



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

# **HM Inspectorate of Probation**

Annual Report 2022/2023



## High-quality probation and youth offending services that change people's lives for the better

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of probation and youth offending services in England and Wales. We set the standards that shine a light on the quality and impact of these services. Our inspections, reviews, research and effective practice products provide authoritative and evidence-based judgements and guidance. We use our voice to drive system change, with a focus on inclusion and diversity. Our scrutiny leads to improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

This report was prepared by Russell Webster (an independent consultant) and HM Inspectorate of Probation.

### Contents

<b>Key facts .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chief Inspector's foreword .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Findings from our local inspections.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Ratings .....	12
Organisational leadership and delivery .....	12
Case supervision .....	13
Court work .....	15
Conclusion.....	16
<b>Chapter 2: Staffing .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Staffing levels.....	18
<b>Recruitment</b> .....	19
<b>Retention</b> .....	19
<b>Sickness</b> .....	19
The experience on the ground .....	19
Workloads .....	20
Oversight .....	23
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The needs of people on probation .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Introduction .....	25
Assessing and meeting needs.....	25
Needs by gender.....	26
Needs by ethnicity .....	26
Outcomes.....	28

<b>Accommodation outcomes</b>	30
<b>Employment, training and education outcomes</b>	30
<b>Declining performance in meeting needs</b>	30
Commissioned Rehabilitative Services	31
Unpaid work	31
Accredited programmes	32
The views of people on probation	33
<b>Access to probation</b>	34
<b>Access to services</b>	35
<b>Views on supervision</b>	36
<b>Co-production</b>	37
<b>Chapter 4: Public protection and risk of harm</b>	<b>38</b>
Assess, Protect and Change	38
Risk of serious harm	38
Assessment of risk	38
Serious Further Offences	40
Learning from recent SFO reviews	41
<b>Jordan McSweeney SFO</b>	42
<b>Learning</b>	43
MAPPA thematic	44
<b>MAPPA levels and categories</b>	44
Domestic abuse thematic inspection	45
Terrorism Act offenders thematic inspection	46
Victims	47
<b>Chapter 5: Resettlement</b>	<b>49</b>
Introduction	49
What is good resettlement?	49
Findings from our local inspections	49
Offender Management in Custody	51
<b>OMiC pre-release</b>	51
<b>OMiC post-release</b>	53
Conclusion	54
<b>Appendix 1: Inspections of services</b>	<b>55</b>
The inspection process	55

<b>Regional review .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>PDU organisational delivery (domain one).....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>PDU case supervision (domain two).....</b>	<b>55</b>
The ASPIRE Model of case supervision.....	55
The ratings.....	56
<b>Appendix 2: Publications .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Thematic inspections.....	60
Serious Further Offences .....	60
Academic Insights .....	60
Research and Analysis Bulletins.....	61
Effective practice guides .....	61
<b>Appendix 3 – Offender management in custody (OMiC) main processes..</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Appendix 4 – Aggregate data .....</b>	<b>64</b>

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

© Crown copyright 2023

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence) or email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. This publication is available for download at: <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation>

Published by:

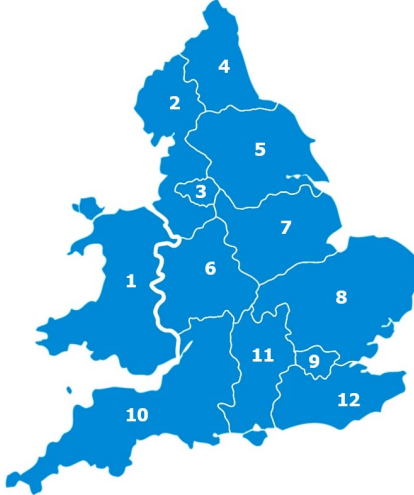
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M3 3FX

Follow us on Twitter [@hmiprobation](https://twitter.com/hmiprobation)

ISBN: 978-1-915468-95-6

## Key facts

Probation Service regions	
1	Probation Service – Wales region
2	Probation Service – North West region
3	Probation Service – Greater Manchester region
4	Probation Service – North East region
5	Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region
6	Probation Service – West Midlands region
7	Probation Service – East Midlands region
8	Probation Service – East of England region
9	Probation Service – London region
10	Probation Service – South West region
11	Probation Service – South Central region
12	Probation Service – Kent, Surrey and Sussex region



### HM Inspectorate of Probation facts:

Between June 2021 – July 2023 the Inspectorate published:	
31	Probation delivery unit (PDU) inspections
7	Thematic inspections
5	Research and Analysis Bulletins
13	Academic Insights
5	Effective practice guides

### Probation population facts:

	31 December 2021	31 December 2022
Total Caseload	238,500	240,431
All supervision in the community	170,744	170,655
All court orders	110,965	112,851
Suspended Sentence Order with requirements	41,892	44,258
Pre-release supervision	69,815	71,617
Post-release supervision	62,805	60,910

	31 March 2022	31 March 2023
Senior Probation Officers	1249	1435
Probation Officers	4489	4413
Probation Service Officers	6104	6950
Trainee Probation Officers (PQIPs)	2148	2626

This annual report covers our work over the past year, and the data covers our local inspections between 26 June 2021 (following re-unification of the Probation Service) up to 13 July 2023 (the date by which 31 out of 36 PDU reports, covering 10 of the 12 regions, had been published).

## Chief Inspector's foreword

---



This will be my final annual report as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation after four years in post, so it is an opportunity to look back over what has been a tumultuous and difficult period for the Probation Service and to offer some reflections on the future as well.

During those four years, the service has undergone yet another major structural reorganisation (its fourth in 20 years). It has had to change its entire operating model overnight in response to the Covid pandemic and then, like the rest of the public sector, had to deal with the long-term impacts of that pandemic on backlogs, staff morale and the partners it works with. This made coming out of the pandemic, if anything, even more difficult than going into it. Added to that has been the more recent impact of the cost of living crisis on staff wellbeing and living standards.

The simultaneous impact of all these factors has been profound and is illustrated clearly in our inspection ratings over the past year. And it's been evident too in the high profile serious cases we have reported on since I became Chief Inspector – including those of Joseph McCann, Damien Bendall and Jordan McSweeney.

In June 2021, when the private sector Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the public sector National Probation Service (NPS) were re-unified into a single public sector Probation Service, I cautioned that re-unification by itself was not going to be a silver bullet for all the problems that the unified service was inheriting. Merely shifting large volumes of cases from the private sector into the public sector, I said, wouldn't improve the quality of work that probation staff are able to do. Real transformation was a long-term commitment, and re-unification was just the beginning of that journey.

Two years on from re-unification, that prediction has sadly turned out to be true. As this annual report shows, the performance of the service against our quality standards has if anything got worse not better since it came back together in 2021.

Why is that? Part of the answer is the depth of the problems inherited from the *Transforming Rehabilitation* period. That applies particularly to staffing levels and caseload pressures. In response to a real-terms reduction in funding caused by a flawed payment-by-results contract mechanism, many of the private sector probation providers were forced to cut the number of qualified probation officers (often replaced by unqualified and inexperienced PSOs) and to scale back investment in other areas. This pushed average individual caseloads up to unsustainable levels in some local areas.

Given that staffing numbers for the CRCs were never published, the extent of this staffing shortfall didn't become known until re-unification, when it became evident that the service was thousands of officers short of what was necessary to deliver manageable workloads. Ambitious recruitment targets were set to fill these gaps, and an additional £155 million was added to the service's budget, taking it past £1 billion a year. However, an influx of inexperienced new staff all needing to be trained and mentored has created its own problems.

Working remotely and receiving all their training online during the pandemic, new staff found it difficult to access the practical support and advice that comes with sharing an office with more experienced colleagues. And in the meantime, those more experienced colleagues have been resigning from the service in greater numbers. While the number of probation officers with up to two years of service has increased significantly (by 46 per cent in the 12 months to 31 March 2023) the number with five or more years' service has fallen.

But not all of the problems we have seen in our inspections since re-unification can be put down to the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms or the pandemic. While I welcomed re-unification at the time, and praised the way this transition programme was managed at pace, it wasn't without its downsides. In particular, I regret the way that transition disrupted some of the positive innovations and progress that the better CRC providers had been starting to make.

That is particularly the case in relation to Through the Gate resettlement services. Our final round of CRC inspections had shown that these services were making real progress in some areas thanks to significant extra investment in enhanced provision after April 2018 and some increasingly mature and positive relationships with voluntary sector partners. All 12 of the CRC areas we visited in our final round of pre-unification inspections were rated as either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for their Through the Gate services.

Re-unification brought an abrupt end to these partnerships in favour of a new set of centrally commissioned service contracts. This left staff in many Through the Gate teams up in the air and unsure of their futures. As our recent thematic inspections have shown, the Offender Management in Custody framework, which has replaced Through the Gate services for those serving longer sentences, has performed poorly, and we found that it is not understood well by staff and prisoners.

In the longer arc of history, the most recent structural reorganisation marks the final step from probation being an entirely locally run and funded service at the beginning of the 20th century, to being an entirely national one in the third decade of the 21st, with probation staff now all government civil servants. While that may have created opportunities for probation staff to move into other roles across government, and economies of scale in terms of business partner arrangements, not everyone has been happy with this change.

Civil Service procurement and recruitment processes can be notoriously slow. Equipment that could be purchased in days, can now take weeks to procure; posts can take many months to fill; multiple layers of approvals and standardised and centralised commissioning processes stifle innovation and can feel disempowering for local leaders.

To that must then be added the impact of the new, merged 'One HMPPS' structure for prisons and probation. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has lost the separate Director General role for probation, which I had previously welcomed as giving the service strong and visible leadership. Past experience with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is that the day-to-day operational and political demands of the prison service can all too easily distract from the Probation Service and its particular (and very different) needs. The insertion of new HMPPS area executive director posts between regional probation directors and national HMPPS leadership will also, I suspect, feel like a downgrading of their status and influence to regional probation leaders.

