



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

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Dear Andrea

Many thanks for the cooperation we received from you and your staff during the recent review of Probation Service – North West Region.

We have now completed the inspection of the Cheshire West, Blackburn with Darwen, Knowsley and St Helens, Liverpool North and Cumbria Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) in your region and would like to take this opportunity to share with you our overall findings and our key observations and areas for improvement at a regional level.

### **Regional observations:**

At a regional level, we have identified the following key strengths and areas for improvement:

#### **Leadership**

As you will know, the North West Probation Service was formed in June 2021, as one of 12 probation regions across England and Wales. This involved the merging of the former National Probation Service (NPS) North West and three Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). Work to decouple the delivery of all regional functions from the now Greater Manchester region had to take place in parallel to unification. This meant that the region had to start from scratch to develop its senior management team and corporate capability. The region is geographically large and covers the North West of the country, from Wales to Scotland. Delivery of services is, in parts of the region, complicated by the rural geography, and this was particularly the case in Cumbria.

There are 20 courts in the region, as well as 10 approved premises and 11 prisons. The region currently employs around 1,900 people and has an approximate caseload of 25,000. There are 13 PDUs within the region, of which we inspected five in conjunction with the regional review – Cheshire West, Blackburn with Darwen, Knowsley and St Helens, Liverpool North, and Cumbria.

The governance and delivery of court work in the North West differs from that prescribed by the target operating model. Accountability sits with four PDU heads, who hold strategic responsibility for court services in a specified geographic area in addition to their PDU responsibilities. Stand-alone unpaid work (UPW) requirements are managed by two stand-alone teams sitting within the region's interventions function. The five PDUs inspected provided distinct, and potentially unequal challenges for the PDU heads, given the difference in staffing, offending profiles, services, and geography within each PDU. Despite these distinctions, we found a number of key themes across all of the five PDUs.

The region is overseen by yourself as the Regional Probation Director who provides strategic leadership with responsibility for the overall commissioning and delivery of probation services across the region. The North West probation region vision and strategy prioritises the quality of service through the regional quality improvement strategy. Clear governance arrangements are in place, including through the senior leadership team and organisational excellence forum. Although there is an appropriate focus on performance and progress against the regional delivery plan and local PDU quality improvement plans, our case inspections across the region demonstrated that the intended improvement in the quality of casework is yet to be fully realised.

Risks to service delivery were largely well understood and appropriate mitigations had been put in place. Resource management pressures were being addressed by the senior management team, and the region was on track to resolve staffing deficits by the end of 2023. The operating model clearly sets out minimum levels of expected contact according to the risks and needs presented by the specific cohorts of people on probation. Effective implementation of the operating model remained a work in progress.

We found that one of the most significant risks to the organisation was the backlog and delay in obtaining domestic abuse information from the police, and that this was insufficiently prioritised at the time of our inspections. Although disputed by the region, we found this to be both at a strategic level and in the delivery of casework, as demonstrated in our Domain two results.

### **Key strengths:**

- The North West regional plan is clear and focused on quality, supported by other regional messaging which places quality at the heart of delivery. The plan includes the key areas for service delivery, including public protection, victim services, and court services. The PDU delivery plans align to the regional priorities. In our regional survey of staff, 115 out of 147 respondents stated that the region prioritised quality, and adherence to evidence, always or most of the time.
- Regional leaders are visible, accessible, and highly regarded by both regional and PDU staff. We found a cohesive organisation that was fully integrated in terms of legacy organisations, with staff clear about the direction of the single organisation. Operational staff are now operating in blended teams, with largely blended workloads. The region achieved this by carefully considering both personal

circumstances and operational needs, combined with an effective communication strategy.

