



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

Insights from recent probation inspections – is the service fit for purpose?

Justin Russell, HM Chief Inspector of Probation
Tuesday 21 March 2023



HM Inspectorate of Probation

The Daily Telegraph

INSIDE
A singular star
Who is the
Knives Out
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Fit for
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Do we really
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By royal request

Murderer was free to kill after probation blunders



Violent offender who went on to kill partner and children classed as 'medium-risk'

A MURDERER who went on to kill his partner and children was classed as a "medium-risk" violent offender by probation officers, it has emerged.

The man, who was released from prison in 2017, was later found guilty of the murder of his partner and their two children in 2019.

Probation officers had classified him as a "medium-risk" offender, meaning they were not required to monitor him as closely as high-risk offenders.

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Freed criminals wrongly rated as 'medium risk'

Matt Dathan Home Affairs Editor
At least ten more offenders released from prison have had their threat level underestimated by the Probation Service amid warnings that the failures that led to the killing of Zara Aleena are likely to be repeated.

Russell, chief inspector of probation, told Times Radio there was a "concern" that the mistakes and blunders that left Jordan McSweeney to stalk and kill Aleena nine days after she was released from jail could be repeated unless the government addressed staffing issues.

An inquiry by Russell found that a "series of blunders by probation officers, including wrongly classifying him as a medium risk, left him free to hunt for a victim in Ilford, east London. McSweeney was wrongly classified as a "medium risk" by staff under "mounting pressure", his report said.

An inspection of London probation services in October found that of 137 offenders classified as "medium risk of harm", 7 per cent were deemed to have had their risk underestimated and could have been rated as a high risk.

when they are doing their plans and their risk assessments."

Farah Naz, Aleena's aunt, accused ministers and the Probation Service of having "blood on their hands" over the failings that led to the murder due to a lack of staff and resources. She said Russell's report revealed "a litany of errors" and branded the service "incompetent", telling *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4: "This is not a service that's doing its best with inadequate resources — this is a service that is incompetent and has failures by people at the top."

The Probation Service is at least 1,846 officers short to address the present demands, according to the government's own figures. The Ministry of Justice has recruited 2,500 additional officers over the past two years and is aiming to hire 1,500 more by March. But the Ministry of Justice has admitted that the number of staff leaving has risen "considerably" since June 2021, when probation services were re-nationalised after the disastrous part-privatisation by Chris Grayling, who was justice secretary in the 12 months to September last year. 874 probation officers have left, an increase of 126 per cent on the previous year.

Vacancies were highest in London, where 287 roles

annual funding that was announced last year for better supervision of offenders and to reduce case loads and recruit more staff. The MoJ has also introduced requirements for the Probation Service to collect information on any domestic abuse or child safeguarding history of offenders from the police before an offender is released from prison.

Steve Reed, the shadow justice secretary, blamed the government "longstanding" failure to invest in the Probation Service as well as its botched part-privatisation. He said: "High-risk offenders on probation commit serious offences every week on average. This is a service in freefall. McSweeney

repeated failure to attend probation appointments should have triggered swift action. He was recalled to prison two days before he attacked Zara, but he was never arrested. If he had been Zara would still be alive."

Hinds told MPs yesterday that the government was considering measures to force all criminals to attend sentencing hearings. Ministers faced demands to make it mandatory after McSweeney refused to appear for sentencing after being convicted of Aleena's murder. He was given a life sentence with a minimum term of

'Zara was failed by system..'

KILLER JUST OUT OF JAIL

by BRENDAN MCFADDEN
ZARA Aleena's aunt says probation officers have "blood on their hands" over her brutal murder.

Jordan McSweeney, 29, the attacked and sexually assaulted the 35-year-old law graduate last June — just days after he was released from prison on licence.

The violent killer, in set, was free to roam despite his licence being revoked after he failed to meet probation officers, a report said. Aunt Farah Naz said: "Some people need to be accountable here. If I don't do my job, I don't deserve my job. Heads should



TRAGEDY: Aleena



IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS

Every six days someone is killed by an offender on probation. Our criminal justice system is in crisis. When will the Government address these...