I know that strong concerns have been raised about these changes and it's important that the voice and interests of the Probation Service continue to get the leadership attention they so desperately need. Many in the service hark back to the days (not that long ago), when probation was a genuinely local service – locally accountable rather than run from Whitehall, focused on local partnerships and able to act autonomously within them. Given our results from the past year, and after speaking to probation leaders and managers around England and Wales, I have to say I have increasing sympathy with this view. The Prison Service will always need to be national, given the constant pressure on prison places and the need to manage scarce functions like the high security, women's and youth estate at a national level.

And some probation functions, like the management of terrorist offenders after release and perhaps of the approved premises estate, are best managed nationally too. But for the great majority of the probation caseload, all of the most important relationships for probation staff and the people they work with are local, with locally run and accountable partners. These include local police services; local authority housing and social service departments; local mental health trusts; and local drug and alcohol services. The Probation Service should be a key player in these partnerships, and it has a seat at all the important partnership meetings – but to make the most of that seat, local leaders need the freedoms to commit resources and staff; to agree local contracts; to decide on investments in local infrastructure and to be able to speak publicly to both defend and advocate for their local services. Local probation leaders are heavily constrained in relation to all of these freedoms and flexibilities by current structures. It is telling that our inspection scores for youth offending services, which can do all of these things, have been far better than for probation over the past year and if anything seem to have improved, in spite of the pandemic.

In part, of course, this is because youth justice services (YJS) have much more manageable caseloads – far lower than probation equivalents. But I think it also reflects the greater resilience and potential for flexibility and innovation that's possible with a locally run and accountable service, with YJS now for the most part firmly embedded in local authority children's services. Strong local relationships are also cemented by local YJS management boards. These include senior representatives of all of the local services with which YJS staff and service leaders will be working, who have the power to get things sorted within their own services on behalf of the children on each YJS caseload.

While I recognise that another reorganisation of the service, and any shift in this direction would have to be with the explicit agreement of local managers and staff, I think the time has come for an independent review of whether probation should move back to a more local form of governance and control, building on the highly successful lessons of youth justice services – 70 per cent of which we rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' last year.



In the second part of this report, we consider the needs of people on probation that may be driving their offending behaviour – such as a drug or alcohol problem; insecure accommodation or a lack of employment; or poor thinking skills – and whether these are being met. The short answer is that they are not. We rated the quality of service provision as ‘Inadequate’ in 13 out of 31 of the local PDUs we had inspected by May 2023. These judgements were borne out by our individual case assessments, where my inspectors found that in only 44 per cent of the cases they inspected did the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the person on probation’s desistance. And for services like drug or alcohol treatment, the picture was even worse. In almost half of the local cases we inspected, the individual had a drug problem linked to their offending, but in only 29 per cent of these was delivery of services sufficient to meet that need.

In an important new initiative, we have also started to ask people on probation whether they think their needs are being met. Since April 2022, the organisation User Voice, which is run and staffed by people who have been through the criminal justice system themselves, has been surveying and interviewing people on probation on our behalf in every local area that we inspect. Of over 1,350 people on probation who answered their surveys across 21 local PDUs, only 61 per cent said they were getting the services they needed, although the high number who said they didn’t need any services suggests that many didn’t recognise their own needs or the services that might have been available to them.

The impact of the pandemic can still clearly be seen in the low start rates and long waiting times for the accredited programmes ordered by the courts and in the high numbers of unpaid work orders reaching the 12-month point without being completed. Here, too, high staff vacancy rates and poor enforcement and compliance have taken a toll.

But it is in the area of public protection that my concerns remain greatest. The Probation Service’s ability to accurately assess and robustly manage potential risks of serious harm from people on probation was already its weakest area of performance before the pandemic, and has become even worse since re-unification. We have rated two-thirds of the individual cases inspected across 10 regions as insufficient. The picture is even worse for medium risk cases, which generate a majority of the murders committed by people on probation and so will often need as careful management as higher risk cases. Large caseloads have reduced the time that practitioners can spend assessing, planning or managing each individual case. In too many cases, this has reduced face-to-face appointments to little more than welfare check-ins, which is not helped by the reduced time that staff are spending in the office rather than working from home. And heavily loaded line managers (senior probation officers) lack the time to properly scrutinise the work of their teams or engage in the sort of coaching and support needed to improve the practice of large numbers of trainee or newly qualified staff – so mistakes are being missed. Across the cases we’ve inspected management oversight was insufficient in an alarming 72 per cent of cases.

Time and again we’re also finding that practitioners are failing to draw on a wide enough range of information when assessing risk. Domestic abuse enquires with the police, for example, were made in only 49 per cent of the cases where we felt they should have been and safeguarding enquiries were made with local children’s services in only 55 per cent. A focus solely on the most recent conviction means that past evidence of risk such as violence against previous partners or evidence of weapon use or gang membership is being missed.

All of these factors were clearly evident in the high-profile independent reviews we published earlier this year into the supervision of Damien Bendall and Jordan McSweeney, which attracted huge media interest. While we did find clear failures in the quality of individual probation practice in both cases, there were also broader systemic issues that we are seeing time and time again in our local probation inspections and thematic reviews. These included overloaded practitioners and line managers with well above their target

workloads; significant delays in handing over cases from prison to community probation staff, resulting in last-minute and inadequate release planning; incomplete or inaccurate risk assessments being carried out at both the court stage and start of supervision; and very inexperienced staff being handed inappropriately complex cases with minimal management oversight.

But what of the future? While this has been a disappointing year on which to finish my term of office as Chief Inspector, I hope for better things to come. We now know that good quality probation practice makes a significant difference to outcomes. In an important research report we published earlier this year, based on an analysis of cases inspected before re-unification, we found that effective probation practice in individual cases significantly correlated with the outcome for that person on probation, as revealed by the Police National Computer and the service's own data. In the cases where our inspectors judged that the delivery of probation supervision both engaged the person on probation and supported their desistance, the sentence completion rate was 24 percentage points higher and the reoffending rate was 14 percentage points lower than in cases where both judgements were negative. This shows not only that we are inspecting the right things when making judgements on quality, but also that those things make a real difference to the life outcomes of the people the service is working with.

A new Chief Probation Officer has made public protection her number one priority for the service, and I'm pleased that HMPPS has accepted all the recommendations from our reviews of the Bendall and McSweeney cases. New staff have been recruited to provide the police and children's safety enquiries that we've found missing in too many cases. A major recruitment drive is finally paying off, with the number of practitioners and senior probation officers starting to increase in the past 12 months. A three-year pay deal may encourage more people into the service, and there are some signs in our inspections that individual caseloads may be coming down, even if that is not yet feeding into the quality of practice. Staff are back in the office after the pandemic and seeing people on their caseloads face-to-face (albeit sometimes only once a month) and unpaid work parties are back out on site as normal. But most of all I sense a determination amongst service leaders and managers to improve. I've been lucky enough to meet hundreds of probation staff across England and Wales in my time as Chief Inspector and I've never doubted their desire to do the right thing. In the effective practice guides that I've introduced as Chief Inspector, we've been able to showcase the many things that individual staff and managers are doing right and the innovations that still survive – to balance what we've had to say in our inspection reports about what's going wrong. And as our interviews with people on probation show, when things are done right it can be life changing (and sometimes life-saving) for the people involved, so I'd like to finish on a positive note by quoting one of them:

*"Probation has been really supportive of me and I'm so glad to have them. I was really worried about my future and probation continue to help me keep calm and focus on the future not the past."*



**Justin Russell**

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Introduction

---

This annual report covers our first wave of local inspections after the re-unification of the Probation Service on 26 June 2021. Since re-unification we have inspected 36 probation delivery units (PDUs) in all 12 probation regions. This report covers data from the 31 PDU inspection reports, covering 10 of the 12 regions that had been published by 13 July 2023. We explain our inspection process in **Appendix 1** of this report.

Since July 2022 we have also published thematic inspections on race equality, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model, perpetrators of domestic violence, and work with terrorist offenders.

Additionally, we published 13 [Academic Insights](#), five [effective practice guides](#), five [Research and Analysis Bulletins](#) and two [Serious Further Offence reviews, in addition to our annual report on Serious Further Offence reviews](#). You can find a full list of all our publications from the period under review in **Appendix 2** of this report.

We have structured this report to reflect the major issues arising from our work this year. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the findings from our local inspections of 31 PDUs. Subsequent chapters examine the principal issues that have emerged from our work this year. Chapter 2 analyses the current levels of staffing and their impact on probation delivery. Chapter 3 explores the needs of people on probation and how well these are being met. Chapter 4 investigates probation performance in relation to risk and public protection; and Chapter 5 describes the current state of resettlement work. **Appendix 4** provides interested readers with a link to the aggregate data from all our PDU inspections for the first time.

## Chapter 1: Findings from our local inspections

---

Following re-unification of the Probation Service at the end of June 2021, HM Inspectorate of Probation started a new cycle of inspections focused on the 108 local probation delivery units (PDUs) across the 12 probation regions of England and Wales. These local units are the base for the majority of probation staff who are responsible for the core sentence assessment and management work with people released from prison on licence and on community sentences. In some, though not all, areas they also manage the probation court teams that undertake pre-sentence assessments and report writing to advise local courts on appropriate sentences.

Other probation teams, for example those delivering unpaid work orders, accredited programmes or victim liaison work, may be line-managed by the probation region. A significant number of probation staff – up to 1,000 – are based in prisons and deliver pre-release assessments and interventions. Although the work of these teams will be reflected in the cases we inspect locally, we do not rate these functions separately at a PDU level. A range of other functions – for example, managing terrorism offenders or approved premises places, or training provision – are provided centrally and are located in HMPPS headquarters. These are not currently rated by HM Inspectorate of Probation but may be subjected to national thematic inspections; indeed, we published a thematic inspection of counter-terrorism work in July this year.

