



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:
Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU
The Probation Service – South West region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, August 2023



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We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice, and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government, and speak independently.

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

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Foreword

At Bristol and South Gloucestershire Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) we saw motivated leaders, managers and staff who wanted to make a difference in the lives of people on probation. It was disappointing that the overall quality of work delivered was rated as 'Inadequate' across four of our five standards for casework, with planning rated 'Requires improvement'. However, taking into account some more positive findings across leadership, staff, services and information and facilities, the PDU has been given an overall rating of 'Requires improvement'.

Procedures for obtaining information from key partners, such as the police and children's services, were not clear and not applied sufficiently and consistently to understand critical risk factors. This meant that, too often, assessments were not based on accurate and relevant information, with inspectors disagreeing with risk of harm classifications in just under a quarter of all inspected cases, meaning that actual and potential victims were potentially being left at risk.

The under-resourced court team represented a significant risk to the PDU, with a number of reports not being produced to assist sentencers with identifying appropriate disposals. This was impacting on the confidence that sentencers had in the service.

It was concerning that the work we saw with people being released from prison was of lower quality than that with people subject to community sentences. The reasons for this will need to be explored and addressed by the PDU, with work already underway to develop staff to specialise in resettlement provision across the PDU.

Significant efforts had been made by leaders to address staffing pressures, and staff numbers were starting to increase. The PDU has a considerable number of new staff going through Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) training and a successful recruitment campaign has improved staffing levels across the Probation Services Officer (PSO) grade. However, it will take time for new members of staff to be fully trained and to be able to ease current pressures.

Credit should be given to the relatively new leadership team in the PDU, who have had to hit the ground running, engaging well across partnership arrangements and using existing caseload profile information to inform service redesign. We saw an impressive array of partnership services and arrangements, with the head of PDU being an active and influential member.

The restructure of staff into specialist Probation Operation Delivery (POD) teams has allowed staff to receive training and engage with services relevant to their individual needs.

The PDU will be disappointed by the outcome of this inspection. Additional leadership resources had been recently provided, meaning that there is additional capacity to develop and embed performance and practice improvements.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU

Fieldwork started June 2023

Score **6/27**

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Good



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work

Inadequate



2.2 Assessment

Inadequate



2.3 Planning

Requires improvement



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Inadequate



Recommendations

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

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU should:

1. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review casework to ensure the safety of others
2. ensure that processes by which to obtain domestic abuse and child safeguarding information are clear and that responses contain sufficient detail to support the assessment, planning and management of risk of harm to others
3. improve quality assurance and management oversight arrangements of all casework, ensuring practitioners apply professional curiosity
4. ensure that interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases
5. provide the necessary training and learning opportunities to support practitioners to apply professional curiosity
6. ensure appropriate management information is available to analyse, and consider, any potential disproportionality in the quality of service delivery to people on probation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and other protected characteristics.

South West region should:

7. ensure that Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU has sufficient staffing resources in place.

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.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Bristol and South Gloucestershire over the period of a week, beginning 26 June 2023. We inspected 70 cases where sentences and licences had commenced between 21 November 2022 and 05 December 2022. We also conducted 70 interviews with probation practitioners.

Prior to the unification of public and private probation service providers in June 2021, Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU was covered by National Probation Service (NPS) South West and the Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). It is a newly formed delivery unit, one of nine PDUs in South West region and has two offices based in Bristol city centre. One is located adjacent to Bristol Magistrates' Court with the other being at Bridewell Police Station.

The PDU's area aligns with Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council and is covered by Avon and Somerset Police. Bristol has four approved premises and four prisons within the PDU and provides services for Bristol Magistrates' Courts and Crown Court. Accredited programmes are delivered to people on probation within Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU but are managed regionally. The coordination of unpaid work services is managed regionally, and the PDU has a dedicated team to manage standalone unpaid work requirements.

The population¹ of Bristol was 471,117 and South Gloucestershire was 290,736. Proven reoffending rates² in Bristol were 25.6 per cent and 17.3 per cent in South Gloucestershire.

The PDU was managing 1,534 community sentences and 667 post-release sentences at the time of our inspection. The South West probation region has four Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), including: Interventions Alliance – part of Seetec – provided support to people on probation with accommodation and education, training and employment services; women's services were provided by the Nelson Trust; and Catch 22 provided personal wellbeing services. Arrangements were in place with Developing Health and Independence (DHI) to deliver services to address alcohol and substance misuse, including the management of community sentence treatment requirements (CSTRs).