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Zara Aleena killer wrongly assessed as medium risk

4 hours ago | London



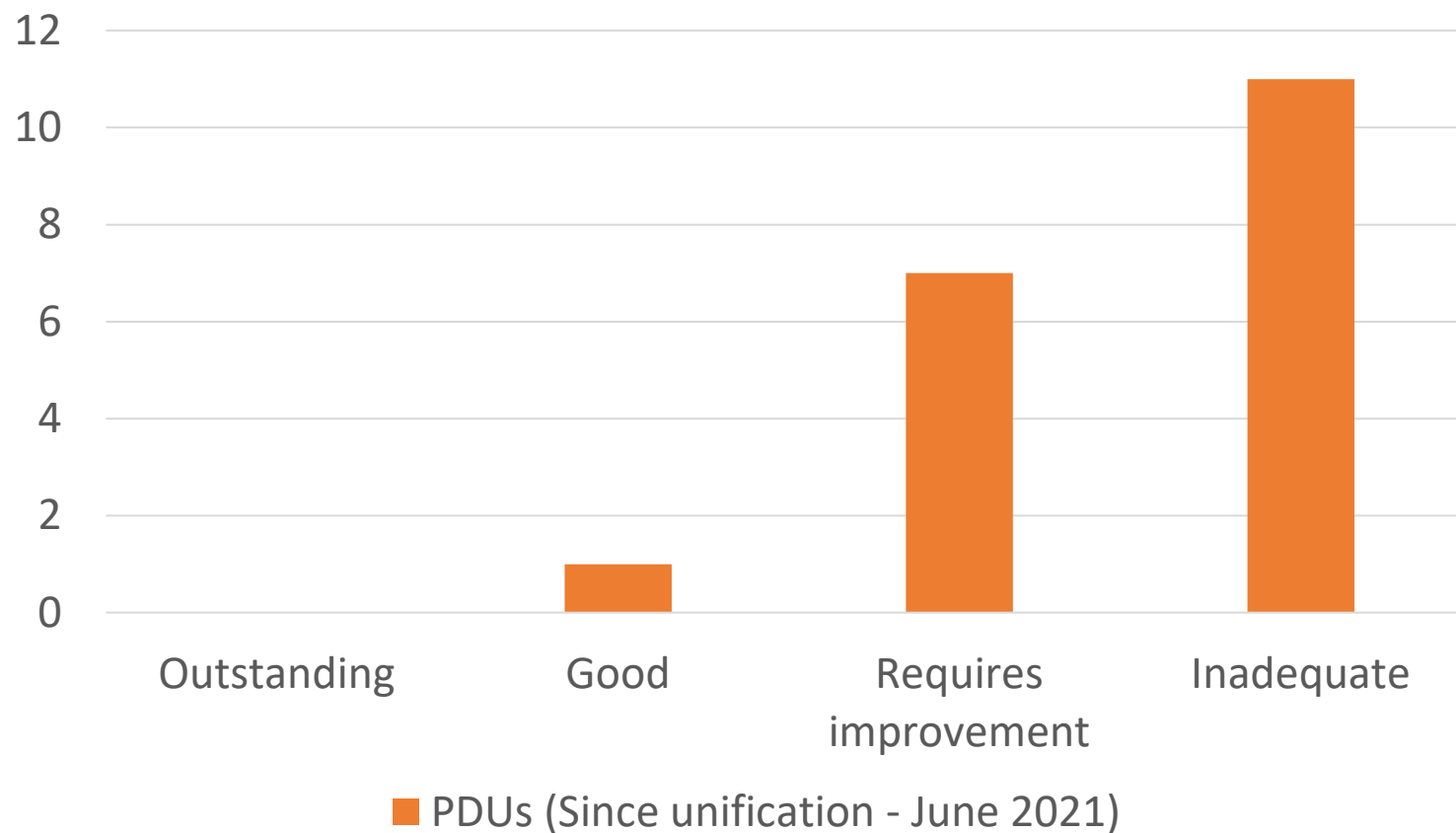
Key challenges

- Staffing and caseloads
- Assessment and management of potential risks of serious harm posed by some people on probation
- Poor support for people leaving prison on licence