Since re-unification of the Probation Service we have aimed to inspect a third of the local PDUs in each of the 12 probation regions in England and Wales. By the middle of July 2023 we had published reports on 31 PDUs across 10 regions.

This chapter looks at the results of this first cycle of inspections of the newly unified service and at how well local probation services are assessing, supervising and supporting people on probation, whether on a community sentence or after release on licence from custody. The chapter starts by explaining our ratings system. We then summarise our local inspection data on case supervision.

### Ratings

Since the autumn of 2021, we have rated 31 PDUs. All services are rated as either 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate' overall, as well as being rated at the level of individual standards for each of the two 'domains' we inspect (see Appendix 1). The results have been disappointing. Only one PDU (South Tyneside and Gateshead) was rated 'Good' with 15 PDUs rated 'Requires Improvement' and the remaining 15 'Inadequate'. The maximum score that a PDU can reach is 27. The 31 PDUs that we have inspected so far were scored between 0 and 15 out of 27 (or out of 24 for the nine PDUs that had no courts team to inspect), with an average (mean) score of just five out of 27. A comparison of the data from the most recent round of inspections with the combined CRC and NPS data for the same regions from before re-unification suggests that the quality of sentence management may actually have got worse.

### Organisational leadership and delivery

Our first set of quality standards (our first domain) refers to organisational leadership and delivery. Judgements against these are based on a range of evidence gathered before and during the inspection. This includes an extensive series of fieldwork interviews and focus groups with staff at every level of the organisation, and data from the sample of individual cases inspected. Our inspections have a strong focus on whether organisational leadership

and enablers are impacting in practice on the people being supervised by the service in terms of their potential risks of harm or needs for key services. Because of this, we introduced a new set of decision 'rules' at the start of the current inspection cycle to explicitly link our judgements on organisational leadership and delivery to what we see in the individual cases we inspect.

In practice this means that a local PDU cannot score 'Good' or 'Outstanding' on our leadership standard if it receives a rating of 'Inadequate' on any of our casework standards (i.e. if less than half of the cases inspected are deemed satisfactory against one of these standards). Similarly, it is not possible for a PDU to score 'Good' or 'Outstanding' on our 'services' standard if it scores 'Inadequate' on what we actually see implemented in the cases we assess – for example, whether accredited programmes or unpaid work orders are being started and completed.

Given the poor quality of sentence management uncovered by our case assessments in the past two years, the impact of these new rules on our ratings has been significant. So, for example, only one PDU was rated 'Good' on our leadership standard, and 13 PDUs were rated as 'Inadequate' on our services standard – with a strong correlation between these 13 and the services that received an overall rating of 'Inadequate'. Ten services were rated 'Inadequate' on our staffing standard, reflecting the chronic staff shortages that we have uncovered in almost every part of England and Wales.

## Case supervision

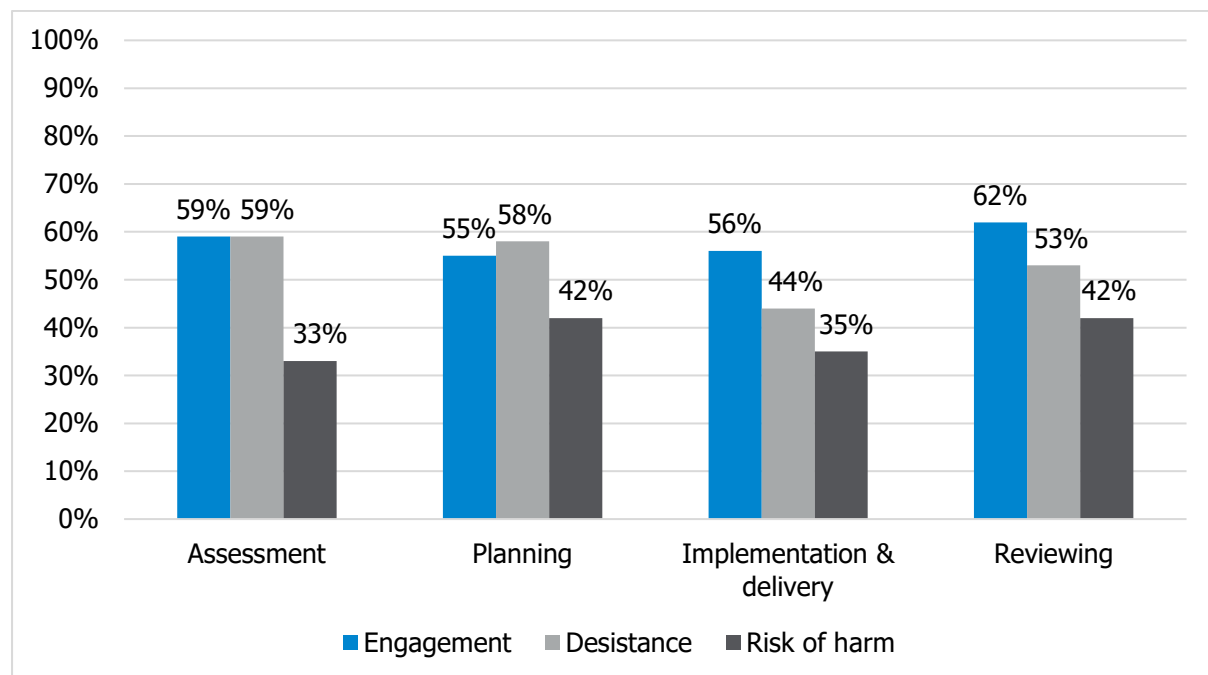
At each local PDU we undertake a detailed inspection of a sample of individual cases where the individual started supervision after release from prison or sentence in court around six to seven months before our fieldwork visit. We assess all of the cases where supervision began in two separate weeks. This generated a sample size of between 21 and 102 in each of the 31 PDUs inspected and published to date.

Contemporary probation practice is based upon the ASPIRE model of case supervision (**A**ssessment; **S**entence **P**lanning; **I**mplementation; **R**eview & **E**valuate). In our local inspections, we judge the quality of delivery in individual cases against this ASPIRE process. (A further explanation of this methodology can be found at Appendix 1).

Disappointingly, analysis of the caseload data across all these probation areas shows that not one element of the case supervision process was being delivered well across England and Wales. **Chart 1** below shows a detailed breakdown of the proportion of cases where each of the 12 quality criteria we inspect was delivered to the level expected by our published standards. No element of the supervision process was delivered satisfactorily in more than 62 per cent of the 1,509 cases we inspected. In only three PDUs were more than half of the cases sufficient against the worst scoring quality question – the assessment of risks of serious harm.

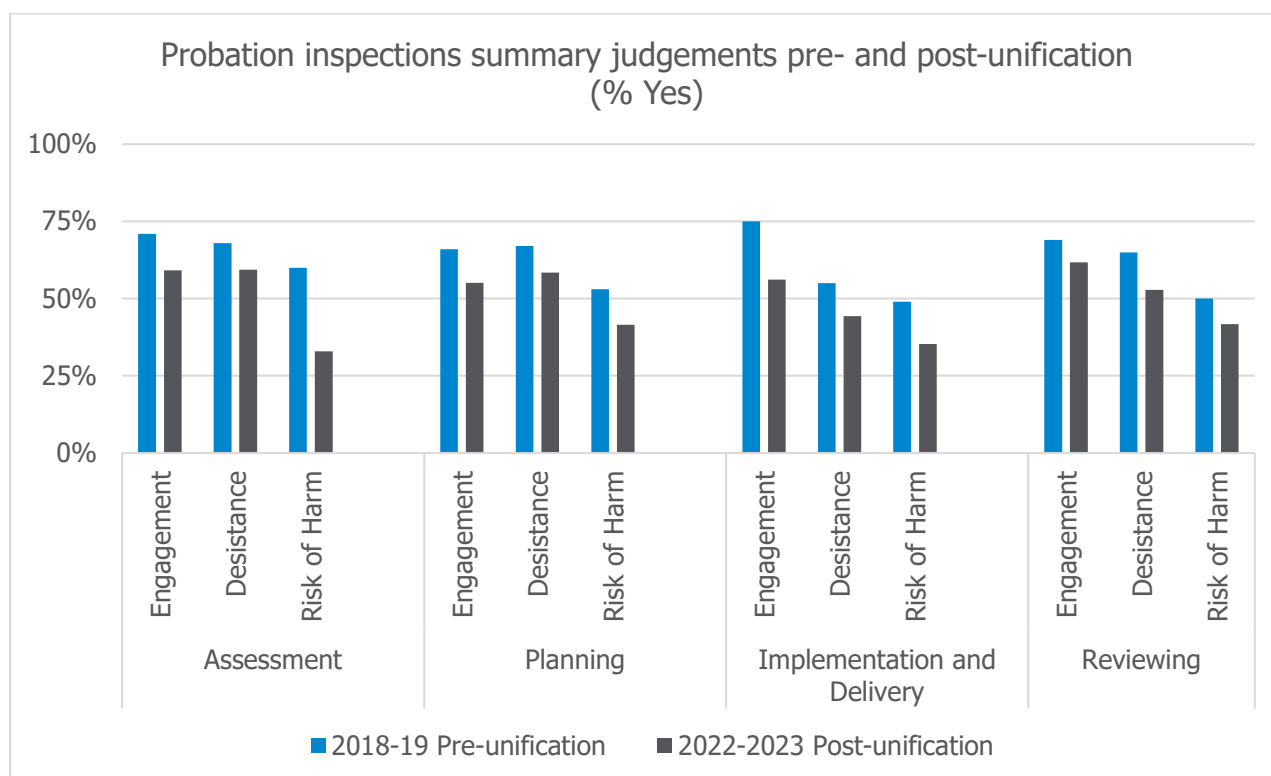
Probation practitioners generally performed better at criteria relating to engaging people on probation at all four stages of supervision, but the attention they paid to risk of harm was consistently poor, and this is the key reason why so many services have received an overall rating of 'Inadequate'. Inspectors judged that a minority of practitioners managed risk of harm to other people effectively at the assessment (33 per cent), planning (42 per cent), implementation & delivery (35 per cent) and review (42 per cent) stages. We consider performance in relation to risk of harm at length in Chapter 4 in this report.