The PDU had worked with partners to commission additional services which included using the regional outcomes and innovations fund. Changing futures was funded to support children and young adults within the criminal justice system and Project Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement (ADDER), part of Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, provided access to specialist groups and individual psychological interventions to people on probation.

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU had staffing and workload challenges. The Head of PDU had been in post around nine months at the point of fieldwork, with a Deputy Head of PDU in post. A second temporary Deputy Head of PDU had been recently put into post to support the increase of leadership capacity. PSO attrition was high, with a high number of vacancies across administration staff. Staff and service partners we spoke to throughout the inspection referred to the high cost of living in Bristol as a contributory factor.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics (December 2022), UK population estimates, mid-2021.

² Source: Ministry of Justice (April 2023), Proven reoffending statistics: July 2020 to June 2021.

1. Organisational delivery

1.1. Leadership



The leadership of the PDU enables delivery of a high quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation.

Requires improvement

As a result of the domain two ratings, the inspectorate's rating decision guidance would normally require leadership to be rated as 'Inadequate'. However, in recognition of the strengths seen at a strategic level, leadership is rated 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths

- Some excellent partnership arrangements were in place across Bristol and South Gloucestershire, with the Head of PDU being an active and influential member. These included the Youth Justice Partnerships, Reducing Reoffending board and Homeless Prevention arrangements.
- Segmentation data has been used across partnerships to identify and co-commission services with adult social care for those with multiple disadvantages. This includes services for 16–25-year-olds and a pilot to work with Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals.
- The Head of PDU had been in post for nine months, following instability in the 12 months beforehand. She was having a positive impact and in our staff survey, 80 per cent of respondents identified that the PDU's culture promoted openness, constructive challenge and ideas, and 83 per cent said the organisation prioritised quality and adherence to evidence.
- The key focus for the head of service has been improvements in staffing levels and clear direction for probation practice. Some progress has been made. In recognition of the challenge ahead, a second deputy has recently been recruited although their benefit is yet to be felt.
- The PDU developed specialist PODs, including 18–25-year-olds, women, integrated offender management (IOM), unpaid work and a POD for the smaller cohort of people on probation from the South Gloucestershire local authority area. Staff understood their roles, received specialist training and engaged with partners relevant to the needs of people on probation.
- Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) undertook specialist support roles across the PDU including those linked to accommodation, IOM and work with foreign national offenders (FNOs). They offered effective support at both a strategic and operational level.
- A performance improvement plan was in place based on regional and PDU priorities derived from performance measures and feedback from the regional case assessment tools. Staff were generally aware of what they needed to prioritise.
- The Head of PDU was part of a steering group of the Tackling Disproportionality Project, a sub-group of the Local Criminal Justice Board.

This was encouraging and will allow services to understand disproportionate outcomes for those individuals across a range of protected characteristics, and their access to services.

Areas for improvement:

