentage
Yes	42	51%
No	41	49%

Do the implementation and delivery of services effectively support keeping other people safe?	Number	Percentage
Yes	40	47%
No	45	53%

Reviewing

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance of the person on probation?	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	56%
No	24	44%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the person on probation's desistance?	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	57%
No	23	43%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	Number	Percentage
Yes	27	51%
No	26	49%

Outcomes

Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made?	Number	Percentage
Yes	52	61%
No	33	39%