Chart 1: Proportion of cases delivered to expected level at all stages of case supervision (n = 1,509 inspected cases)



We were disappointed to find that performance has fallen against every one of the 12 key questions we ask about the quality of probation practice. **Chart 2** compares performance in the 10 regions inspected to date under the re-unified model with performance in the period 2018 to 2019 under the *Transforming Rehabilitation* model (combining scores from the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies). It is important to note that these ratings are based on identical questions for inspections conducted before and after unification.

Chart 2: Comparison of case inspection data before and after unification



We might have expected performance to have been adversely affected both by the pandemic and by the large re-structuring process that re-unification involved. However, we are concerned that there has been no discernible trend towards improved performance in the 19 months in which we have undertaken these 31 local inspections, with 30 PDUs receiving overall ratings of 'Inadequate' and 'Requires improvement' in 2023.

In the one PDU that has received a rating of 'Good' (Gateshead and South Tyneside), our inspectors identified a number of factors that appeared to be linked to this good performance. They included:

- a strong, committed staff group with reasonable workloads
- a skilled and committed group of senior probation officers who provided good oversight
- good continuity of supervision
- excellent partnerships, especially with police and children's services – domestic abuse enquiries were sufficient in all court reports where appropriate.

## Court work

In addition to inspecting case supervision, we also examine the quality of court reports in all of our local inspections where there is a court team based in the PDU. This was the case in 22 of our 31 local inspections. We have some major concerns around court work. Of all the court reports we have inspected since re-unification, in a majority (52 per cent) of cases, our inspectors judged that pre-sentence information and advice were not sufficiently analytical and personalised to support the court's decision-making. Half (11 out of 22) of the PDUs we inspected were rated 'Inadequate' for court work and nearly a third (7 out of 22)

were rated 'Requiring improvement'. One PDU was rated 'Good' and three out of 22 were rated as 'Outstanding'.

We were particularly concerned about the lack of a comprehensive risk assessment at the court report stage:

- 51 per cent of police domestic abuse enquiries had not been completed in court reports where we felt this was necessary
- 48 per cent of safeguarding enquiries with local children's services were not completed.

If the initial risk assessment at court (or at the start of sentence) is wrong, that error feeds through into poor plans and poor case management, as our serious further offence reports have found. We explore this issue in more detail in Chapter 4, which covers public protection and risk of harm.

The performance of many court teams was adversely affected by under-staffing. However, where our inspectors found good performance and high levels of sentencer satisfaction, these tended to be as a result of good strategic planning. Both the North East and West Midlands regions had invested in a regional court strategic manager both to provide an oversight of performance and to maintain close communication with the judiciary, particularly regarding changes to probation structures and service provision.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, probation performance has been disappointing since re-unification. One of the main factors for this is under-staffing, which is affecting every probation region. The next chapter explores this issue in depth.



## Chapter 2: Staffing

A key issue underlying many of our concerning local inspection scores has been chronic under-staffing at many practitioner grades and its knock-on impact on workloads and their perceived manageability. The CRCs did not make their headcount figures available at the time they were operating, so the full extent to which the Probation Service was understaffed was not revealed until re-unification. It swiftly became clear that the service was thousands of officers short of what was necessary to deliver manageable workloads under the new target operating model for the re-unified service. In response to this, HMPPS increased the national target headcount for probation officers by a further 1,000 in the summer of 2022 to 6,160. This has increased the vacancy rate at probation officer grade, but is a more realistic view of the number of staff needed to deliver manageable caseloads.

We welcome the Ministry of Justice's determination to recruit more staff and its decision to fund this increase in staffing. Nevertheless, almost all PDUs we have inspected are struggling with under-staffing, although recent inspections have seen staff numbers starting to grow.

In this chapter, we start by setting out the latest workforce numbers, and then look at the impact on practitioners' workloads. We then look at the impact of staff shortages on both frontline delivery and the oversight of the service provided.

Our inspections have uncovered a range of challenges around staffing. These are reflected not just in high vacancy levels but in high sickness and resignation rates. They include challenges around post-pandemic blended working arrangements, delays in starting new staff, and issues around training and management oversight.



## Staffing levels

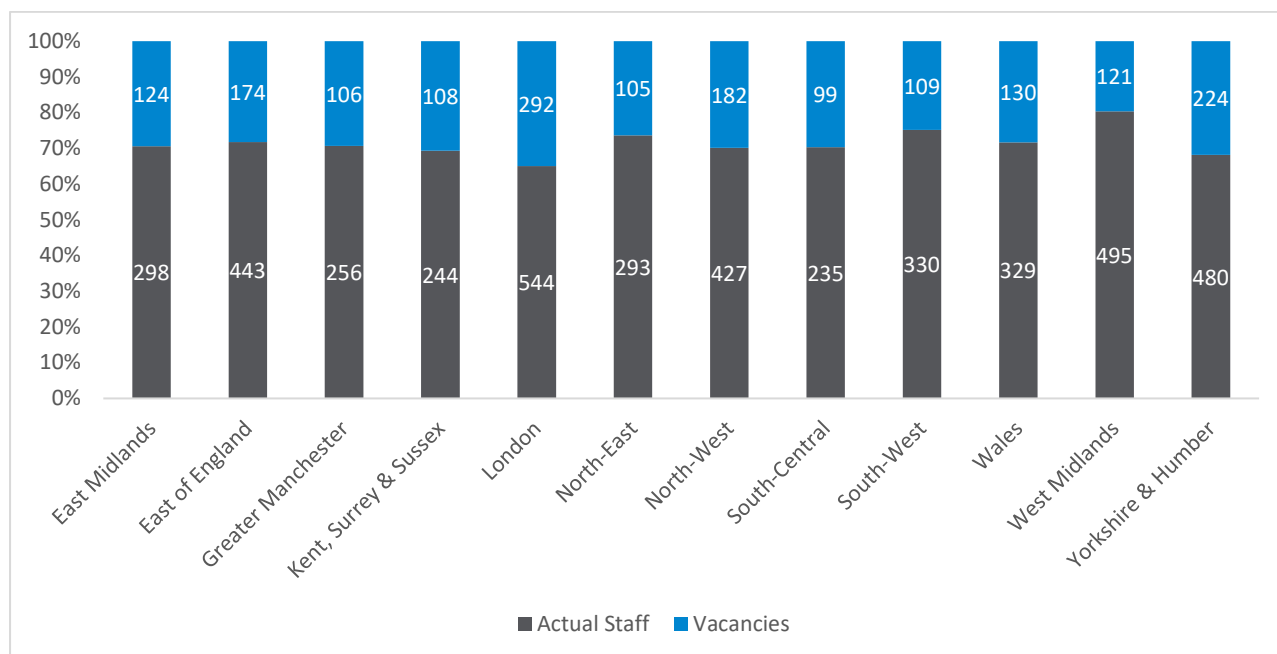
The latest national probation workforce data<sup>1</sup> shows both the extent of the staffing crisis and the complexity of the issue. HMPPS statisticians define three main key grades of probation staff: band 3 probation service officers (PSO), band 4 probation officers (collectively known as probation practitioners), and band 5 senior probation officers (who line manage practitioners). Staff who are training to be a probation officer work as a PSO during their training, so a proportion of the PSOs in post will be working towards the professional probation officer qualification (PQiP).

As at 31 March 2023, there were 6,950 full-time equivalent (FTE) band 3 PSOs in post. This represents a welcome increase of 846 FTE (13.9 per cent) PSOs over the previous year. This was aided by a significant boost in recruitment in the first quarter of 2023 with an additional 741 PSOs in post. The main reason was a big increase in the number of probation officer trainees. On the same date there were 4,413 FTE band 4 probation officers in post. Conversely, this figure represents a slight decrease of 50 FTE (1.1 per cent) band 4 probation officers from 31 December 2022, with no improvement this year. Given the latest target headcount of 6,158, there is an overall national shortfall of 1,771 probation officers against this required staffing level, a vacancy rate of 29 per cent.

There were also 1,435 FTE band 5 senior probation officers in post on 31 March 2023. This represents a welcome increase of 186 (14.9 per cent) over the previous year and an increase of 70 (5.1 per cent) over the previous quarter.

Staffing levels vary substantially by region. **Chart 3** shows the overall vacancy rate for probation officer grades across all regions<sup>2</sup>. The vacancy rate ranges from 19.6 per cent in the West Midlands region to 31.8 per cent in Yorkshire and Humber and 34.9 per cent in London.

Chart 3: Probation officer vacancy rate by region, December 2022



<sup>1</sup> HMPPS Workforce Statistics Bulletin published on 18 May 2023 covering the period up to the end of March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Data from HMPPS workforce statistics annex probation officer recruitment until December 2022. All figures are full-time equivalents.

## Recruitment

A national HMPPS recruitment campaign resulted in there being 2,626 FTE staff in the process of doing the PQiP probation officer training as of 31 March 2023 (a jump of 659 on the previous quarter). The training programme lasts for 15 or 21 months (depending on previous education in criminology or similar subjects) so the date when trainees will qualify (if they are successful) varies.