- Despite many positive aspects of the leadership, staff were not yet enabling the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation. Across our case sample, work was not of a sufficient standard in the majority of cases. In particular, work relating to the management of risk of harm to others was insufficient.
- The process by which to obtain key information from the police and children's services was unclear. In some cases, administration staff initiated enquiries and in others it was the practitioner. The lack of clarity and role responsibility meant that there was a danger that key information around risk may not be obtained.
- Overall, we saw some indications that work with those on licence was not as effective as work with those in the community. While the creation of a specialist short-sentence team was planned, more was required to understand some of these shortfalls.
- 'Start it right' was a regional initiative, adopted within the PDU delivery plan and aimed at improving risk assessment and planning. However, embedding this requires more work. Many staff and managers could not always explain what this meant for their practice and how this would be measured.
- Many PDU risks were not sufficiently understood and tracked. Further work is required to ensure that the process to undertake police domestic abuse and child safeguarding enquiries is clear to staff. An inconsistent application of the process by some staff, and some inconsistent activity on the part of both police and children's services meant that the extent of key deficits in court work and subsequent assessments were not fully understood, with no formal escalation route or strategic oversight in place.
- Whilst the region has an Engaging People on Probation strategy, the PDU were yet to identify, analyse and incorporate the views of people on probation within their delivery plan.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Workforce planning was actively addressing staff shortages. Staffing levels were monitored and reviewed by the Head of PDU in monthly workforce planning meetings with human resources and finance business partners.
- In recognition of the size and complexity of the PDU, additional resource has been identified to increase leadership capacity, with a second Deputy Head of PDU (temporary) recently assuming post.
- Staffing levels were starting to improve. The PDU had recently recruited four further senior administration officers (SAOs). In February 2023, PSO vacancies were at 43 per cent; however, at the time of fieldwork, vacancies for PSOs had reduced.
- Probation Officer (PO) vacancies had risen slightly, due to a regional target staffing adjustment. A number of PQiP trainees were due to qualify in the next six months, meaning that this figure would reduce further.
- A PDU performance development meeting tracked the development needs of staff to identify appropriate support and opportunities. This had some positive effect with staff identified to move to the IOM high harm team, identified for roles within the short-sentence function pilot and to identify those with interest in progression to quality development officer roles.
- Case administration processes had been reviewed in response to significant vacancies across the service to enable proportionate support for practitioners based on available resources. Tasks are allocated via the SAO centrally to prioritise and allocate resources appropriately.
- Development opportunities were available for practitioners within specialist PODs. Close working relationships were in place with seconded PO staff in the Youth Offending Team and CRS working with 16–25-year-olds.
- Bristol and South Gloucestershire was a control PDU for the implementation of Reflective Practice Supervision Standards meaning that the manager group have not received the SEEDs training.
- Management of staff was a high priority in the PDU. In our survey, 28 out of 33 respondents said that they received regular supervision and that it enhanced their practice.
- The competency-based framework was in place and used to sequence training and identify gaps in staff development.
- In our survey, 27 out of 32 staff identified that they are allocated cases for which they had the appropriate skills and knowledge. Neither PSOs nor PQiPs were supervising high or very high risk of serious harm cases across any of the cases we inspected.

Areas for improvement:

- Staffing levels across Case Administrators, PSOs and POs was insufficient. While 24 out of 33 people in our survey said their workload was not manageable, 26 out of 44 in our practitioner interviews said that they were.
- Staff were experiencing between 100 per cent and 130 per cent on the workload management tool and average caseloads for a PO was 37 and 47 for PSOs. Seventeen out of 30 people in our survey and 28 out of those we interviewed said they had caseloads of up to 40. A small number of staff had much higher caseloads.
- The negative experiences of some staff were compounded by high levels of staff turnover which averaged over 14 per cent but was as high as 21 per cent for PSOs.
- The high PSO attrition rate added to the large intake of new and inexperienced PSOs which meant there were deficits in staff skills and experience at this grade. Cost of living in the city had been identified as a barrier to retaining PSO and administrative staff. Staff and PDU leaders identified the induction and training as insufficient to prepare PSOs for their roles; this led to the development of a new training and induction process. The benefit of this is yet to be seen.
- Whilst there has been some activity to promote recruitment of a more diverse staff group at local job fairs, there was limited evidence of an understanding of demographic data to improve the diversity of the PDU's workforce.
- Recruitment and (re)allocations of cases was identified as a pressure for many managers due to high levels of staff turnover. Encouragingly, 89 per cent of cases inspected had only been assigned two or fewer practitioners.
- Management oversight of inspected cases was sufficient in only 29 per cent of inspected cases. Management oversight was practitioner led and process driven, with insufficient attention to omissions or case direction.
- Some dedicated staff coordinated a wellbeing group to arrange PDU activities, which included setting up a staff wellbeing room. This activity was not sufficiently impactful, with only 55 per cent of staff in our staff survey indicating that sufficient attention was paid to staff wellbeing.

1.3. Services



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

Requires improvement

In rating services, the effective arrangements in place to develop, commission and make available relevant services and interventions have been considered against the inadequate domain two rating for implementation and delivery. The strengths recognised have led to the overall rating of 'Requires improvement' for services.

