



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

Dorset PDU

The Probation Service – South West region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, August 2023

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Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Shellie Adams, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the Inspectorate. We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible.

The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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

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This publication is available for download at: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation

ISBN: 978-1-915468-82-6

Published by:

HM Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
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Foreword

This was the first Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) inspection of services in Dorset since the unification of the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) in June 2021. Although we found committed staff and managers, the result of our inspection was disappointing and as a result of our findings Dorset PDU has been rated as 'Inadequate' overall.

Dorset PDU had been without a substantive head of service for two years. The interim leadership provided by the local head of another PDU has generated some important improvements, but it is unsustainable for one person to continue to split her time between two different PDUs. The Effective Practice Service Improvement Group (EPSIG) had been offering support in Dorset, setting an action plan for improvements in service delivery. However, the management of risk within the cases inspected was below expectations, and we identified gaps in the identification and assessment of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) nominals which was of significant concern.

Whilst we were encouraged to see a full staffing complement of Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) who were approachable and visible, the overall management oversight of cases was insufficient, ineffective or absent in 29 out of 42 relevant cases we reviewed. Workloads were felt to be unmanageable for 82 per cent of practitioners surveyed, and the vacancy rate for qualified probation officer (POs) was 49.5 per cent when compared to new target staffing figures. There is still much to be done to achieve manageable workloads and improve the quality of service delivery.

There were positive working relationships with both police and child safeguarding teams, and access to domestic abuse and child safeguarding information was more readily available than we have seen in some other PDU inspections. Return rates for information requested from the police was high in the cases we inspected. But we saw a lack of enquiries made to child safeguarding and this was a concern.

As we see too often, when information was received from other agencies, this was not always followed up or used to inform and drive risk assessment and risk management. There was a lack of delivery of services to reduce risk, and only 20 per cent of case reviews were sufficiently focused on keeping other people safe.

There were difficulties in delivering unpaid work (UPW) and completing other requirements such as accredited programmes before the termination of sentences. This was impacting on sentencer confidence in The Probation Service and requires attention.

PDU managers and staff will undoubtedly be disappointed with our findings. Support from South West region will be required to improve the quality of service, availability of resources, and outcomes for people on probation. We hope to see better when we return in future.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

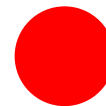
Dorset PDU

Fieldwork started June 2023

Score **3/27**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work

Requires improvement



2.2 Assessment

Inadequate



2.3 Planning

Inadequate



2.4 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.5 Reviewing

Inadequate



Recommendations

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

Dorset PDU should:

1. ensure all MAPPA nominals are identified, and the level setting for custody and community cases is timely, taking into consideration the earliest possible date of release and any temporary releases, and are fully informed by information from all relevant agencies in all cases
2. ensure all risk information relating to MAPPA nominals is shared with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) via the MAPPA notification process, in a timely manner
3. improve the quality of work to assess, plan, manage and review risk of harm
4. ensure information relating to domestic abuse history is sufficiently analysed to support the management of risk of harm to others
5. ensure information relating to child safeguarding is routinely obtained and used to ensure risks to children are understood and safety arrangements are in place
6. provide additional support and training to SPOs to improve their confidence, independent decision-making and leadership skills
7. ensure managers are providing effective, individualised management oversight, focusing on the quality of work relating to risk of harm
8. ensure that the interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all cases.

South West region should:

9. prioritise the recruitment of a permanent head of PDU
10. ensure senior regional management support and visibility until a permanent head of PDU is appointed
11. ensure UPW requirements start promptly and that there are sufficient UPW placements and supervisors to deliver the orders of the court
12. ensure the recruitment of an additional Horizon programme facilitator.

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

13. consider providing ongoing EPSIG place-based support within the PDU.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Dorset PDU over the period of a week, beginning 12 June 2023. We inspected 45 cases where sentences and licences had commenced between 07 November and 13 November 2022 and 12 December and 18 December 2022. We also conducted 30 interviews with probation practitioners.

Prior to the unification of the NPS and Community CRCs in June 2021, probation services within Dorset PDU were delivered by Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC (owned by Seetec, and managed as a division of the Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC) and NPS South West and South Central. It is one of nine PDUs in South West region. Many of the core services within Dorset PDU are managed pan-regionally, including UPW, interventions and programmes, victim liaison and the commissioning of support services. There are four offices across Dorset, with Weymouth, Poole and Bournemouth being open on a full-time basis and the Dorchester office being open three days per week. There is also a standalone UPW site in Redhill, Bournemouth.