In every region, there are more FTE staff training to be a probation officer than there are probation officer vacancies. Again, this varies by region. While the number of PQiPs is almost identical to the number of current probation officer vacancies in London (295 in training and 293 vacancies), there are almost three (2.7) PQiPs in training for every vacancy (321 in training and 120 vacancies) in the West Midlands. In analysing this data, it is important to note that the withdrawal rate<sup>3</sup> from PQiP training in 2021/2022 (the last year for which figures are available) was almost one in six (16 per cent).

## Retention

So far, the substantial increase in trainee probation officers has had a limited impact on overall staffing levels. One reason for this is that the number of staff leaving the service has also increased considerably. In the year to March 2023, 2,098 staff left the Probation Service, an increase of 10 per cent on the year before. The resignation rate for the Probation Service in the year to March 2023 was seven per cent, identical to the previous year. Resignation rates varied between bands; PSOs had the highest resignation rate at 9.7 per cent. The service is also losing its more experienced staff. Almost two-thirds (66 per cent) of the 359 probation officers who left the service in the year to March 2023 had five or more years' experience in the job.

## Sickness

Another factor adversely affecting staff workloads is the ever-growing number of days when staff are absent because of sickness. In the financial year 2022/2023, probation staff had an average of 12.7 days off work because of sickness per person, a slight improvement on the previous year's figure of 12.9 days. Sickness rates ranged from 10 days per year in the South West region to 16.7 days in London. Worryingly, for probation officers, over half (55 per cent) of the days lost to sickness in the 2022/23 financial year were as a result of mental health issues – up from 43 per cent in 2017, and a reflection of the stress that many staff feel themselves under.

## The experience on the ground

Managers in most PDUs told inspectors about their ongoing struggles with under-staffing, although in a sizeable minority of PDUs, particularly in more recent inspections, managers said that staffing levels were improving. Practitioners in three PDUs commented that caseloads were "*noticeably lower*" than when they were working for CRCs.

Several regions we inspected had invested considerable time and effort in recruitment campaigns, with varying success. While some areas had been successful in recruiting both qualified and trainee probation officers, others reported failed recruitment campaigns. A common problem was the high attrition rates for people applying for probation service officer roles in particular. Several PDUs commented that there had been a big drop-out rate in the period between an individual being short-listed and actually starting employment. Managers identified two main problems: delays in the regional resourcing model and a very

---

<sup>3</sup> The withdrawal rate refers to both those who have left a PQiP course and remained in HMPPS in a non-PQIP role and also those who have left HMPPS completely.

slow vetting process with potential appointees deciding to take up positions with other organisations instead of waiting "*for months*" to be able to start work in the Probation Service.

Retention of newly recruited staff was also an issue in some PDUs (Gwent reported that almost two-thirds of PSOs had left the job within a year of appointment, and Barking, Dagenham and Havering also reported high attrition rates for PQiP trainees). However, this was not universal – the East Midlands region, for example, retained 94 per cent of its PQiPs one year after recruitment.

Many PQiPs told our inspectors that they had found it difficult to learn the job and get good support from their colleagues for two main reasons. Firstly, those who qualified during the pandemic were often working and doing their training remotely; and, secondly, when they were in the office, there were fewer colleagues available to ask advice from. This was both because of the blended working arrangements, which meant that staff worked from home for part of week in every area, and because those who were present were extremely busy due to staff shortages and high workloads. But our inspectors were encouraged to see that there had been a substantial increase in face-to-face training since the end of the pandemic.

For all staff, the blended model (which is now the mainstream business model) means that the requirement to undertake all face-to-face supervision, in what is typically just three-days in the office, is pressurised and means that the opportunities to discuss cases with colleagues can be much reduced.

Some PDUs had also lost existing staff who did not want to return to face-to-face working as the pandemic restrictions ended and normal operating models were resumed.

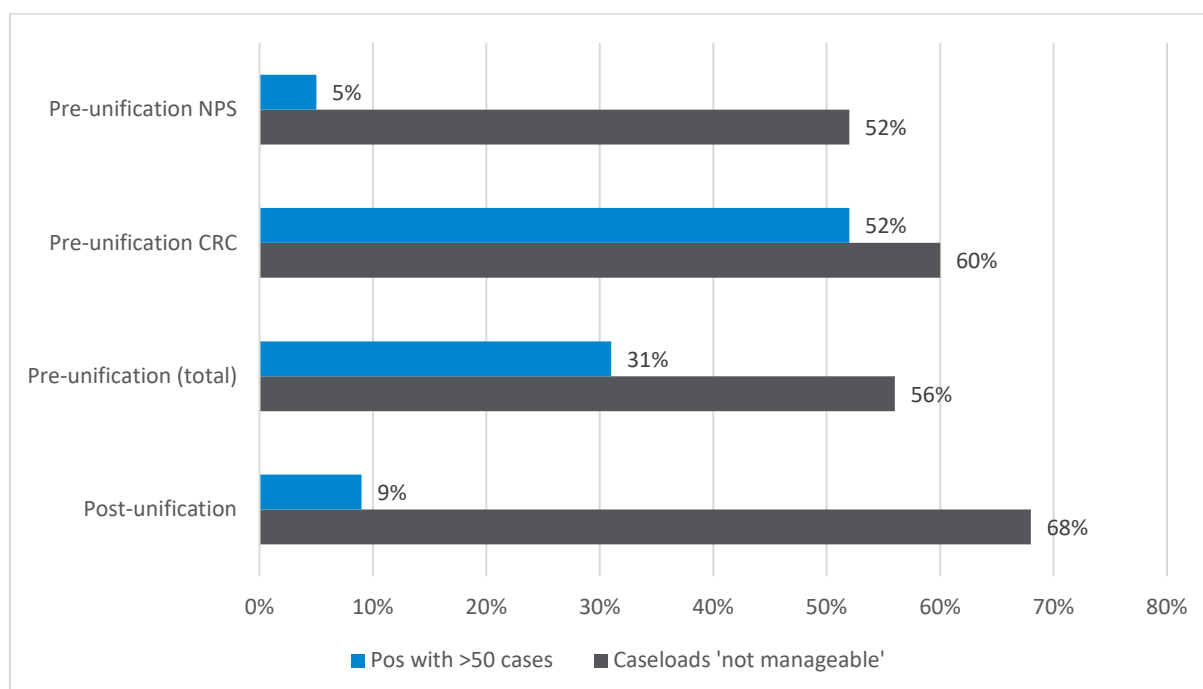
In addition to chronic shortages of probation officer staff, most regions told inspectors about high vacancy rates in administration teams.

## **Workloads**

A core element of our PDU inspections are our interviews with staff; we interviewed a total of 887 probation practitioners across the 31 PDUs covered in this annual report and asked all of them about their workloads. First, inspectors asked about the number of cases each FTE practitioner was responsible for. While over half (51 per cent) had caseloads of 40 or fewer – there was a sharp distinction between probation officer and PSO caseloads. Just under one in 10 (nine per cent) of the probation officers we interviewed since re-unification have had more than 50 cases. PSO caseloads were significantly larger – more than half (53 per cent) had more than 50 cases and 33 per cent of these more than 61. It was reassuring that just three per cent of trainee probation officers had caseloads of more than 40.

Average probation officer caseloads seem to have declined since re-unification, particularly for legacy CRC staff. Before re-unification, our inspections found that 52 per cent of CRC probation officers and 72 per cent of CRC PSOs had caseloads of over 50.

Chart 4: Probation officer workload perceptions



Despite these reduced caseloads (a significant reduction for former CRC staff), just one in 20 practitioners (five per cent) considered that their workload was *"very manageable"* and only a further third (34 per cent) rated their workload as *"quite manageable"*. A third (33 per cent) said their workload was *"not so manageable"* and more than a quarter (27 per cent) reported that it was *"not at all manageable"*. In spite of the apparent fall in caseloads, perceptions of 'manageability' seem to be declining – 68 per cent of probation officers and 62 per cent of PSOs rated their caseloads as being in one of these 'unmanageable' categories (though this was only 33 per cent for trainees who have capped caseloads). One reason for this may be because the nature of community-based practitioners' caseloads has changed since the OMiC reforms transferred responsibility for significant numbers of custody cases to probation staff working in prisons. As a result, while average caseload numbers may have fallen, the cases that do remain in each caseload are more likely to be in the community than in custody and will therefore require significantly more contact.

Although the data suggests that caseloads may be starting to fall, managers and staff in the majority of PDUs we inspected still talked about very high caseloads for some staff. These practitioners were working at well above their official workload limits, sometimes at 150 per cent or more of their target workload. Staff interviewed by inspectors talked about the stress caused by these high workloads:

*"I don't know if staff are coping. There is a lot of good will in teams which is the only thing that is holding us together. The standard of work has gone down a few notches, staff put in extra hours and some people have been very ill and this really concerns me. We're all on the same boat and if I go off sick my caseload would go to colleagues as well. We're all under the cosh together, and that keeps us going."*

West Kent PDU

*"Overtime is unavailable and (unpaid work) staff need to work evenings or weekends to sustain the workload."*

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland PDU

*“We hold the line, we know what the priorities are, and then we have people coming to us in tears, and then we have to decide, our job is to protect the public and victims but everything is a nuisance because things are different. We need to do the best job we can, and what is the priority, well that’s making sure our staff are well and we protect the public. We are the human face of the policy.”*

West Sussex PDU

*“Workload is massive, sometimes I feel that admin are not as appreciated as much as we should be, we do a massive amount of work which is over and above and we don’t get the recognition for that.”*

Gwent PDU

In recognition of the pressures caused by high staff vacancies and high caseloads, HMPPS introduced a prioritisation framework in January 2022, which enables some tasks to be paused or downgraded and for national standards to be suspended. Where staffing levels are at 70 per cent or less and workloads are over 120 per cent of target levels, regional directors can move their operations to ‘amber’ status. In more extreme conditions where staffing is at 60 per cent or less of target headcount in a PDU or region, the area can apply to the Chief Probation Officer for ‘red’ prioritisation status. This allows, for example:

- suspension of national standards
- suspension of face-to-face contacts with low and medium risk cases (except higher risk domestic abuse cases)
- pausing of routine OASys reviews and of contact in the last 12 weeks of an order for lower risk cases
- redeployment of OMiC staff back into the community and pausing of accredited programmes.