Overall ratings – Probation delivery units

Local Probation Delivery Unit inspections





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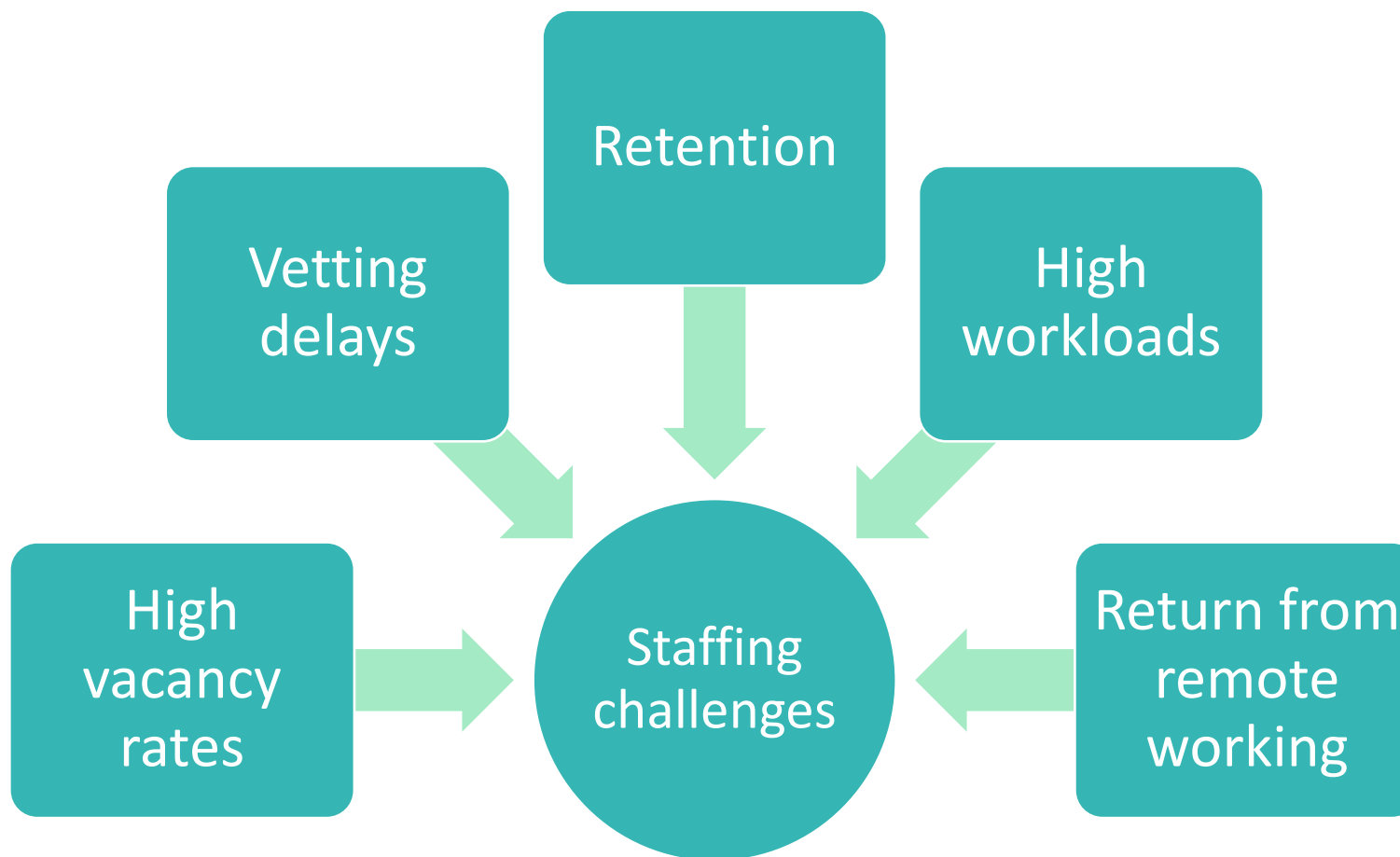
HMIP Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) inspection scores since unification (June 2021)