Dorset is the second largest PDU in South West region and aligns across two councils, Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Dorset is covered by one police service. The population of Dorset is 379,579¹ with proven reoffending rates of 22.4² per cent across South West region. These averages are slightly higher in Bournemouth and Poole at 26.1 per cent and 24.1 per cent respectively, with Dorset as a whole being lower than South West region's average of 20.8 per cent.

There has been a lack of a consistent head of PDU for over two years, initially due to long-term sickness and the temporary measures put in place to cover this absence. The current interim head of PDU stepped up as interim head from January 2023, alongside managing another PDU within South West region (Devon and Torbay PDU) on a full-time basis.

At the time of inspection, the PDU had 10.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) SPOs in post, two of whom oversaw Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) learners. In total, there were 86.9 FTE probation practitioners, 25 of whom were trainees completing their PQiP.

The PDU is serviced by three courts, Bournemouth Combined Court and magistrates' courts in Weymouth and Poole. Dorset has three male prisons within its footprint – HM Prison (HMP) Portland, HMP The Verne and HMP Guys Marsh. There are also two male-approved premises across the county. Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) are provided by: Interventions Alliance for accommodation and education, training and employment; Catch 22 for personal wellbeing; and The Women's Centre (Cornwall) for women's services.

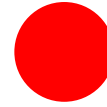
Unlike many other areas inspected over the last two years, Dorset PDU had not applied to enter into prioritisation framework arrangements and, as such, were not subject to any demand management principles in terms of what was required to be prioritised in service delivery.

¹ Census 2021 – [2021 Census Profile for areas in England and Wales - Nomis \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/).

² Source: Ministry of Justice (January 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.

Inadequate

This PDU had been significantly impacted by the absence of a full-time head of service. Whilst the interim head has overseen positive progress, she has also had to manage another PDU, which is unsatisfactory. Four out of the five domain two standards were rated 'Inadequate'; this, alongside the disappointing performance against domain one standards, has resulted in an overall rating for leadership of 'Inadequate'.

Strengths:

- Dorset PDU had operated with an absence of a permanent head of service for the last two years. However, interim arrangements over the last eight months have seen a more stable, dynamic and consistent approach to leadership, and that was a credit to the current interim head of Dorset PDU. Teams have been reconfigured to drive a unified service and improve outcomes for people on probation.
- There had been a lot of work completed in the last eight months to address key delivery risks, particularly around staff recruitment. Whilst this remained a challenge, there was clear and consistent attention paid to addressing gaps.
- Staff had been consulted and engaged when changes had been implemented in relation to team composition and ways of working, which had created a greater sense of ownership.
- There were strong working relationships with key partners across the PDU. Examples included co-location with the Management of Sexual or Violent Offender teams, close links to Integrated Offender Management teams and a commitment to co-locate with newly formed 'Safeguarding families together' teams. These relationships helped engage wider partners in achieving key delivery plan outcomes.
- In our survey, 52 out of 58 respondents said that the organisation prioritised quality and adherence to evidence.
- Where possible, all avenues to increase staff availability and the effectiveness of resource had been considered. This had been driven at a local PDU level and had included securing overtime payments, including: for staff outside of Dorset (Devon) to complete initial sentence plans and undertake the termination of cases; sentence management staff being paid to deliver UPW interventions at weekends; upskilling PDU sentence management staff to deliver interventions (Horizon, an accredited programme delivered to men with sexual convictions) on a sessional basis; and using PQiPs to encourage those people on probation with UPW to engage in community campus/education, training and employment activities.

Areas for improvement:

- The current head of service was split between two PDUs; despite their best efforts, there was an urgent need to resolve the long-term leadership vacancy.
- Despite recent improvements, this had not yet enabled the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation. Additionally, while a clear delivery plan was in place, the extent to which this was driving service delivery was limited.
- Lack of consistent leadership until relatively recently had impacted negatively on the overall effectiveness of casework, as indicated in our casework review, especially in relation to work to manage risk of harm to others.
- There were some further concerns about the confidence of SPOs and their leadership skills in the absence of a full-time PDU head and a perceived lack of support from the regional leadership team.
- There was a lack of autonomy or authoritative voice among middle manager grades when engaging in wider stakeholder boards.
- Whilst regional senior managers had offered regular virtual contact and support, given their experience with temporary managers over the previous two years, physical contact was less than some staff in the PDU felt was sufficient. This left some staff feeling undervalued.
- There needs to be more work done to truly unify Dorset PDU as one probation service. The implementation of Probation Operation Delivery (POD) and the blending of teams to share skills, experience and knowledge is paramount in order to enhance local service delivery and team cohesion.
- The key objective of risk management and safeguarding was articulated by staff but did not translate into practice, as indicated in our case review.
- Management information relating to MAPPAs was not being routinely scrutinised, leading to gaps in the consistent identification of cases. There had also been a delay in sharing MAPPAs information with the DWP and this directly impacted the risk management of some cases.
- Police arrest data was not consistently made available to practitioners and when received, was not always shared between probation practitioners and facilitators of programmes.
- There was a lack of consultation with people on probation, and their voice was not represented in current PDU delivery plans.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

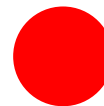
Strengths:

- Staffing numbers for sentence management were regularly reviewed to inform forward planning and the changing demands to workloads. Recent increases in recruitment were positive, as was the wider monitoring of future anticipated variations between target staffing and actual staffing numbers.
- We saw positive examples of succession planning, such as case administrators moving into Probation Services Officer (PSO) roles and PSOs commencing PQiP training. A number of agency staff had also been recruited into permanent contracts.
- Sickness levels were relatively low at 7.2 days lost per person per year on average. Staff demonstrated resilience during a period of significant change and uncertainty, which is a credit to them.
- Supervision was offered on a regular basis and staff appeared engaged and motivated in their work. In total, 75 per cent of staff who responded to our survey (38 out of 51) felt they received supervision that enhanced the quality of their work with people on probation. Seventy-eight per cent stated this supervision was offered at a sufficient frequency.
- The recent introduction of protected learning days was also a positive initiative. Although their benefit was yet to be fully embedded, this offered an opportunity to explore key areas of skill development identified within teams.
- Managers had an open-door policy and senior PDU leaders were visible, which was appreciated and valued by staff.
- At the time of the inspection there was a full staffing complement of SPOs to drive forward improvements to service delivery.
- Resources were used creatively to fill gaps across both sentence management and courts, including the splitting of posts, skills development for staff and PQiPs being utilised across different areas of service delivery to both enhance their learning and meet business needs.
- Twenty-nine out of 31 practitioners interviewed during our case review indicated that they believed they had sufficient skills, experience and knowledge to supervise the specific case.
- Where reasonable adjustments were required, these had been actioned swiftly.

Areas for improvement:

- Staffing levels overall were insufficient to meet the demands of the service across both sentence management and courts. Under new target staffing figures recently published, Dorset PDU had a vacancy rate of 49.5 per cent for qualified POs.
- Despite efforts to build the necessary levels of staff, we were concerned that current plans remained insufficient to meet demand within 18 months.
- The vast majority, 96 per cent, of staff (49 out of 51 respondents) in our survey did not feel that staffing levels were sufficient.
- The current average workload measurement tool (WMT) figures across all sentence management functions was 120 per cent. This, however, was not a fair reflection of the work being completed by some officers, with figures as high as 195 per cent at PO grade and 152 per cent at PSO grade. Current average figures were distorted as newly recruited PSOs and PQiPs were counted on WMT as available members of staff; however, they also held reduced caseloads.
- Forty-two out of 51 respondents in our staff survey and 18 out of 23 staff whose cases we reviewed said their workload was not manageable.
- The impact of management oversight was insufficient. We saw examples of standardised records that were not reflective of the individual case and included incorrect core risk information in some cases. Management oversight was insufficient in a total of 29 out of 42 cases we inspected.
- We saw no use of volunteers to enhance service delivery. There was a recently commissioned mentoring service, but we did not see evidence of its use in the cases inspected.
- Whilst experienced and qualified staff do offer mentoring and support opportunities, this is against a backdrop of high caseloads, meaning unqualified and inexperienced staff are unable to benefit from the ever-decreasing pool of knowledgeable staff.
- Whilst 88 per cent of respondents to our staff survey indicated they felt they had the necessary skills and experience to manage the cases allocated to them, we saw examples of practitioners at PSO grade being allocated sexual offences and domestic abuse cases without sufficient training to adequately manage the associated risks in such cases.
- There was a significant delay in accessing core training for newly appointed PSOs, and this impacted the development of this staff group. There was also limited capacity to engage in anything outside of mandatory training for most staff due to workloads.
- Morale was low for some staff, with court staff telling us that they found delivering updates to about UPW availability 'professionally embarrassing'.