- Change processes are managed well, and effectively supported by the business, strategy, and change team, which is fully integrated into the region. In our survey of regional staff, two-thirds of staff reported that change was managed well. This demonstrates an upward trend compared with the data in the region's own staff survey completed almost a year ago. Organisational risks are largely understood across teams and there is an embedded process for their review, which involves both regional and PDU staff.
- The region has strong relationships with its key strategic partners, including the four Police and Crime Commissioner offices within its boundaries. It is represented at a senior level at the key strategic boards across the region, including community safety partnerships, safeguarding children boards, and domestic abuse partnerships.
- The regional performance and quality team produces comprehensive management information that is accessible to staff. In addition, the region has recently introduced the use of the new national practitioner dashboard to support performance. While usage is not yet consistent across the region, initial usage figures show promise, and we were impressed by its potential to improve delivery.
- The strategic 'engaging people on probation' plan is starting to have some impact, to include those under supervision. The region has recently held two engagement forums, attended by senior managers, probation staff, and people on probation, and has held a number of recognition events to celebrate the achievements of people on probation. We were able to meet a lived-experience colleague as part of this review, which in itself really demonstrated the commitment of the region to focus on this important area of work.
- The region has an 'equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging' action plan that is overseen by an Equalities Steering Group. The region engages with all of the staff support groups and staff members with lived experience. They have developed an equalities community outreach officer role to support the delivery of a community outreach strategy. Materials have been developed to support practitioners in having conversations around gender, gender identity, and sexuality with people on probation.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- The clarity expressed through regional business planning, focused on quality, has yet to be fully translated into organisational practice. This was particularly the case around practice in relation to risk of harm, where we found significant deficits in the cases we inspected. Across all five PDUs, standards around risk of harm were assessed as being insufficient in too many cases. We found that initial assessments had insufficient focus on keeping people safe in almost three-quarters of the 196 cases inspected. Additionally, when assessing the implementation and delivery of the sentence, we found that almost two-thirds of cases did not deliver services effectively to support the safety of other people, which is concerning.
- A consistent theme in our PDU inspections was insufficiencies in the processes around police information requests in relation to domestic abuse. In some PDUs, we found significant backlogs, including over 1,300 outstanding requests across

Merseyside. As a result, there was a lack of risk information available to inform service delivery and to keep people safe. In Merseyside, the process in place provided some, but not enough, information relating to a history of domestic abuse, and required practitioners to request more detail to understand the context of police intelligence. These further enquiries experienced up to a 12-week delay in response time from the police. This presented practitioners with a significant challenge of assessing and trying to manage risk of harm without relevant information, leaving potential and actual victims exposed and unsafe. Even in PDUs where there were not the challenges, delays, or backlogs, such as in Cumbria, we were not satisfied that this information was being collected routinely. Further, even when requests had been made, practitioners often seemed unable to appropriately consider how risk information informed their assessments and practice.

- At the time the inspections were announced, the North West probation region had two PDUs identified as 'red', and six as 'amber' sites under the prioritisation framework (PF). A lack of probation officers, and other inexperienced staff across the region are the primary reasons for this situation. The PF is nationally driven and offers very little by way of support to those areas applying for red status under the framework. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) needs to give further consideration to whether the model supports PDUs sufficiently well.
- Given the resource challenges within the organisation, the region recognises that it has been very directive to PDU heads in how they manage the resource and workload in their PDUs. This has resulted in a lack of autonomy for these leaders, which is frustrating for some, while reassuring for newer leaders. As the region develops and staffing levels improve, the region is committed to increasing the level of responsibility of the PDU heads, which would be beneficial.
- The 'engaging people on probation' agenda has yet to be fully operationalised, so that the views of those under supervision are used to shape the organisational vision and the development of appropriate interventions.

## Staff

The North West probation region has clear governance arrangements in place to manage and recruit staff. Since unification, recruitment issues, particularly in relation to probation officer grade and administration staff, have affected service delivery. The overall vacancy rate, across all grades, at the time of the inspection announcement was approximately 10 per cent, against the national target staffing figure. However, this figure belies the fragility of a very inexperienced workforce overall.

The last 12 months have seen a significant increase in staff numbers overall, which leaves an organisational risk around the newness and ability of new starters, and the infrastructure to support them appropriately. Large numbers of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees qualifying as probation officers throughout 2023 are of course welcome but present a significant learning, development, and performance management challenge for the region.

Despite the staffing challenges, the region has not shied away from performance management of ineffective staff where it is needed. There was a positive and engaged staff culture in the PDUs that we inspected, and a focus on staff wellbeing.