Across the 31 PDU inspections covered in this report, four were operating at ‘red’ status on the prioritisation framework at the time of inspection and 10 at amber status. This has inevitably had an impact on the quality of work we have seen in our individual case inspections (all four PDUs operating at red status were rated ‘Inadequate’). Inspectors are concerned about how long some PDUs have stayed at red or amber status and the long-term impact this has had on business-as-usual performance and on returning it to a satisfactory level. Many areas lacked a clear route map to take them back to ‘green’ and staff often felt uncomfortable about the sentence management tasks they were being asked to pause or deprioritise when in red or amber status (or else didn’t fully understand this). The implementation of the framework allowed important probation work not to be undertaken, and led to insufficient action being taken to tackle the real issues of insufficient staff levels, high workloads and inexperienced staff needing greater oversight and support. Some areas, for example Greater Manchester, had made a conscious decision not to apply the national prioritisation framework, but instead had developed their own more flexible arrangements. We found that, although there were still staffing challenges, staff there had a clear understanding of what they were required to deliver.

Staff in some areas said they prioritised OASys assessments because these were measured centrally, and that work supporting people on probation suffered as a result. Staff in another area had taken the opposite approach, deciding not to do time-consuming OASys assessments in an attempt to spend more time with people on probation.

## Oversight

In addition to the under-staffing of frontline roles, most areas also struggled with shortages of senior probation officers (SPOs), although national data suggests that there were 186 more SPOs in post on 31 March 2023 than in the previous year. Staff interviewed by our inspectors talked about SPOs being responsible for line managing large numbers of probation practitioners. They said that this led to a weakened 'first line of defence' against the mistakes that new and inexperienced practitioners could be making, and limited opportunities for reflective supervision and coaching.

This lack of oversight was borne out by our inspectors' views on the effectiveness of management oversight. In the 1,400 cases that they inspected across the 31 PDUs where that oversight was required, inspectors judged that it was effective in less than three out of 10 cases (29 per cent). It was judged to be 'insufficient, ineffective or absent' in the other 72 per cent of cases.

Examples of this lack of oversight shared with our inspectors included:

- SPOs signing off OASys assessments without reading them in depth
- SPOs not being available for consultation about important casework issues
- SPO post-holders changing frequently, and often only in post on an interim basis
- oversight focusing more on processes than quality.

However, the most serious concern was that staff supervision had become much less frequent. Staff in different PDUs reported that supervision might only take place every eight weeks. One court team said that formal supervision had not taken place in over a year.

SPOs themselves often told inspectors that it was difficult to juggle all their responsibilities; several said that their human resources commitments took a disproportionate amount of their working week. As a result, they were not available to probation practitioners as much as they would have liked.

## Conclusion

---

Probation performance will continue to be hampered until staffing levels improve and workloads fall. As we have seen, there are some hopeful signs of improvement. An increasing number of trainee and recently qualified probation officers have joined the service, and there is evidence that caseloads have fallen since re-unification.

Nevertheless, sickness levels remain high, and the fact that most staff regard their workloads as unmanageable demonstrates the impact that two major structural reorganisations and chronic under-staffing have had on the probation workforce.

To tackle this challenge, probation regions will need to support both long-established and new staff to retain them in post while new recruits join and the new structures bed in. There are some signs that a long-term pay award (worth an extra £5000 per year for probation officers and an extra £3500 for PSOs by 2024/2025) may be having an impact on attrition rates. But it appears that staff burn-out and stress, rather than pay, are the main reasons for experienced staff leaving the service; so we were pleased to see that the new (2023-2025) probation workforce strategy highlights the importance of promoting staff wellbeing and attracting and retaining talented people.

We now turn our attention to the extent to which probation staff are currently able to address the needs of people on probation.



## Chapter 3: The needs of people on probation

### Introduction

This chapter starts by presenting a detailed analysis of the needs of people on probation and the extent to which the Probation Service is currently meeting those needs. We then examine the implementation of the new Commissioned Rehabilitative Services arrangements, before presenting our findings on the operation of unpaid work and accredited programmes. We conclude this section by sharing the views of people on probation themselves.

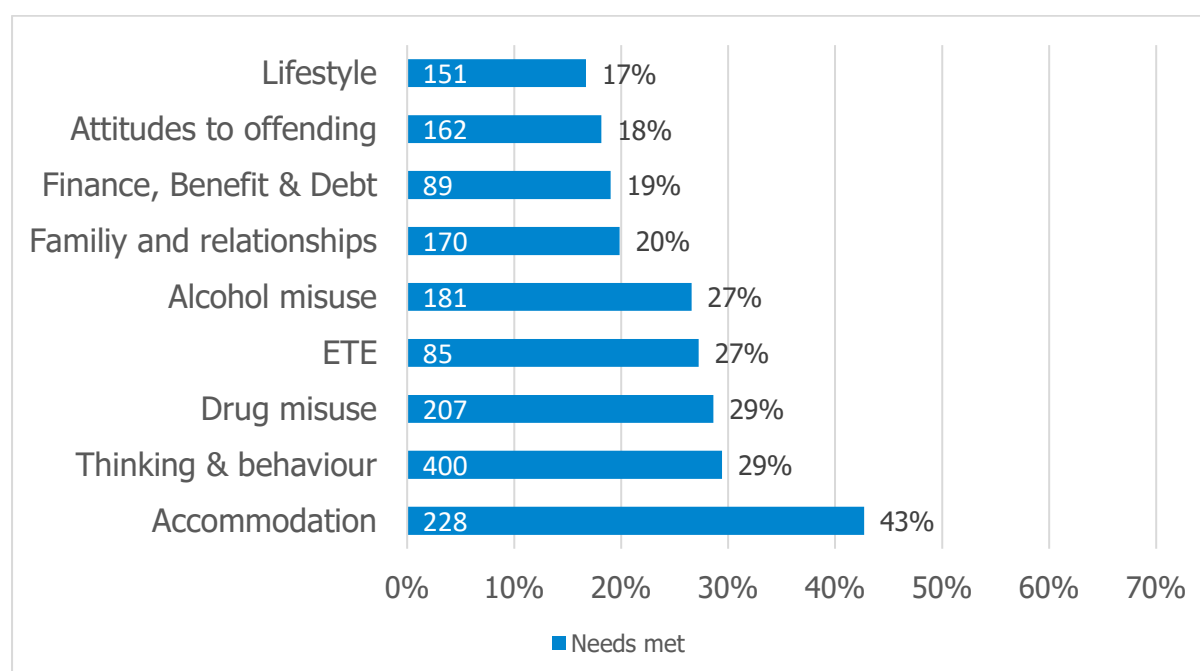
### Assessing and meeting needs

Our inspectors identify the most important factors linked to offending in every case they inspect from a list of nine derived from OASys. The average number of factors identified for each individual was four and a half. In addition to criminogenic factors, such as thinking and behaviour, lifestyle and attitudes to offending, substantial numbers of people on probation had needs relating to their drug misuse (48 per cent), alcohol misuse (45 per cent), housing (35 per cent) and debts (31 per cent).

The primary reason that inspectors identify needs in the cases they inspect is so they can check whether those needs are met or not. Chart 5 shows whether inspectors were satisfied that sufficient services were delivered for each of the factors identified in a particular case. It is important to remember that the majority of people on probation have multiple needs.

For needs relating to accommodation, inspectors noted that there were sufficient services in 43 per cent of cases. Those relating to lifestyle (sufficient in just 17 per cent cases) and attitudes to offending (18 per cent) were the least likely to be addressed.

Chart 5: Sufficient delivery against individual type of need (n = 1,509 cases inspected across 10 regions)