Strengths:

- There was a needs analysis, undertaken annually and based on OASys data. Some service provision was positive, and we saw good examples of support for women and via the homelessness prevention team, the latter of which included dedicated accommodation PSOs to support the work. There were also some good links to drug and alcohol services, and we saw some good work within inspected cases.
- Women's services were delivered by the Nelson Trust under the Women's CRS provision. The PDU had adopted a specialist women's POD and had women-only reporting times. Desistance work across inspected cases was generally more effective when compared to those for men.
- Established IOM arrangements focused upon serious acquisitive crime, high harm and the development of a cohort of high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators. This was a positive step to ensure information sharing and multi-agency working were at the heart of supporting victims of domestic abuse.
- The PDU had identified 372 cases of FNOs, or those of Home Office interest managed within the PDU. Given the complexity around working with those individuals with no recourse to public funds, they had developed a concentrator model with four specialist staff and a lead SPO. These staff hold relevant cases, have undertaken training and liaise with the national FNO coordination hub.
- The Head of PDU had been instrumental in developing and maintaining effective partnerships and services across Bristol and South Gloucestershire. There were good partnerships, both strategically and operationally, with CSTR services that tracked provision and monitored the effectiveness of service provision.
- The PDU had access to a wide range of health services including those provided by DHI for substance, alcohol and mental health treatment. Project ADDER, commissioned by Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, provided access to specialist groups and individual psychological interventions to people on probation.
- In our case sample, 26 individuals were subject to either a drug, alcohol or mental health requirement. We saw a number of good examples in this sample of effective engagement, liaison and implementation of work.

- It was encouraging that the average waiting time to commence the delivery of rehabilitation activity requirement interventions was only three and a half weeks.
- Waiting lists for accredited programmes were low for Building Better Relationships (BBR), Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) and Horizon. Following pre-programme interventions, the average waiting times to commence BBR and TSP was four weeks.
- We saw some effective use of CRS personal wellbeing services, with some effective communication and sequencing with the Offender Personality Disorder pathway. Some staff believed that relationships with CRS providers would improve if there were greater co-location arrangements.

Areas for improvement:

- Whilst we saw strong services and partnerships, this has yet to impact on the effectiveness of service delivery in inspected cases.
- Working relationships with the police when making domestic abuse enquiries were inconsistent. Information was not requested from the police in 41 per cent of court proceedings and in 23 per cent following sentence where they should have been. The process to obtain police domestic abuse information was unclear, with the potential for staff to make duplicate enquiries throughout the allocation and assessment process that would return responses with varying levels of detail.
- Staff had limited confidence in the delivery of services via CRS for some services, including accommodation. We saw a culture where some staff would undertake work themselves where they believed some services were not sufficiently flexible. This was to avoid the risk of breach, especially where individuals were homeless and given the HPT service, which was viewed positively.
- Unpaid work was under-resourced, with excessive backlogs. This impacted on the reputation of the PDU with sentencers and the court, with large numbers of extension applications impacting on court availability. Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU had 878 unpaid work requirements, with 49 per cent of unpaid work hours outstanding beyond 12 months. Placement supervisor vacancies meant that allocation onto placements was a challenge, with 102 cases currently on the backlog awaiting extension. Whilst teams were instructing 152 per cent of capacity, attendance remains at 50 per cent or lower.
- Structured interventions were underused, despite there being available capacity in the team.

Resettlement work

Strengths:

- It was encouraging that 14 out of 18 relevant cases inspected had proportionate levels of contact between the prison and community offender manager prior to release. This provided an opportunity to understand individual needs and set a good foundation for further work.
- Induction and referrals for services were prompt where an individual was released from prison. When compared with community sentences, post-release requirements were started promptly, or at an appropriate time in a significantly higher proportion of cases.
- Practitioners prioritised and identified risks of non-compliance more effectively and enforcement actions were taken when appropriate within post-release supervision cases than in community sentences.
- Written reviews were more likely to have been undertaken by practitioners in post-release cases. As a result, practitioners gave greater consideration to amending plans to address barriers to engagement.

Areas for improvement:

- Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU had yet to implement specialist resettlement roles within PODs to work with prisoners preparing for release, and after release into the community. Work to promote desistance and ensure the safety of others in pre- and post-release work was not as effective when compared to some of the work of those subject to community sentences.
- Despite reasonable levels of contact prior to release, assessments were less effective in identifying and analysing offending-related factors than those undertaken for community sentences.
- Pre-release planning did not sufficiently set out a level, pattern and type of contact sufficient to engage the individual and to support the effectiveness of specific interventions. Opportunities were missed to develop relationships to support desistance and to manage risk of harm due to insufficient levels of contact with the person on probation once they were released.
- Key agencies were less well coordinated in managing the risk of harm within post-release supervision than in community sentences. Whilst discussions took place with some key agencies such as the police and social care, this was not always followed up by appropriate actions such as home visits. Professional curiosity was not used consistently to review plans and undertake actions to keep other people safe.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all people on probation.