## **Key strengths:**

- The region has made a significant effort to recruit new staff and has been successful in being able to recruit in significant numbers. There were 366 new starters between January 2022 and January 2023, largely at probation services officer and administrative grades. Furthermore, the PQiP numbers within the region have been significant, with a total of 155 due to qualify in 2023.
- There has been a pragmatic and creative use of the region's staffing budget surplus to recruit into non-practitioner posts, including maintaining staff in the quality development role to support new starters. The use of protected development days for operational staff has been embedded and demonstrates a commitment to the development of staff. This will be particularly important in supporting the planned intake of newly qualified probation officers throughout the remainder of the year. There is a regional development plan focused on newly qualified officers to support these efforts.
- The regional focus on supporting staff and their wellbeing was palpable at both a regional and PDU level. Staff largely view working for the North West probation region positively, albeit that they understand and feel the current resourcing pressures. There has been a concerted effort to address sickness rates, and these have reduced over the last six months, reducing to an average of 12 working days per annum per staff member in April 2023. There is an embedded plan to support PDU heads in managing their sickness absence and it was clear from our PDU inspections that sickness levels and type were well understood.
- There is a strong culture of rewarding staff through the use of reward and recognition, both at PDU and regional level. In addition to individual localised awards, there are also regional awards and events. The budget is fully utilised and our PDU surveys amalgamated across the five PDU indicated that 56 per cent of staff felt that exceptional work was rewarded and recognised.
- The region supports both regional staff and PDUs to make reasonable adjustments for staff in line with requirements, and there is use of workplace passports to support staff, which is further evidenced by spending in this area. Our PDU surveys amalgamated across the five PDUs indicated that, of the 39 staff who said that they needed reasonable adjustments, 28 had their needs met.

## **Key areas for improvement:**

- With the success of the recruitment of large numbers of new staff, the region is exposed to the significant risk posed by an inexperienced workforce. This is further compounded by the vacancy rate within the probation officer group, which provides a limited infrastructure to support new starters. In our casework inspections, the work of both probation services officers and PQiPs was of a lesser quality<sup>1</sup> than that of probation officers across the majority of our standards, albeit that that the quality of work by probation officers was also insufficient in too many cases. Given the oversight that should occur in PQiP cases, this needs to be an area of particular focus for the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Data aggregated from all PDU inspections.

- The regional training and development strategy and newly qualified officer plan have yet to be effective, in terms of building a competent workforce, and the current offer is not linked to business risks. In some of our PDU inspections, we found qualified staff who did not understand what multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are, and others who did not understand their responsibility in regard to domestic abuse practice. In addition, the increased focus and resource devoted to performance and quality teams have yet to prove effective in improving both of these areas.
- Although the regional case assessment audit tool had been used routinely in the region following unification, it was not yet driving quality improvements. We found management oversight to be absent or ineffective in almost two-thirds of the cases we inspected at PDU level. The region should consider developing a more coherent framework for checking and analysing quality within teams.
- Despite an effort to improve recording of the protected characteristics of staff, there remains over a quarter of staff in some PDUs still to record this information. Work has been undertaken to understand this issue, but this has yet to result in the required improvement. More needs to be done to encourage staff to complete the information, to support future analysis of issues of disproportionality in areas such as promotion, recruitment, and reward and recognition.

## Services and interventions

The region has an experienced community integration team, which monitors and evaluates the delivery of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRSs). These cover six main pathways: accommodation; education, training, and employment; personal wellbeing; women's services; finance, benefits, and debt; and dependency and recovery. The region routinely monitors referral rates to the CRSs, the complexity levels of supervised individuals, and the characteristics of people on probation who have been referred to CRSs.

Serious organised crime has been a key focus for the region, following four high-profile homicides in the Merseyside area within the last 12 months. Much work has been undertaken on a multi-agency basis to explore and understand the issues of serious organised crime across the Merseyside and wider North West caseloads. These enhanced multi-agency arrangements need to be embraced and developed further, to allow them to support other offence types across the caseload.

### Key strengths:

- The region has an appropriate strategic needs analysis for those they supervise. This has subsequently been used to underpin Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF) commissioning decisions and a range of provision for those on probation supervision. Leaders have taken a proactive approach, at both a regional and operational level, to manage and improve CRS delivery. Despite significant challenges with the CRS accommodation contract, the region has been proactive in managing it, including the imposition of an improvement plan, and made great efforts to improve services under these arrangements.
- The Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 accommodation contract has been well managed, with excellent relationships at a strategic and operational level, which has led to positive outcomes for people in scope. At the time of the inspection, 200

bedspaces were available to support people on release from prison, with further accommodation places actively being sought.