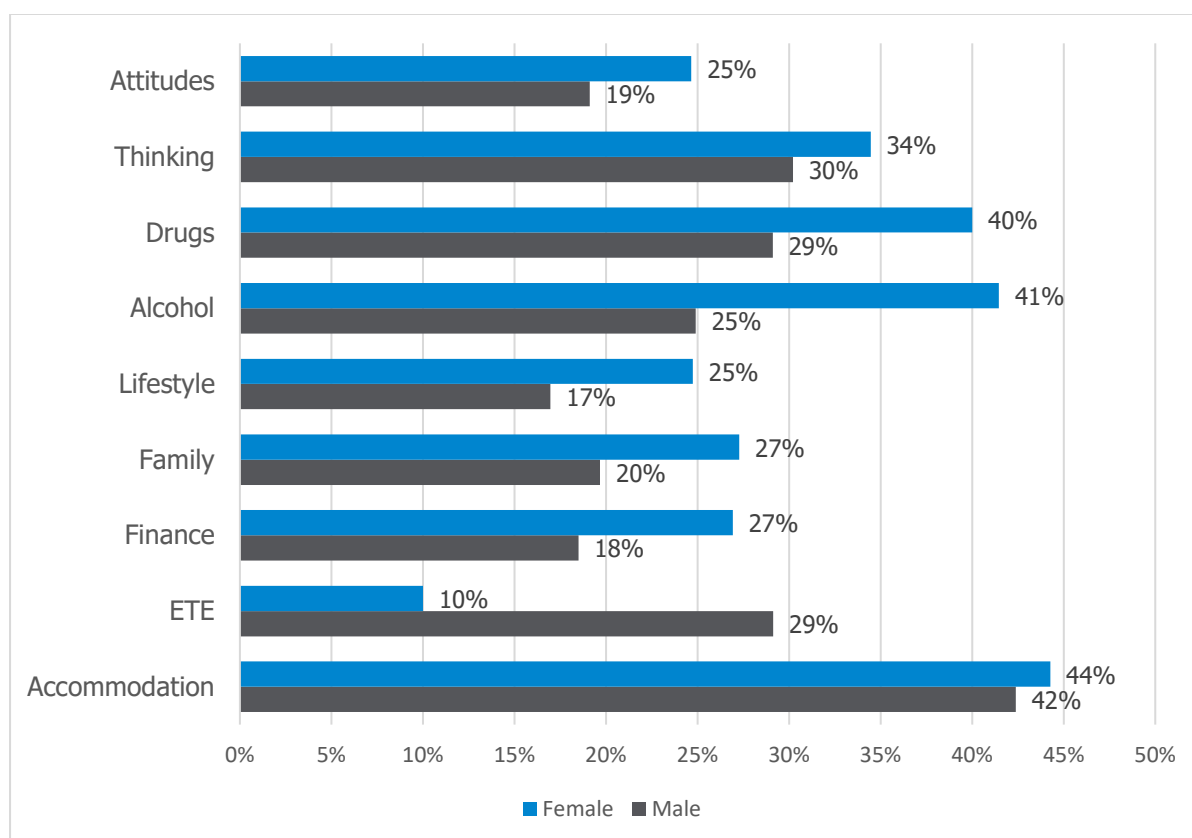


Note: ETE means education, training and employment.

## Needs by gender

Our inspectors found that women are more likely to have sufficient services to meet their needs for all factors with the exception of ETE.

Chart 6: Sufficient delivery against needs – comparison by gender



## Needs by ethnicity

In all our inspections, we record the ethnic background of the cases we inspect to identify any racial disparity in probation practice. To set the inspection findings in context, we now share the conclusions from our [thematic inspection of race equality in probation](#), published in September 2023. This was a follow-up to a [previous inspection](#) we undertook in 2021. Our inspectors found that, while senior leaders have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking the recommendations of our previous report forward, there has been limited progress in embedding effective practice or improving the satisfaction levels of minority ethnic staff.

In our thematic inspection inspectors specifically asked managers to identify cases where there had been good practice. But in the 50 cases we inspected there was still little evidence that probation staff had spoken with minority ethnic people on probation about their ethnicity, culture, religion, and experiences of discrimination, or planned interventions that were responsive to these diversity factors. People on probation confirmed this reluctance by probation practitioners to ask them about matters of faith and culture.

Data from our broader PDU inspection programme showed that assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery were worse for minority ethnic people on probation than for white people. Detailed figures are provided below. However, inspectors found no evidence of any disproportionality in the use of enforcement and breach.

In our thematic inspection sample, two-thirds of participants said that they had an effective and trusting relationship with their practitioner. But inspectors did not find much effective practice on race equality.

Probation services did not take a strategic approach to meeting the needs of minority ethnic people on probation. The number of services commissioned for black, Asian and minority ethnic people on probation had decreased, and probation practitioners had few links with organisations in the community that specifically support minority ethnic individuals' rehabilitation.

Disappointingly, there are few training programmes that enable practitioners to work effectively with people from different backgrounds, and it is rare for this to feature in reflective supervision with line managers.

The levels of dissatisfaction that inspectors found among many minority ethnic staff were concerning, although there were some improvements in the scores on our staff survey. Inspectors heard some distressing accounts from individuals of poor management, discrimination, concerns ignored, and lack of encouragement to progress. Our survey found that few minority ethnic staff were consulted or provided with support when allocated cases of racially motivated offenders.

HMPPS has still not agreed revised grievance procedures and we found that many minority ethnic staff are fearful of raising their concerns. Those who do raise grievances are invariably dissatisfied with the outcome.

More positively, there have been improvements in the number of minority ethnic staff moving into middle management positions, and there are positive examples of managers creating a more inclusive culture. Promising new training programmes have been developed for managers.

There is better data available to service managers on disproportionality in staffing and service delivery, and this now needs to be turned into information for action. Addressing race equality is not a quick fix, but we would like to see HMPPS prioritise and expedite progress in this area.

Turning back to our PDU inspections data, our inspectors found that delivery against needs varied considerably depending on the ethnic group of the person on probation. The data reveals a mixed picture. In terms of services delivered primarily by Commissioned Rehabilitative Services or other external providers, black people were substantially less likely to have their alcohol and drug misuse needs met than their white British counterparts. People of mixed ethnic backgrounds were most likely to have their accommodation, ETE and finance, benefit and debt needs met than all other ethnic groups. Asian people were much less likely to have their accommodation needs met than any other ethnic group.

In terms of delivery against needs by offender managers, black people were less likely to have needs related to family and relationships, lifestyle, thinking and behaviour, and attitudes to offending met than white people. Asian people were more likely to have their alcohol, thinking and behaviour, and attitudes to offending needs addressed than any other ethnic group.

## Outcomes

Up until now, our inspection framework has focused on the quality of professional practice by services and individual practitioners. We focus on this in the hope that it will in turn result in better real-life outcomes for the people under probation supervision. So, since re-unification we have started to track the outcomes achieved by people on probation during the first months of their supervision by the service. This included reoffending and ETE status at the start of their order/period of licence and at the point of inspection six months or so later, given the links between these factors and future re-offending (though we recognise that genuine desistance from offending may take much longer to achieve or measure).

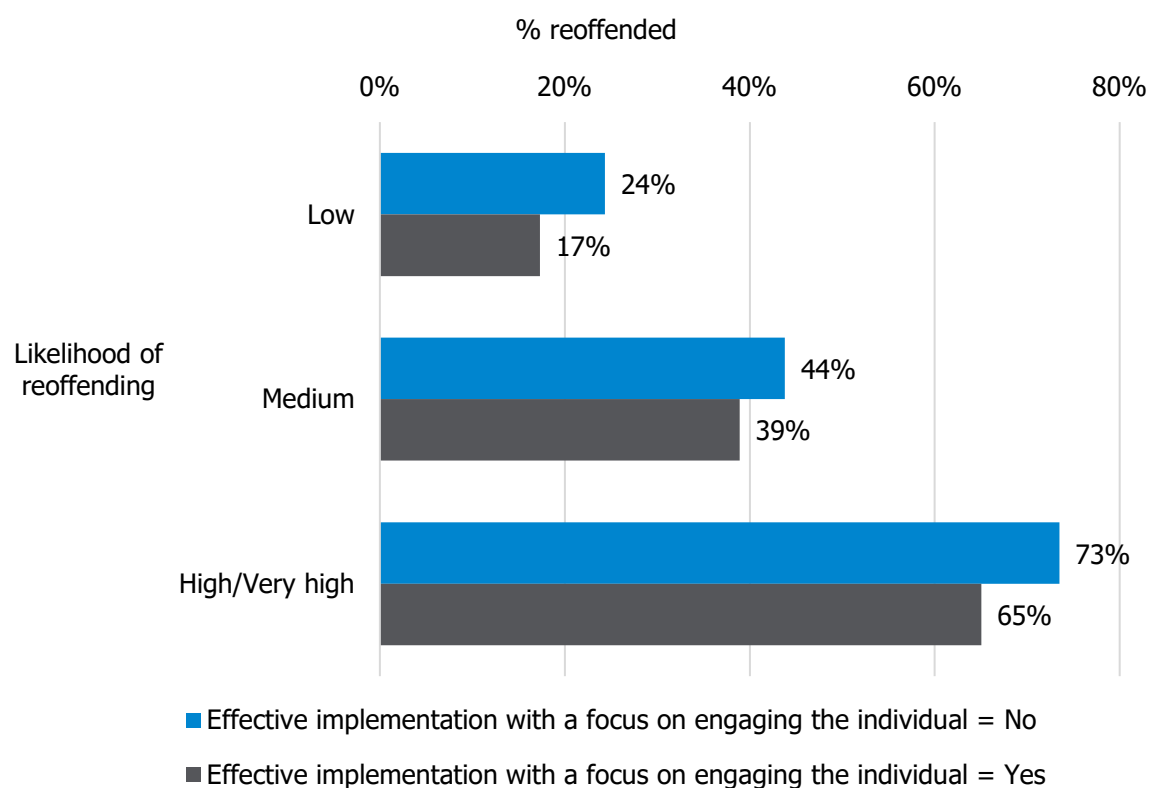
We have also invested in analysis and research which proves that when probation is done well, it has a significant impact on reoffending rates, reducing them by 14 percentage points. We provide more information about this research in the box below:

In a Research and Analysis Bulletin published in August 2023, we examine the relationships between inspectors' judgements on the quality of delivery and later output/outcome measures in the form of sentence completion and proven reoffending.

In order to assess reoffending outcomes (which can only be ascertained two years after the start of a supervisory period), this study examined 3,308 cases inspected between June 2018 and June 2019, covering all of the then 21 CRCs and the seven NPS divisions.

The analysis revealed independently significant associations between inspectors' judgements on the quality of implementation/delivery and both sentence completion and proven reoffending. In those cases where our inspectors judged that the delivery both engaged the person on probation and supported their desistance, the sentence completion rate was 24 percentage points higher and the reoffending rate was 14 percentage points lower compared with those cases where both judgements were negative.

Chart 7: Binary reoffending by effective implementation (and likelihood of reoffending level)



For those who had reoffended, we also found reductions in the frequency of reoffending when probation delivery was of a high-quality nature. Reductions rather than total cessation can be more realistic for those with the most entrenched offending histories and behaviours.

We intend to repeat this analysis with cases supervised by the re-unified Probation Service and include these additional methodological refinements.