Good

Strengths:

- The regional and PDU quality improvement plan was based on the analysis of performance measures, audit feedback and Serious Further Offence learning. This has been communicated to staff on all-staff calls and in management meetings. An overview was provided to staff on a one-page document to ensure that communication was managed and proportionate.
- Data regarding the protected characteristics and profile of people on probation had been used to develop the delivery model with, for example, the introduction of specialist PODs and FNO concentrator models.
- Services were delivered across two offices in Bristol, one in the court building and the other within Bridewell police station. Of the respondents to our staff survey, 85 per cent identified that the premises and offices supported the delivery of appropriate work and effective engagement.
- An additional, smaller premises was used for delivery of some accredited programmes.
- In our staff survey, 73 per cent of respondents identified that the PDU had a culture of learning, and that continuous improvement activity was actively promoted.
- Protected learning days, determined by learning from audit and inspection activity, had been scheduled. This should continue to consolidate and embed learning for staff.
- Where reasonable adjustments were required, these had been put in place in the large majority of cases.
- Practitioners and managers welcomed the practitioner dashboard, a system to identify gaps across caseloads and prioritise work given that there was limited proactive case administration support within PODs to assist with improving performance. ICT systems enabled staff to deliver their work in a timely way, and to access information as required. In our survey 79 per cent of respondents said that the systems enabled them to deliver their services in a timely manner.
- Policies and procedures were available on the intranet, and communication was supported via online team channels. The region provided performance management data which was shared in managers meetings and in supervision.

Areas for improvement:

- There was no disproportionality data available.
- Despite staff identifying the benefits of working in specialist PODs, there was no routine analysis available to assess whether this approach had improved outcomes for people on probation. There was an absence of collecting or utilising the feedback of people on probation to review and improve the effectiveness of services.
- The office at Bridwell Street was based within a police station, and is a legacy CRC building. Extended police vetting had to be undertaken for staff to access this, with some teams split across the two sites. There was limited scope for administrative staff to provide cover in the event of staff absence without necessary clearance, with some applications being declined for staff not permanently based at the Bridewell office. This may hinder PDU developments to unify staff and reduce references to legacy NPS and CRC arrangements.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 81 people on probation as part of this inspection. Of those contacted, there was almost an equal split between those currently subject to a community sentence and those on licence. Respondents to the User Voice survey were representative of the PDU caseload, with 23 per cent identifying as Black, Asian or minority ethnic background and 10 per cent identifying as female.

Strengths

- Of those responding to the User Voice survey, 67 per cent of individuals believed that probation have helped them access the services they needed in Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

“They have been really good at getting me the appropriate housing and have informed the right people about my mental health.”

- Of those individuals responding to the User Voice survey, 88 per cent indicated that they were able to have private conversations with their PO.

Areas for improvement

- People on probation did not feel that there was sufficient flexibility around appointments according to their personal circumstances, such as their employment or childcare needs.

“I’m worried about losing money. £160 a day I get paid and I have to take a day off to attend my appointments which is bonkers and defeats the purpose of probation.”

- The PDU ran individual and group inductions. People on probation were critical of the induction process, with many citing that this did not feel like a process personalised to their individual needs.

“I didn’t have one really, there was an induction pack, it wasn’t for me, it was for them to make sure they had put the fear of god into you at every step.”

- Over half of people on probation surveyed were not asked for their views about being on supervision.

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

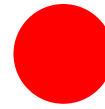
- There were positive relationships with youth justice services and two seconded posts had been staffed, despite vacancies experienced in teams, and appropriate transition arrangements were in place.
- We saw better outcomes for desistance for women overall than for men. The PDU had positive relationships with women's CRS provision; a specialist POD with an SPO lead was in place and there was local access to a female-only approved premises.
- The Offender Personality Disorder pathway was embedded into the IOM team and was available for practitioners in sentence management teams for eligible cases.
- The PDU had adopted an FNO concentrator model which contained four specialist staff. Training has been provided with regular contact with the national FNO coordination hub to identify services in recognition of the difficulty in supervising individuals with no recourse to public funds.