- Significant work has been undertaken across the region to reduce the backlog of completions of accredited programmes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. In some areas of the region, this has resulted in no backlog at all, although this is not a consistent picture across the area. Programmes are available across a wide range of sites and times to meet the needs of those who need them.
- The region has made good use of the ROIF funding, informed through their strategic needs assessment, particularly to support the needs of diverse groups. This has included the commissioning of a service to support neurodivergent people to engage better with their sentence. ROIF funding has also been used to support specific PDU projects, including those working with black, Asian, and minority ethnic people on probation and young people who have committed violent offences.
- The region has a unique provision in Merseyside, providing support for men released after very long custodial sentences, called 'Resettle'. While cases from this cohort were not included in our PDU inspections, it was clear that this multi-agency specialist approach is a service of which the region is justifiably proud. The project, run in conjunction with health services, has been evaluated externally and found to have significant benefits to those that receive these services.
- Women's services are varied across the region, with Merseyside services being seen as the high standard to which other areas of the region aspire. Across all PDUs, we inspected 26 cases where the person on probation identified as female. While this was a much smaller figure than for the male cases inspected, female cases were assessed more positively than male cases across almost all of our summary judgements.<sup>2</sup>
- The region is making efforts to address the backlog of UPW caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It has made some progress since implementing a regional UPW sentence management improvement framework. These improvements have been enabled by the effective performance management of the UPW supervisors shared between PDU and UPW managers. This has been supported by comprehensive management information provided by the performance and quality team.
- Work has been undertaken to improve the UPW placements available for females, and the majority of the region has seen an increase in the availability of women-only groups.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- Within current resourcing pressures, there has been a delay in the establishment of short sentence function teams, which were due to go live in June 2023. This is now planned for December 2023 but is reliant on the region being able to place newly qualified officers into custodial environments. Additionally, in almost half of all cases where a handover was required between the prison and community offender manager, this had not been undertaken within the expected timescales as required.

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<sup>2</sup> Data aggregated from all PDU inspections.

- There is a need to improve enforcement practice. The approach to breaching a community or UPW order and returning the case to court following non-compliance is inconsistent. Enforcement action was not undertaken in 32 out of 87 cases where it should have been. The enforcement hub was also rejecting 70 to 75 per cent of the cases that it quality assured using the quality development tool, whereas the expectation was 20 per cent.
- The structured interventions offer has been refreshed over the last 12 months, with the aim of providing consistency across the region. However, use of this provision is varied and not yet embedded in all areas. Within the current resource challenges, it is imperative that this area is grown to support practitioners managing their caseloads appropriately.
- The region is not achieving its target of providing magistrates' courts with pre-sentence reports on the day of request. Additionally, there is limited regional insight into sentencing patterns and whether pre-sentence proposals to court by practitioners are proportionate. Further analysis at a regional level would enable leaders to have greater confidence that advice to courts is increasing the likelihood of people receiving appropriate sentences, and to improve the management of demand on services which are overstretched.
- The region is making efforts to address the backlog of UPW caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, but further improvement is required. It has made some progress since implementing a regional UPW sentence management improvement framework. There are 183 cases in the region (four per cent) that have been extended beyond 12 months because the hours were not completed on schedule. At the point the inspection was announced, the North West probation region's performance was at 98 per cent, against the revised nationally set target of achieving 102 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

## Information and facilities

The production and analysis of management information reports, driven by the performance and quality team, to improve service delivery is a key strength for the region. Despite the challenges caused by staffing, the focus has remained on both performance and, in particular, quality. This was further evidenced by the recruitment of an additional performance officer and a commitment to recruitment to both the quality and performance teams. There are strong regional messages to PDUs about the need to focus on quality and performance cascaded through a variety of governance structures, and communications from the regional teams. However, these efforts have yet to result in the delivery of high-quality work with people on probation often enough.

### Key strengths:

- Policies and other communications are published on Microsoft Teams, and are accessible and well utilised. While some staff in our PDU inspections found it unhelpful, overall, it is a useful, intuitive, and consistent way in which to engage staff and share information.
- The region has established 'engage to improve' sessions, to ensure that the views of practitioners across functions directly inform improvement work. There is also a

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<sup>3</sup> Data provided by the region.



prioritisation of ongoing quality assurance, with a focus on a 'starting well' approach to casework through delivery of the national core quality management framework.