	Overall rating	Score out of *24/27	Leadership	Staffing	Services	Information and facilities
Swansea NPT	Inadequate	4	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Gwent	Requires improvement	6	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement
West Sussex	Inadequate	4	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement
West Kent	Inadequate	1	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Essex North	Inadequate	1	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Northants	Requires improvement	9	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Birmingham North East and Solihull	Requires improvement	2	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Staffordshire & Stoke	Inadequate	2	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Warwickshire	Requires improvement	7	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Good
HFKCW	Inadequate	0	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate
Ealing & Hillingdon	Inadequate	3	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Lambeth	Inadequate	3	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Lewisham & Bromley	Inadequate	*4	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Newham	Requires improvement	*6	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Barking, Dagenham & Havering	Requires improvement	*5	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Redcar, Cleveland & Middlesbrough	Requires improvement	*8	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement	Good
Gateshead & South Tyneside	Good	15	Good	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Derby City	Requires improvement	11	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland	Inadequate	2	Inadequate	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Inadequate	Inadequate
Requires improvement	Requires improvement
Good	Good



Staffing challenges



Staffing – key findings

- Significant vacancies at every grade and for admin and unpaid work supervision staff – up to 50% in some London PDUs
- Sickness rates have increased significantly – half of days lost are now due to mental ill-health
- Resignation rates have increased – more experienced POs leaving
- Caseloads still perceived to be unmanageable by POs and PSOs

But

- Almost 2,000 new POs in training – PSO numbers up 8%
- Three year pay deal agreed