Areas for improvement:

- The PDU had committed to launch a Race Action Plan in 2022, however this remained outstanding.
- Individuals from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background made up 20 per cent of the PDU caseload, but there were no specialist services identified. A pilot service was in place to work with people on probation from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background but there was limited space, with only 16 people on probation accessing this provision.
- Despite identifying specialist PODs to work with a range of protected characteristics, there was no routine analysis as to whether this had improved outcomes for people on probation.
- Restructure of teams had taken place with some staff consultation. However, staff were allocated into PODs with no equality impact assessment and decisions were made predominantly around business needs. Staff did not always understand why they had been allocated into particular roles, which impacted on their job satisfaction.

2. Court work and case supervision

2.1. Court work



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

Inadequate

Our rating³ for court work is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against the key question:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?	31%

Strengths:

- Practitioners engaged people on probation meaningfully, and considered factors related to their offending. This meant that people on probation were positively involved in the process.
- Advice to court considered individuals' diversity and personal circumstances in 84 per cent of cases inspected and 97 per cent of proposals made to courts were appropriate. Expectations for people on probation to be able to comply appropriately with their sentences were realistic.

Areas for improvement:

- Domestic abuse information was not routinely being requested by staff and was absent in 41 per cent of cases we reviewed. This was even where the index offence and previous convictions were related to domestic abuse. Where information was not received from the police, factors relating to risk of harm to others were not always sufficiently analysed or considered in the advice to court. Where enquiries were made to police by court staff, three out of 18 relevant cases did not receive any response.
- Enquiries to children's services were not made in nine out of 23 relevant reports where there were individuals who had contact with children. Of the 14 relevant cases where information was requested, three received no response. Key risk information is critical to ensure proposals do not compromise the safety of actual or potential victims. The lack of management oversight of advice to court was concerning and was not routinely identifying these critical omissions to ensure that remedial action was taken.

³ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.2. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁴ for assessment is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	60%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	67%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	36%

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for assessment as the lowest score was 36 per cent. Concerningly, this related to the effectiveness of the work to keep other people safe.

Strengths:

- Practitioners meaningfully engaged with people on probation in their assessment in 67 per cent of cases, which provided a good foundation on which to build positive relationships.
- Assessments sufficiently focused on factors associated with offending and desistance in all inspected cases for women on probation.

Areas for improvement:

- Key information was not requested often enough to ensure that assessments fully identified and correctly analysed all relevant risks. Domestic abuse enquiries should have been made in 23 per cent of cases and child safeguarding information was only requested in half of all relevant cases. This meant that assessments did not analyse specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims in 32 out of 62 relevant cases.
- Assessments were often limited to the index offence and the current circumstances of individuals. Broader risks were not always considered even where these had been identified on previous probation assessments. Inspectors disagreed with risk of harm classifications in just under a quarter of all inspected cases, with five out of 70 cases assessed as 'medium' risk of serious harm that should have been assessed as 'high'.

⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

2.3. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the person on probation.

Requires improvement

Our rating⁵ for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	60%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	70%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	47%

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU is rated as 'Requires improvement' for planning. Professional discretion could be applied as the lowest score, again relating to keeping other people safe, was within five percentage points of the rating boundary of 50 per cent between 'Inadequate' and 'Requires improvement'. We found broader evidence of effective planning practice gathered during fieldwork to suggest a higher rating was justified.

Strengths:

- Inspectors saw more effective planning work to ensure the safety of others within community sentences than in post-release supervision. At the time of inspection, the PDU was appointing specialist resettlement staff within each POD to address this.
- Plans to promote desistance and keep other people safe were more effective where in cases under IOM, multi-agency public protection arrangements and where there was an allocated sexual or violent offender manager.

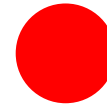
Areas for improvement:

- Practitioners set out necessary constructive and/or restrictive interventions to address the risk of harm in 27 out of 63 relevant cases. There were insufficient contingency arrangements in place which set out necessary actions to take in the event of changing risk factors in 37 out of 66 relevant cases.
- Where individuals were subject to standalone unpaid work (nine cases), planning was not sufficiently personalised, with only four out of nine relevant cases having analysed the personal circumstances of the individual and

⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

considered the impact of these on their ability to comply and engage with service provision.

2.4. Implementation and delivery



High-quality well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging the person on probation.

Inadequate

Our rating⁶ for implementation and delivery is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	56%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	51%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	39%

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 39 per cent. As with previous areas of casework, this also related to the effectiveness of the work to keep other people safe.

Strengths:

- Sufficient efforts were made to enable individuals to complete their sentences, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances (81 per cent). This was supported by over two thirds of those responding to the User Voice survey feeling that they had received support to access the services they need.