1.3. Services



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

- Encouragingly the average waiting time to commence the delivery of Rehabilitation Activity Requirement interventions was only three and a half weeks.
- Practitioners were proactive at using toolkits with people on probation and enhancing personal strengths and protective factors when working with individuals.
- Homelessness prevention provision was generally well managed, with a co-commissioned Housing Navigator post staffed by the local authority. The model was working well. Of the 16 cases identified in our case sample with an identified accommodation need to address desistance, nine were assessed as having sufficient services delivered.
- There were also largely positive strategic relationships with both police and safeguarding services, and in our practitioner interviews 15 out of 31 said they had effective relationships to support desistance and 19 of 31 to manage the risk of harm.
- Working relationships with police for the turnaround of domestic abuse enquiries was strong. We saw this in action within court proceedings, with requests for information being made in 86 per cent of cases and all requests for information being returned by police before the report was presented to court. Likewise, there was domestic abuse information available to inform initial assessments in the majority (80 per cent) of cases, far higher than we see in many other areas.

Areas for improvement:

- Many of the services available were managed on a regional basis or commissioned outside of the PDU, with little autonomy afforded to the senior leaders across the PDU to co-commission with partners. This impacted local working relationships and undermined the work of the PDU, where there were excessive waiting lists and low completion rates. There was a lack of strategic support at a regional level to address these issues.
- A needs analysis was in place and reviewed annually. However, recorded rates of referrals to both CRS provision and others appeared low against this need. This was further reflected in the low levels of service provision noted in many of the cases we reviewed. It was not clear why practitioners were not drawing more heavily on the availability of services.
- Despite the perception of effective working relationships with partner agencies by practitioners, we did not see this consistently reflected in the cases we reviewed.

- Commencement times for programmes was variable. The average time to commencement for Building Better Relationships and Thinking Skills Programme is 12–13 weeks, while that for the Horizon programme was approximately 40 weeks. This was largely due to staffing issues.
- There were in excess of 500 UPW requirements across Dorset PDU at the point of inspection. Of those, approximately 200 individuals were awaiting allocation of a placement, and a further 100 were suspended and not currently on a waiting list for allocation. Internal monitoring identified 96 cases that had not had any contact with The Probation Service in a 12-month period, even though they were actively subject to a sentence with UPW. The number of available groups was low, 10 in total, with no delivery on Sundays and Mondays. Some cases were required to be instructed to work on a fortnightly basis in order to have any type of opportunity to complete hours. There were currently 2.75 FTE UPW supervisors; target staffing numbers were 10. Recent recruitment had been on a national basis but had not met the needs of the PDU. The lack of UPW delivery resulted in repeated requests for extensions to deliver the order of the courts.
- The overall completion rate for requirements was low, with 41.7 per cent of cases having outstanding requirements at sentence expiry. The completion rate for UPW was even lower, with 72.5 per cent of cases not being able to complete their hours within 12 months. These outcomes were impacting sentencer satisfaction and confidence in The Probation Service's ability to effectively deliver the sentence of the court.
- Of the 258 intervention requirements for individuals convicted of offences other than a sexual offence, 100 individuals (39 per cent) were yet to commence.
- Referrals for structured interventions were low and there was no proactive case selection by the programme team to improve numbers. The reasons for low referral rates were not known.
- There was little analysis of the demographics and diversity needs of cases across the whole of Dorset. We heard of interpretation services being used, but outside of that there appeared to be little by way of additional services for diverse populations, including the 166 foreign nationals on the current caseload of the service.

Resettlement work

Of the 45 cases inspected, 29 cases were subject to community orders and 16 were subject to custodial sentences and subsequent licence supervision in the community (resettlement cases). Work focusing on the assessment, planning and delivery of service for resettlement cases was poor within Dorset PDU. These cases were managed within generic sentence management teams.