Probation officer vacancy levels





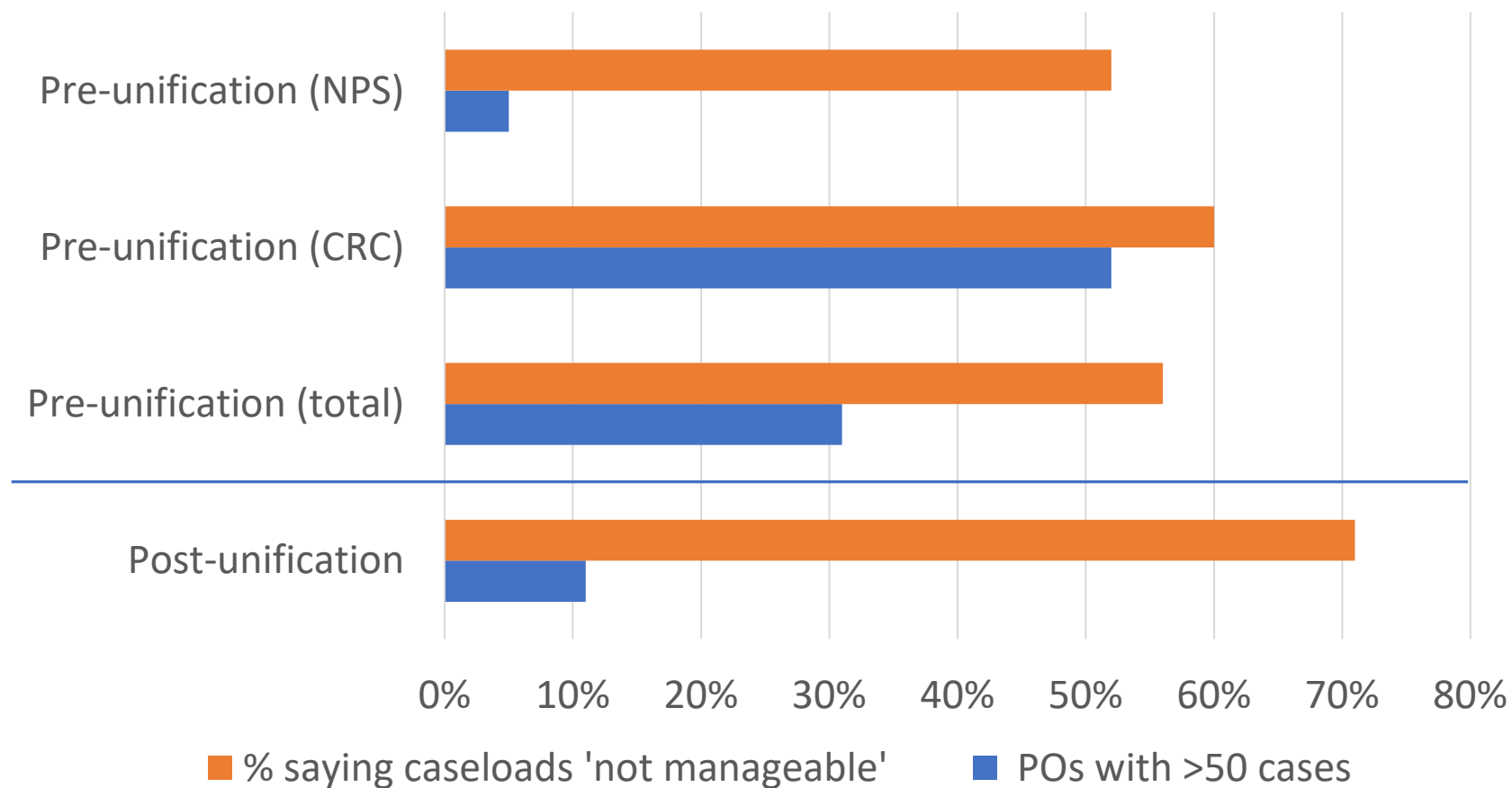
More staff in the pipeline

Overall national figures:
1967 PQiPs in training
1761 total Probation Officer vacancies





Probation Officer caseloads coming down but perceived 'unmanageability' increasing?