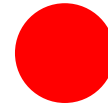
Areas for improvement:

- In just under a quarter of all cases inspected, requirements of the sentence did not start promptly, or at an appropriate time. The PDU operated a group induction process. Staff did not always feel that this was personalised or met the needs of individuals, and due to a delay in undertaking assessments and planning, work was not always started promptly.
- Whilst there was some effective use of services across Bristol and South Gloucestershire, delays and backlogs in obtaining court listing dates meant that staff were reluctant to refer people on probation to services that they did not consider flexible. We saw some staff delivering specialist work themselves, such as accommodation support.

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

- Risks of non-compliance were not identified and addressed to prevent enforcement actions in 27 out of 51 relevant cases, and enforcement action was not taken where it should have been in 15 out of 41 relevant cases inspected.
- Home visits were not undertaken when necessary in 36 out of 59 cases to support the effective management of risk of harm. This was a missed opportunity to gather key risk information to inform work to support the safety of others. Insufficient attention was given to protecting actual and potential victims in 37 out of 61 cases.
- The range and availability of unpaid work arrangements required attention in Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU. Of standalone unpaid work requirements, seven out of the nine cases did not start at an appropriate time, with three of these being due to the non-compliance of the person on probation. Five further unpaid work supervisors had recently been appointed.

2.5. Reviewing



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

Our rating⁷ for reviewing is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	61%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	53%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	31%

Bristol and South Gloucestershire PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for reviewing as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 31 per cent. Again, this related to the work to keep other people safe.

Strengths:

- Despite practitioners not undertaking formal reviews in a half of relevant cases, inspectors saw promising reviewing practices to monitor the compliance and engagement of the person on probation in supervision sessions.

Areas for improvement:

- Information was not requested from other agencies such as the police and children's services to check whether risk factors had changed in 39 out of 62 relevant cases. When reviews were undertaken in response to changing circumstances, necessary adjustments were not made to risk management plans where required (46 out of 61 relevant cases).
- Reviewing was not informed by necessary input from other agencies working with the person on probation in 28 out of 57 relevant cases where it should have been. Reviews were therefore not taking into account how interventions were impacting people on probation and whether they were successfully supporting desistance.
- People on probation, and where appropriate, key individuals in their life, were not involved meaningfully in reviewing the risk of harm in 48 out of 63 cases. This was a missed opportunity to gather key information from support networks to inform desistance and review plans to keep other people safe.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

2.6. Outcomes

Early outcomes are positive, demonstrating reasonable progress for the person on probation.

We do not currently rate the outcomes standard, but provide this data for information and benchmarking purposes only.

Outcomes	Percentage 'Yes'
Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	44%

Strengths:

- An increase in offending only occurred in 16 per cent of cases that we inspected, with 60 per cent showing no change and seven per cent indicating a reduction in their offending behaviour. While the reasons for this may include services delivered by the practitioner, other agencies or the person on probation's strengths, this was a positive outcome.
- Of the people on probation in the sample for inspection, 54 out of 70 had not been charged with or convicted of any further offences.

Areas for improvement:

- In 56 per cent of cases inspected, reasonable progress had not been demonstrated in early outcomes for people on probation in relation to their individual needs, offending behaviour and the harm posed.
- Compliance was sufficient in only 54 per cent of cases and in the 30 cases where breach or recall action was required, it only occurred in 18 cases. A more consistent approach is required to breach action. Whilst enforcement action occurs in response to non-compliance, it also provides an opportunity to consider and address any barriers to engagement to improve future compliance.
- Sufficient progress had not been demonstrated in outcomes for people on probation who were deemed to pose a risk of serious harm in 41 out of 67 inspected cases. This was, in part, due to complexities of some individuals; however, it is also reflective of how work may be prioritised where risk of serious harm is assessed as high.
- Alcohol and/or drug misuse were identified as factors linked to the risk of serious harm posed in 52 cases we inspected at the start of the sentence or in preparation for release from custody. However, in only around one-third of these cases had sufficient progress been demonstrated.
- Whilst we saw positive homeless prevention partnership arrangements, in 29 cases accommodation needs were assessed as relating to the risk of serious harm, yet progress was only seen in seven of them, with examples of some people unable to maintain their accommodation and others where accommodation exposed them to increased risks.

Annexe one – Web links

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

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