- Early adoption of the new national practitioner performance management tool demonstrates a commitment to a focus on performance, and early utilisation figures show promise.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- The region accepts that some buildings across the North West probation estate are not fit for purpose, including in Blackburn. Others, such as in Liverpool North, are not ideal, in terms of access for those staff with mobility issues. Work is being undertaken to explore alternative options. Wi-Fi coverage in offices is inconsistent across the region. We recognise that the region has made efforts at both a local and national level to make improvements, but it does not have the remit or budget to rectify the concerns directly.
- Although there are governance arrangements in place that are focused on quality, including the Organisational Excellence Forum, our inspection findings would indicate that these have yet to be successful in delivering high-quality services.
- In a number of our PDU inspections, we identified that access to Violent and Sex Offender Register records was an issue. Staff have been vetted but there have been delays in accessing police-based training. This feeds into a wider picture of some sentence management staff not having full access to risk information, to inform their work with people on probation.

### **Statutory victim work**

Across the five inspected PDUs, 16 inspected cases had an offence which was eligible for victim contact scheme arrangements, although just six victims or their families had opted into the scheme. We reviewed these case records, to look at whether initial contact with victims encouraged engagement with the victim contact scheme, whether information and communication exchange supported the safety of victims, and if pre-release contact allowed victims to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release.

In addition to the cases reviewed, we interviewed the regional public protection manager who had the strategic lead for victims, and three operational managers. The governance arrangements for victims worked well in enabling region-wide consistency and shared learning. Victim liaison officers (VLOs) are embedded within sentence management teams across the region, to support positive team working and proactive information sharing.

### **Key strengths:**

- Initial contact with victims is timely and appropriately encourages engagement with the victim contact scheme. It provided information about sources of support in all relevant cases. The initial letter to the victim was appropriately personalised, considering the nature of the experience of the victim and any diversity issues in all but two relevant cases.
- Clear information was given to the victim about what they could expect at different points in a sentence in all relevant cases. The initial letter to the victim contained sufficient information to enable them to make an informed choice about whether to

participate in the scheme in all relevant cases. The victim was referred to other agencies or services or was given information about available sources of help or support in all but one relevant case (one of 10 cases).

- There was information sharing to support the safety of victims in five out of six of the relevant cases. Where it was absent, there had been difficulties in obtaining information from prison-based colleagues. VLOs were also involved in some professionals' meetings and with some MAPPA level 1 case reviews. The region had put clear guidance in place to involve VLOs in public protection meetings where they are required.
- Victim liaison staff shared relevant information about the victim with probation practitioners in all relevant cases. VLOs were co-located in PDUs. Cases were allocated according to the location of the victim, and integration of VLOs into the PDUs worked well, with VLOs sitting alongside probation practitioners. The concerns of the victim were addressed, and attention was paid to their safety when planning for release in all relevant cases.
- Victim liaison staff were provided with appropriate and timely information about the management of the offender in five out of six relevant cases. Pre-release contact with victims allowed them to make appropriate contributions to conditions of release in all relevant cases. The victim was given the opportunity to contribute their views, to inform decisions about the offender's release, in a timely way and was supported in doing so in all relevant cases. Views expressed by the victim were treated appropriately and in accordance with the victim contact scheme in all relevant cases. 'No contact' licence conditions were used in nine out of 10 relevant cases.

### **Key areas for improvement:**

- The recording of protected characteristics of victims was missing or incomplete in almost all cases (14 of 16 had no or partial information recorded).
- Although we were told in our regional meetings that VLOs were routinely invited, and integral, to MAPPA meetings, in our case inspections we found them not to have been involved in three out of four cases where they should have been.
- The victim was informed about the action they could take if the prisoner attempted to make unwanted contact with them in only five of the 10 cases where they should have been.

### **Learning from Serious Further Offence investigations**

The Serious Further Offence (SFO) team sits within the remit of the regional head of performance and quality team and consists of six reviewing managers, who are also responsible for other investigations, including disciplinary investigations and complaints. Between 31 January 2022 and 31 January 2023, a total of 27 SFO cases were reviewed by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HMPPS. Of these, the quality of 17 was found to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding', with 10 'Requires improvement'. Themes from these SFOs reflected much of what we have found in our PDU inspections across the region, including insufficient and/or inaccurate risk assessment, insufficient management oversight, and ineffective safeguarding and domestic abuse practice.

It was clear from discussions held between SFO staff and the HM Inspectorate of Probation SFO team that there is a commitment in the region to achieve high standards in respect of SFO reviews. However, the team has recently seen a dip in its ratings and is keen to improve on this. There is frustration regarding the amount of work that has to be put into writing and quality assuring reviews, and about the dip in performance. The team has engaged with HM Inspectorate of Probation in a benchmarking exercise to consider effective methods of writing SFO reviews.