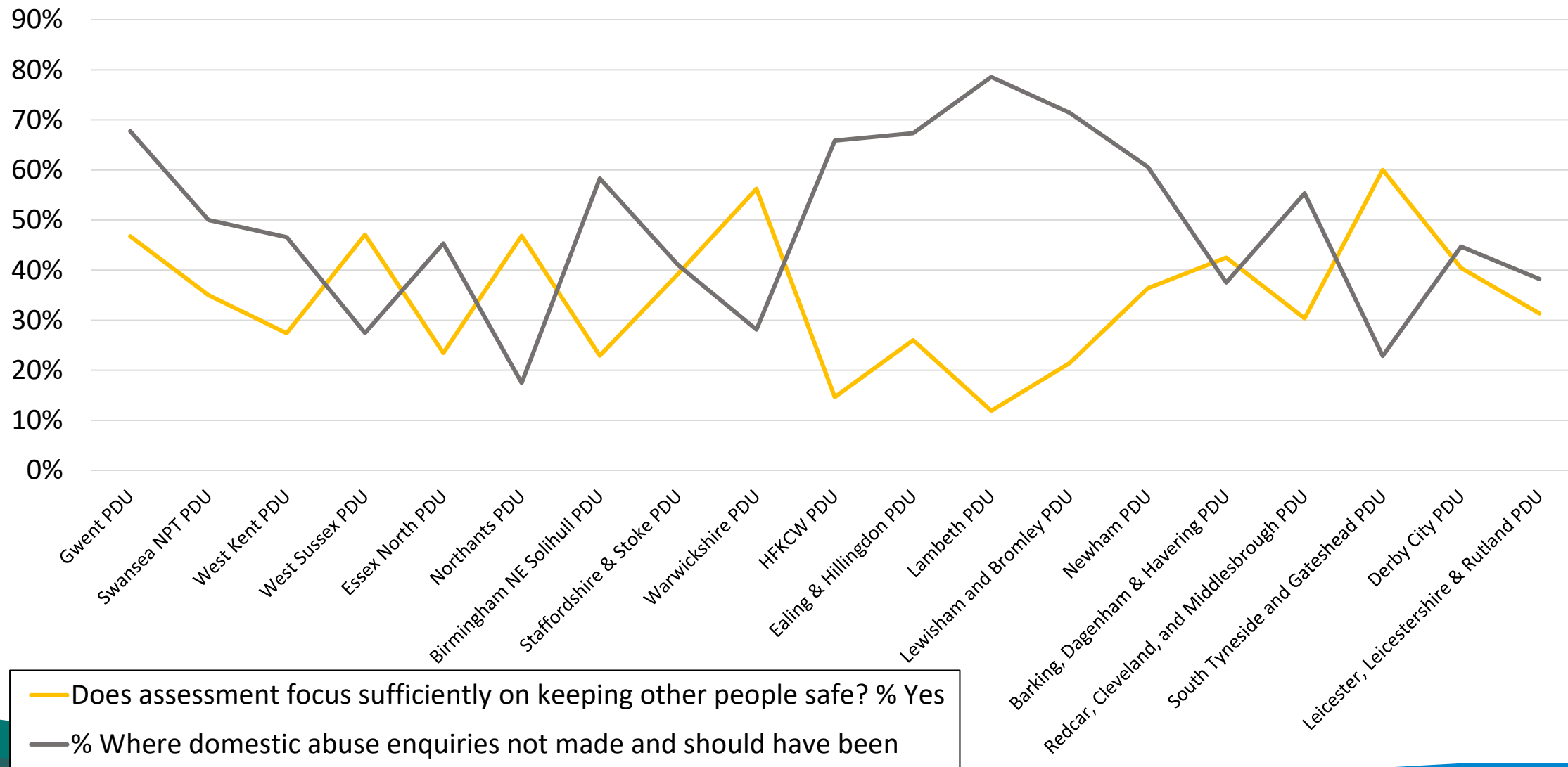


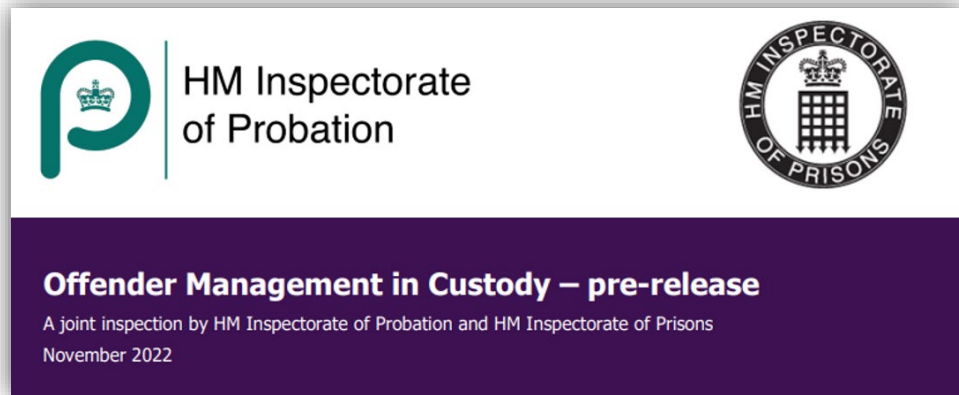
Key findings from Bendall and McSweeney cases

- Both were inaccurately assessed as ‘medium’ risk of serious harm – when should have been ‘high’
- Failure to do domestic abuse or safeguarding checks or take account of past abuse concerns and restraining order intelligence
- Inadequate sharing of information from prison to community
- Late and inadequate planning for release from custody
- Inappropriate allocation to inexperienced / unqualified staff
- Inadequate management oversight / overloaded SPOs
- Inadequate licence conditions / failure to deliver sentence requirements