Strengths:

- Community Offender Managers ensured a proportionate level of contact with 10 out of the 16 cases inspected, and in the same number of cases took steps to address key resettlement or desistance needs prior to release. This included examples of good work to address accommodation needs.
- There was evidence of flexibility to take account of personal circumstances and supporting the individual to complete their sentence successfully in the majority of cases.
- The level of contact, once in the community, was sufficient in three-quarters of the resettlement cases inspected in relation to reducing reoffending and supporting desistance. This supported developing the supervisory relationship with the person on probation and management of the licence.

Areas for improvement:

- Engaging people on probation in assessments, planning and review was consistently better evidenced for those subject to community orders than resettlement cases.
- The implementation and delivery of services to support the person on probation's desistance were assessed as more effective in significantly more community order cases, compared with those on licence.
- Disappointingly we only saw evidence of well-coordinated services being delivered in five of the 13 relevant resettlement cases we reviewed. There was a lack of engagement with local services to support and sustain desistance.
- The quality of risk assessment, and subsequently keeping people safe, across all key questions linked to assessment, planning and implementation was poor in the majority of cases inspected. This was a particular concern when it came to review, with only two out of the 16 resettlement cases inspected demonstrating a sufficient standard of work.
- Key risk of harm needs were not being sufficiently addressed prior to release in 44 per cent of cases, and more could have been done to have ensured sufficient contact to manage risk of harm concerns once released.
- Home visits were not completed in over half of the cases where we would have expected to see them, for both resettlement and community order cases. This negatively impacted the effective management of risk of serious harm.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Strengths

- Pro-active learning opportunities with partners were routinely undertaken and shared with practitioners to improve service delivery, including learning from other agencies.
- Seventy per cent of respondents to the staff survey (35 out of 50) felt that a culture of learning and continuous improvement was promoted across the PDU.
- Policies and procedures were available on the intranet, and 61 per cent of practitioners were accessing the practitioner dashboard supporting individual time management and activity. The region updated performance data daily, and this was then used to produce monthly reports. Information from this was shared by managers with staff in supervision. This appeared to be impacting positively on performance achievements.
- Protected learning days, determined by learning from audit and inspection activity, as well as self-identified learning requirements of staff, was scheduled, albeit relatively recently.
- Dorset PDU had received place-based support via EPSIG and staff were generally positive about their involvement as well as the opportunity to learn through this experience whilst EPSIG were in attendance.
- There was a willingness and motivation amongst staff to utilise all learning and systems available to them to improve service delivery.
- Offices were generally safe. In our survey, 41 respondents from a total of 51 told us that ICT systems enabled them to deliver work in a timely way and to access information as required. Seventy-two per cent of people on probation in our survey told us that they felt safe accessing the probation office, and 81 per cent said they were able to have private conversations.
- There was adequate space at each office to facilitate supervision and suitable facilities for group work to be facilitated. Where possible, UPW placements were offered on a local basis and transport was also provided when required.

Areas for improvement:

- There was an absence of collecting or utilising the feedback of people on probation to review and improve the effectiveness of services.
- Concerns were raised in relation to how well policies and guidance was communicated during unification and, as a consequence, officers had developed learning through their own self-direction rather than collectively. Improvements in recent months were positive but further work was still required.

- Whilst there had been building works made to make the Dorchester office (reception) feel a safer environment to work in, there were issues with soundproofing within interview rooms which compromised the confidentiality of supervision sessions for people on probation.
- Panic systems were not audible across all areas of the Weymouth office.
- There had been a repeated issue with the quality of drinking water within the Poole office. This had been fully investigated, the result of which showed no additional measures could be taken to improve the quality directly from the taps. Spending had been agreed to provide water filters within the office. However, it was disappointing that this had not been taken forward.
- The intercom for the Poole office did not work; this included when female-only reporting sessions were taking place, and there was potential for vulnerable attendees at the session to be left unattended and locked out of the building, which is unsatisfactory.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 71 people on probation as part of this inspection. This included 64 survey responses and seven in-depth interviews. Of those surveyed, 89 per cent were male and nine per cent were female, with two per cent preferring to self-describe. Two-thirds were subject to a community order, with the other third reporting following a period in prison. Most respondents were aged 30 years or over, which is representative of the caseload of the PDU. Still, those with a diverse ethnicity and those with declared disabilities were under-represented within the cohort.

Strengths

- Overall, the majority of people on probation stated they had been able to contact their probation practitioner when required and had been offered appointments at a time which suited them.

“It’s good, she’s really flexible around appointments, especially as I have kids. She is nice to me and always wants to try her best for me.”