Although the team is nearly fully staffed, members report having a full workload. Despite frustrations within the team regarding ratings and methods of feedback (namely, this being sent to senior leaders), there was a strong commitment to improve, and clear evidence of both peer and management support. There are clear links into PDUs and opportunities to discuss themes at a strategic level, with the aim of driving change across the region.

It was notable that the SFO team is not involved in the reviewing of action plans, which sits with a manager, usually the MAPPA coordinator for the PDU or group of PDUs. This makes it difficult for the team to gather evidence as to the impact of their action plans. Given that the team has good links to the PDUs, it is suggested that it becomes more actively involved in this process, so that it can record how actions are progressed. This would then feed into future reviews and allow for the joining up of actions and a more holistic approach to SFO learning.

## **Summary**

In our PDU inspections, we rated Cheshire North, Blackburn with Darwen, and Cumbria as 'Requires improvement', while Knowsley and St Helens, and Liverpool North were rated as 'Inadequate'.

The North West probation region is a well-led organisation, with a positive, supportive working culture. Generally, staff are clear about their priorities and have confidence in their managers. There are largely strong relationships with the key external services at both a strategic and operational level. These relationships, particularly with police colleagues, need to be maximised, to ensure improvements in risk of harm work with people on probation.

Staff shortages, including a probation officer vacancy rate of 50 per cent in part of the region, high workloads, and a predominance of inexperienced staff hindered delivery of the intended quality of case management in the inspected PDUs. However, the region has achieved a lot since unification. It recognises that the integration of three former CRCs and one NPS division was challenging, but you should be satisfied with how this has been done, and the resulting cohesive organisation. You have a region that has a good foundation on which to build the improvements required.

It is crucial that the region improves work to keep other people safe. This includes improving assessment of risk, risk management planning, and the delivery of case management activity. However, most important is the need to reduce the backlogs of domestic abuse checks across the region and to equip staff to consider appropriately the information they receive, and integrate this into their case and risk management work.

Our recommendations from the inspected PDUs are set out in Annexe one. I look forward to receiving your regional action plan in due course, outlining the implementation of our recommendations. I wish you and all your staff well in undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Russell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'R'.

**Justin Russell**  
Chief Inspector of Probation

## **Annexe one – Recommendations**

Set out below are the recommendations arising from the inspection of PDUs in this region.

### **Cheshire West**

#### **Cheshire West PDU should:**

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

#### **North West region should:**

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

#### **HM Prison and Probation Service should:**

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

### **Blackburn with Darwen**

#### **Blackburn with Darwen PDU should:**

1. improve the quality of court reports to inform sentencing
2. improve the quality of work to assess, manage and review risk of harm
3. ensure diversity is prioritised in both strategic and operational practice
4. develop and implement a stronger offer to engage the voice of people on probation

5. ensure the delivery of training is prioritised to enhance the skills of the workforce and put in place a blended offer of online and in-person staff training.

**North West region should:**

6. review the commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) contract for accommodation support services to provide an effective service which meets the needs of people on probation

7. consider the implementation of a regional intranet for staff to access regional updates, policies and tools to support interventions.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

8. provide more suitable buildings and estates for staff, people on probation and services for effective service delivery

9. evaluate the PQiP allocation process to ensure there is sufficient infrastructure within PDUs to manage high numbers of staff in training.

**Knowsley & St Helens PDU**

**Knowsley and St Helens PDU should:**

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

**North West region should:**

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

**HM Prison and Probation service should:**

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

## **Liverpool North PDU**

### **Liverpool North PDU should:**

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

### **North West region should:**

7. ensure police information relating to domestic abuse is accessible and of sufficient quality to ensure the effective management of risk.

### **HM Prison and Probation Service should:**

8. improve the vetting timescales for the recruitment of staff
9. review contract arrangements for Commissioned Rehabilitation Services (CRS) accommodation services to ensure that these meet the needs of people on probation.