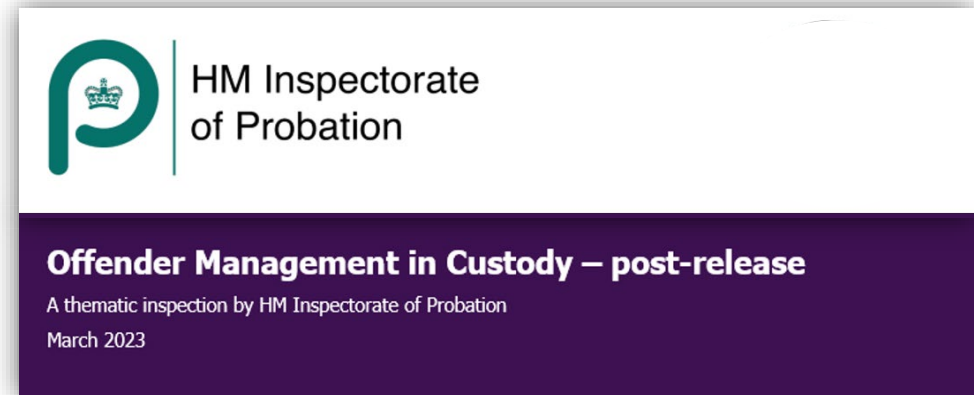
Trends in case assessment scores by PDU





Pre-release report - November 2022 (joint with HMI Prisons)

- 100 cases from 8 prisons across England and Wales – assessed pre-release (April 22) and 96 of them post release (mostly 3-5 months after release) (in October 22)
- Interviews with relevant prison officers and probation officers in prison (keyworkers, POMs) and in the community (COMs)
- Interviews with 72 of the prisoners involved (and with 53 of them after release)
- Also with prison and probation managers and leaders and national leads in HMPPS
- Inspected quality of assessment, planning and delivery – including whether needs (e.g. for accommodation, employment, drugs, mental health) were met and whether risks of harm were managed



Post-release report – March 2023

Are needs being met?

- Continuing serious concerns with OMiC model – a “wake up call”. Probation staff shortages in the community impacting on quality of work. Too few staff, too many cases to manage. Mismatch between services needed and those provided
- One in ten released homeless. 60 per cent released without settled accommodation. (But improved to 40 per cent by point of inspection). Positive impact of the CAS3 post-release accommodation in 5 regions which guarantees up to 84 nights temporary accommodation after custody.
- Some improvement in employment from 6 per cent at point of release to 33 per cent at point of inspection (though 39 per cent still unemployed)
- Services to meet a drugs misuse problem linked to offending were delivered in only 24 per cent of cases, and for an alcohol problem in only 32 per cent of cases
- 30 per cent recall rate in our sample – 4 in 10 of these within 28 days

Are risks of harm being managed?

- Assessment, planning and case reviewing to manage the risks of people being released from custody was of sufficient quality in half of inspected cases
- Domestic abuse checks in only 55 per cent of cases where they should have happened. Safeguarding information on children only shared in 59 per cent of cases
- Significant difficulties and delays in receiving information from children's services – in some cases they stopped requesting it
- Some concerns that risk levels are being reclassified downwards too soon or did not sufficiently reflect the risks of harm posed
- Insufficient interventions delivered to address abusive behaviour towards partners and family members. Not enough home visits

Recommendations

We make **10 recommendations** to HMPPS and to Regional Probation Directors, including:

- Introduce a senior practitioner role in probation to improve staff retention
- Reduce duplication and delays in the referral processes for accommodation
- Ensure ongoing substance misuse treatment for every person leaving custody
- Give commissioned service providers direct access to probation case record systems
- Improve domestic abuse and safeguarding information sharing
- Ensure accommodation needs are addressed before and after release

In conclusion

- Committed and engaged staff and managers
- Increased investment in recruitment and services (eg accommodation) is starting to pay dividends
- Where staffing is stable and caseloads are manageable this is leading to higher quality practice
- Risk of harm assessment is being given a higher priority

But

- Vacancies still to fill and retention now needs prioritising
- Too many areas not operating to business as usual standards yet
- Prison to community transfer needs significant improvement and too many people in prison and on probation not getting the interventions they need