- There was a mixed response in regard to access to services. Fifty-five per cent of those spoken to, who felt they needed services, said they had been positively supported to access these.

“All of the additional services have been great. For example, CF03, Local Council Housing Team, DWP work coach and Offender Manager.”

- Over three-quarters of the respondents spoken to, 77 per cent, felt that the location of their supervision appointments, courses or support had been within reasonable travelling distance.
- Most people, 72 per cent, also stated they felt safe when accessing probation offices.

Areas for improvements

- Waiting times, when people on probation reported to offices, and last-minute cancellations of appointments, were a top theme in the feedback and a source of frustration.

“They are always late seeing us. I’m always waiting ages, and it feels like no one ever knows what is going on.”

- In contrast, some who felt they needed additional services were either undecided or disagreed/strongly disagreed that they had been able to access the support they had required.

“There’s a possibility of a grant to get stuff but my probation officer didn’t tell me. To me, it feels like they have no idea what’s available to us.”

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

- There were positive relationships with the youth justice service (YJS), the seconded post had been staffed despite vacancies and appropriate transition arrangements were in place.
- The PDU had links with offender personality disorder pathways and a recently commissioned neurodivergence service. Case formulations were made available to support working relationships with cases and improve outcomes. However, practitioners were not tending to follow this up with requests for any additional support.
- iHorizon, an adapted programme for men with sexual offending behaviours, was offered in a small group setting accommodating individual needs.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a gap at both the strategic and operational levels in the approach and priority towards diversity.
- There was a lack of evidence of how diversity and protected characteristic information was being used to shape services, despite an impressive 99 per cent of recording the protected characteristics of people on probation.
- There was no clear analysis of diversity and needs of people on probation that informed commissioning. We did not see examples of any local commissioning arrangements being utilised to provide services which specifically meet the diverse need of cases within Dorset.
- There were no specific services identified for those who were from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds that the PDU was working with on a regular basis.
- There were cohorts of Foreign National Offenders, travelling community, Romanian and Polish people on probation. Still, we did not see evidence of access to any local services that would support these diverse needs.
- An offer of support from YJS of speech and language therapy training and to support 18–25-year-old PODs was not utilised.
- There was a lack of proactive monitoring of changing demographic information to understand the trends and changes in the local community population and the subsequent individual needs of those subject to probation.
- As we often see, female officers were overrepresented within the workforce, in comparison to the profile of the people on probation. Five per cent of sentence management staff identify as from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to the overall nine per cent of people on probation. There was limited evidence of the PDU considering this dynamic or actively analysing demographic data to improve diversity within its workforce.

2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work



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

Requires improvement

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?	57%

Strengths:

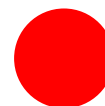
- Court officers made sufficient domestic abuse enquiries in the majority of cases to inform reports prepared for the courts. Of enquiries made (where they were required), all were returned by police prior to the report being presented to court.
- There was good evidence of meaningfully involving the person on probation in the report writing process, and their views were considered in the majority of cases. This included considering their motivation and readiness to change, as well as considering diversity and personal circumstances.
- Over three-quarters of all reports sufficiently considered factors relating to offending and risk of harm, leading to appropriate proposals being made to court, with well-informed and sufficiently recorded advice in 86 per cent of cases.

Areas for improvement:

- Worryingly, child safeguarding enquiries were not made in seven out of 18 cases where it would have been appropriate to do so. Where enquiries were made, most were returned prior to the report being presented in court.
- Advice and information to the courts did not draw sufficiently on all available sources of information, including that from both police and children's services, in 43 per cent of cases. This negatively impacted how court reports were scored overall due to not considering all key risk information and the lack of subsequent analysis.

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?	67%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	71%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	33%

Dorset PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for assessment as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 33 per cent. Concerningly, this relates to keeping people safe and this work was only sufficient in a third of cases.

Strengths:

- The engagement of people on probation, and the assessment of factors linked to offending and desistance, was exceptionally strong in community order cases. We saw this best demonstrated in cases where protected characteristics, personal circumstances, and motivation to engage and comply were considered as part of the assessment process.

Areas for improvement:

- Domestic abuse enquiries were not made in nine of the cases where we would have expected to see them, and 17 of the cases had child safeguarding enquiries missing. This meant there were significant gaps in the identity, understanding and subsequent assessment of risk in those cases.
- Even where enquiries had been made, this information was not always sufficiently analysed or considered in the overall risk assessment and management of the case.
- There were seven out of 45 cases where either the risk of serious harm classification was not clearly assessed, or alternatively set too low, in the view of the inspector.