## **Cumbria PDU**

### **Cumbria PDU should:**

1. ensure domestic abuse and safeguarding information is analysed sufficiently to inform the quality of assessment, planning, and management of people on probation
2. review the focus of management oversight to ensure that risk of serious harm is accurately assessed and proactively managed
3. have an effective process in place to ensure actions set by managers are completed effectively
4. improve planning activity in high-risk cases with particular focus on links to the work of other agencies
5. improve pre- and post-release engagement activity for those in custody to ensure that assessment and plans are timely and meet the needs of those on probation
6. ensure diversity across all protected characteristics is prioritised and barriers for staff and people on probation are fully understood and addressed.

### **North West region should:**

7. review the impact and efficacy of the regional enforcement hub and develop a consistent approach to enforcement quality assurance so that practitioners, court staff and sentencers are confident in the quality of this work
8. ensure middle managers have sufficient capacity to provide the appropriate level of oversight according to the needs of staff members
9. undertake an impact assessment to provide an understanding of how learning and development is reflected in the quality-of-service delivery to inform future learning needs
10. improve completion rates of accredited programmes and structured interventions.

### **HM Prison and Probation Service should:**

11. review the role of the middle manager to ensure they have the right capacity to provide oversight to the increased numbers of newly qualified staff and those going through training
12. provide reliable Wi-Fi across all PDU premises in Cumbria
13. improve access to Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR)<sup>4</sup> vetting and training.

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<sup>4</sup> ViSOR (also known as National Dangerous Persons' Database) is a national 'Official Sensitive' database that supports public protection by facilitating effective sharing of information and intelligence on violent, sexual, terrorist and other dangerous offenders between the three MAPPA Responsible Authority agencies, namely the Prison and Probation services and Police Service (including Counter Terrorism Police). ViSOR also contains records of other nominals such as Serious Organised Crime (SOC) and Potentially Dangerous Persons (PDP) and is used by associated partner agencies including NCA (National Crime Agency) and MOD (Ministry of Defence).
























## Annexe two – PDU ratings










Set out below are the ratings of the PDUs in this region. More detail about the reasons for the ratings is available in the PDU reports, which are published on our website:


<b>Cheshire West PDU</b>		Score	<b>7/24</b>
Fieldwork started March 2023			
<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>		
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>			
1.1 Leadership	Requires improvement		
1.2 Staff	Good		
1.3 Services	Requires improvement		
1.4 Information and facilities	Good		
<b>2. Court work and case supervision</b>			
2.1 Court work	Not rated		
2.2 Assessment	Inadequate		
2.3 Planning	Inadequate		
2.4 Implementation and delivery	Inadequate		
2.5 Reviewing	Requires improvement		









<b>Blackburn PDU</b>		Score <b>10/27</b>
Fieldwork started March 2023		
<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>		
1.1 Leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2 Staff	Good	
1.3 Services	Requires improvement	
1.4 Information and facilities	Requires improvement	
<b>2. Court work and case supervision</b>		
2.1 Court work	Inadequate	
2.2 Assessment	Requires improvement	
2.3 Planning	Good	
2.4 Implementation and delivery	Requires improvement	
2.5 Reviewing	Requires improvement	

<b>Knowsley and St Helens</b>		Score	<b>2/24</b>
Fieldwork started April 2023			
<b>Overall rating</b>		<b>Rating</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>			
1.1 Leadership		Inadequate	
1.2 Staff		Requires improvement	
1.3 Services		Inadequate	
1.4 Information and facilities		Requires improvement	
<b>2. Case supervision</b>			
2.2 Assessment		Inadequate	
2.3 Planning		Inadequate	
2.4 Implementation and delivery		Inadequate	
2.5 Reviewing		Inadequate	

<b>Liverpool North PDU</b>		Score	<b>4/24</b>
Fieldwork started April 2023			

<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>		
1.1 Leadership	Inadequate	
1.2 Staff	Requires improvement	
1.3 Services	Requires improvement	
1.4 Information and facilities	Requires improvement	
<b>2. Court work and case supervision</b>		
2.2 Assessment	Inadequate	
2.3 Planning	Inadequate	
2.4 Implementation and delivery	Inadequate	
2.5 Reviewing	Requires improvement	

<b>Cumbria PDU</b>	Score	<b>6/27</b>
Fieldwork started May 2023		
<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>		

1.1	Leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Services	Requires improvement	
1.4	Information and facilities	Requires improvement	
<b>2. Court work and case supervision</b>			
2.1	Court work	Requires improvement	
2.2	Assessment	Inadequate	
2.3	Planning	Inadequate	
2.4	Implementation and delivery	Inadequate	
2.5	Reviewing	Inadequate	