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.

Inadequate

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?	51%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	69%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	33%

Dorset PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for planning as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 33 per cent, and concerningly again, this relates to the focus on keeping other people safe.

Strengths:

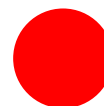
- Most, 90 per cent, of plans for community sentences set out how all the requirements of the sentence would be delivered within the available timescales. This was less well evidenced for licence cases and only sufficient in 38 per cent of cases. In the previous 12 months, 41.7 per cent of cases had not completed all requirements at the point of sentence termination, and therefore sufficient planning in the initial stages, and during review, is paramount going forward.

Areas for improvement:

- Factors most critical to addressing risk of harm were not prioritised in over half of the cases, resulting in unacceptable gaps in the management of risk.
- More could have been done to incorporate the work of other agencies at the planning stage, including how other agencies and services would both support desistance and manage risk where appropriate.
- There was a lack of necessary and effective contingency arrangements within 26 of the 44 cases where they were required. In too many cases, contingency plans did not sufficiently address how identified risks would be managed.

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.](#)

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?	58%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	40%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	27%

Dorset PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for implementation and delivery as the lowest score out of the three key questions was 27 per cent for keeping other people safe.

Strengths:

- Probation practitioners worked hard to maintain effective working relationships with people on probation. They were flexible in their approach, considering both diversity needs and personal circumstances. The level of contact was sufficient to address reoffending and desistance in 34 out of 45 relevant cases and to manage risk in 28 out of 42 of relevant cases. There was a good level of re-engagement with cases after enforcement and recall action.

Areas for improvement:

- Some cases inspected should have been screened for MAPPA status and level; however, this did not always happen, and when it did, this was not always timely. This is a significant omission in risk assessment and management.
- There were unacceptable gaps in protecting potential and actual victims. This related specifically to domestic abuse and child safeguarding, where previous behaviours were not sufficiently analysed to identify how they link to current circumstances, and how ongoing risk to others needed to be managed.
- Services being delivered in cases were not those most likely to reduce reoffending or address key risk issues in 60 per cent of cases. There was a lack of coordination in the delivery of different services.

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.](#)

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?	71%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	42%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	20%

Dorset PDU is rated as 'Inadequate' for reviewing. This is based on the lowest score of the key questions in relation to keeping others safe, which was only sufficient in 20 per cent of cases.

Strengths:

- Those on probation were meaningfully involved in the review of their engagement and progress in 71 per cent of inspected cases.
- The review of community orders was judged to be of a sufficient standard more often than the review of resettlement cases.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a lack of written reviews which recorded either progress in the sentence or any barriers to reducing offending and managing risk.
- Where there were changes to factors relating to either desistance or risk of harm, these were not routinely identified and included in reviews. This meant ongoing work was not being informed by all relevant factors in the case and interventions were not tailored sufficiently to address these changes.
- Reviews of risk did not routinely involve information from other agencies, key individuals in the person's life, or the person on probation. Again, this meant that not all risks were being considered comprehensively, and this impacted negatively on how the case was subsequently being managed.
- Management oversight was insufficient, ineffective or absent in too many cases.

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?	38%

Strengths:

- Encouragingly, in 36 out of the 45 cases inspected, there had been either a reduction in offending or no change. Only two of the cases inspected were seen to have demonstrated an increase in offending. Given the current challenges in delivering probation services across Dorset PDU, it was positive to see that the reoffending rate on the cases inspected was relatively low.

Areas for improvement:

- Of concern, it was assessed that there was a reduction in factors most closely related to risk of harm to others in only 14 per cent of cases. This was reflective of the low scores relating to keeping others safe that we saw throughout all aspects of sentence management and demonstrated that insufficient work was undertaken to address and reduce the risk of serious harm posed by individuals in too many cases.
- In addressing offending, we saw an improvement in only 33 per cent of cases where there had been sufficient interventions delivered to improve those factors most closely linked to offending, including developing strengths and addressing needs.
- Improvements in the number of people on probation accommodated in settled independent accommodation (increased by two) and full-time employment (increased by four) at the point of inspection, in comparison to the start of their order or licence, were low in numbers.

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)