Nevertheless, the overall message is clear – when probation officers are given the time and resources to perform to the full extent of their abilities, there are substantial gains for the individual on supervision and for the wider public, significantly reducing the number of future victims of crime.

## Accommodation outcomes

We found limited change in people's accommodation status over the period that we inspect in our local case assessments (generally the first six months or so of probation supervision from the point of initial assessment). While the proportion of people who are homeless fell from six per cent to four per cent over the course of their supervision, so did the number of people in settled accommodation (from 70 per cent to 68 per cent).

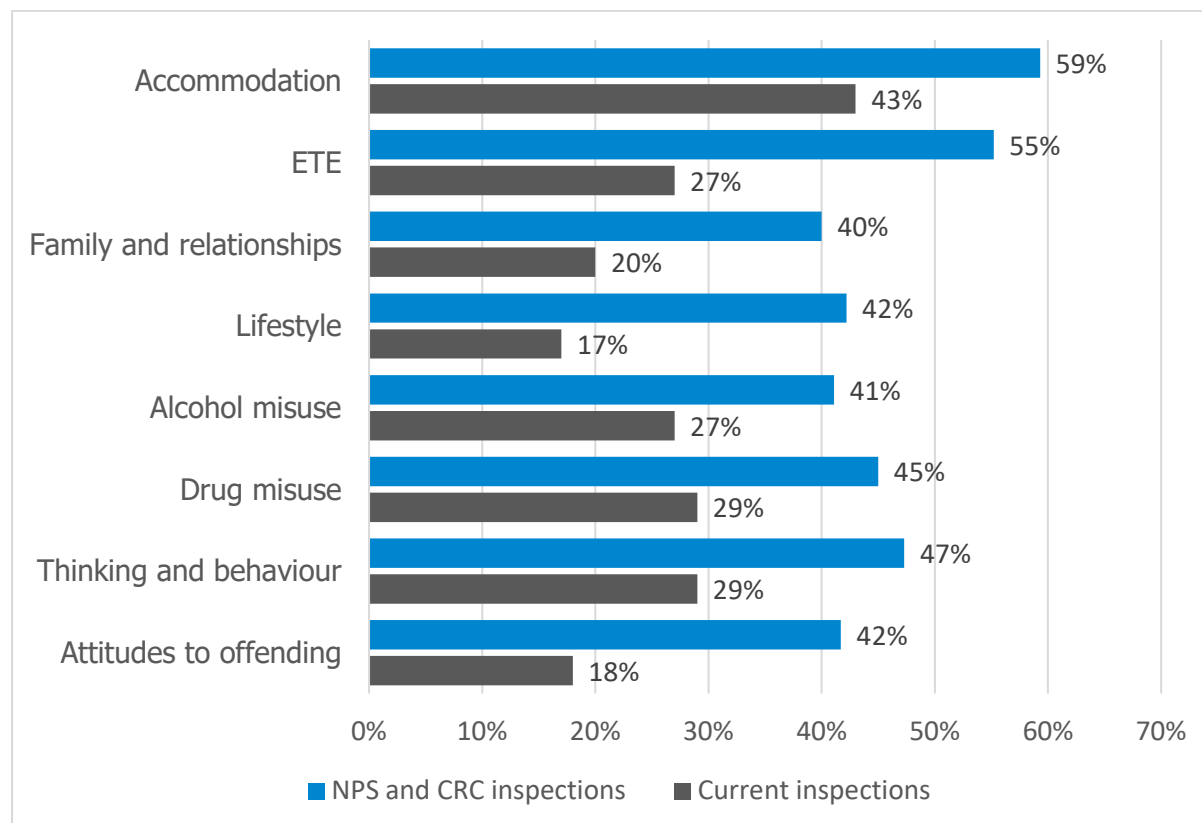
## Employment, training and education outcomes

Our inspection sample suggests that the Probation Service is being more successful in helping people into work, training and education. The proportion of people in full time employment increased from 25 per cent to 28 per cent during the course of supervision and there were also smaller increases in the number of people in part-time work, and in part-time education.

## Declining performance in meeting needs

To track whether the Probation Service's performance in meeting the needs of people on probation has improved in the past year, we compared inspection data from the core inspections of the re-unified Probation Service with the data from the same areas gathered in the last round of CRC and NPS inspections under the *Transforming Rehabilitation* framework. It is concerning to report that the re-unified Probation Service is currently less successful at meeting every kind of need than the much-criticised split Probation Service. Chart 8 below compares the extent to which different areas of needs were met both before and after re-unification. It is unclear how big a part the pandemic, the re-unification process and recording issues play in these figures.

Chart 8 - Sufficient delivery against needs pre- and post-unification



## Commissioned Rehabilitative Services

Since July 2021, the Ministry of Justice has invested £195 million in Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), designed to provide vital support services to people on probation. CRS contracts have been awarded for a range of services (addressing several of the areas of need discussed above). They include employment and housing advice, wellbeing services, and specific support for women. Over 100 contracts have been awarded, some at a probation regional level and others at local police force level<sup>4</sup>. Referrals to these new services have varied considerably across different PDUs and for different types of service. Referrals in some areas (particularly for housing advice) have been between 150 and 200 per cent higher than forecast. In other areas, referral volumes have been very low, particularly for wellbeing services.

In their conversations with inspectors, both probation practitioners and CRS providers highlighted teething problems with the new system, which persisted for some time. Although both parties said that there has been substantial progress recently, they agree that there remain problems in the 'refer and monitor' process by which CRS interventions are accessed, in particular how updated case information is shared following the initial referral.

Other issues brought to our attention were a lack of direct access to housing for people on probation (most services can only provide advice and support); a lack of rapid intervention for those in immediate need; and, in some areas, a resistance from probation practitioners to refer to services. One particular concern for senior managers was the lack of data on outcomes to inform future commissioning.

While there is potentially a hugely positive role for the voluntary sector in partnership with probation, a number of key issues need addressing for this to be realised. These include:

- more clarity about the respective roles of probation staff and statutory and CRS practitioners
- a fuller and prompter exchange of information by both parties
- a commissioning framework that gives local service leaders much more flexibility and autonomy to meet the specific, local needs of their caseloads
- a focus on real, practical and measurable outcomes rather than merely signposting people on probation to services that might be able to help them.

We saw relatively little true partnership working and we consider that strong relationships and collaboration are essential to ensure that people on probation receive access to the full range of services they need. Revitalising partnership working between probation and CRS staff is key to improving this situation. Our inspectors have found that co-locating probation and CRS staff is often the single most important factor that contributes to better partnership working, and we hope to see more co-located services in our future inspections.

## Unpaid work

Unpaid work, also known as 'community payback', is a sentence requirement that the courts can include in community orders and suspended sentence orders, and should be completed within 12 months. The main purpose of unpaid work is to provide punishment and reparation. The person on probation works on projects that benefit the community and that give them an opportunity to develop life and vocational skills that support desistance.

Backlogs in the delivery of unpaid work remain a challenge for all the probation regions we inspected, as they continue to recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic when

---

<sup>4</sup> Commissioning arrangements are different in Greater Manchester and London.

almost all unpaid work was suspended. The impact of the pandemic was felt for a long time after the national lockdowns had ended. For example, the restrictions on transporting people on probation in vans to unpaid work were not lifted until March 2022. We have continued to find significant backlogs in unpaid work; for example, in some PDUs we found that almost half of unpaid work hours were outstanding beyond 12 months. However, we have seen that regions are making efforts to reduce these backlogs.

The size of the challenge faced by unpaid work staff should not be under-estimated. All probation regions have increased the output of unpaid work to pre-pandemic levels, but most have struggled to make significant inroads into these backlogs. This task has been exacerbated by high rates of staff vacancies. In some regions, an increase in unpaid work requirements made by the courts has put services under additional pressure. Our primary concern is the high number of unpaid work requirements that are not being completed within the 12 month period stipulated by law (unless the court agrees to extend).

In some areas inspectors found that poor enforcement practice meant that many orders that should have been taken back to court because of non-compliance were still active, taking up unnecessary resources.

A number of strategies have been adopted at national and regional level to try to make progress. These have included:

- a national drive to recruit 500 unpaid work staff in the summer of 2022
- bulk listing of cases to obtain court extensions past the 12 month limit for uncompleted orders (across the country)
- a renewed focus on enforcement to encourage people on probation to comply with their unpaid work requirements
- improved data management systems (London and North East regions)
- the national roll-out of the Community Campus initiative which allows people on unpaid work to engage in ETE and have this formally recorded directly on NDelius, the Probation Service's case management system.

## Accredited programmes

Accredited programmes – also known as offending behaviour programmes – aim to change the thinking, attitudes and behaviours that may lead people to reoffend. Most programmes are delivered in groups but there is provision for one-to-one interventions. They include programmes to address:

- specific offences – such as sexual offending and domestic violence
- general patterns of offending behaviour
- offending related to substance misuse.

The pandemic restrictions affected the delivery of accredited programmes for the same reasons that they caused a backlog in unpaid work, principally that social distancing requirements precluded the delivery of face-to-face groupwork except in much smaller groups. As with unpaid work, these restrictions were lifted at a much later date than those in other sectors. Pre-pandemic forms of delivery were only fully re-established in April 2022.

Tackling the backlog was made more difficult because of staff vacancies. The scale of the backlog can be seen by looking at typical figures for one region, where the completion rate was only 27 per cent for sexual offending accredited programmes and 17 per cent for other programmes in the 12 months before inspection. In this region, in 62 per cent of all cases



requiring an accredited programme, the intervention had not commenced at the time our inspection was announced.

Again, areas had adopted different approaches to try to tackle this backlog, including:

- a national drive to recruit 300 programmes staff in the summer of 2022
- reviewing all cases where an accredited programme was unlikely to be completed before an order ended and instead directing individuals to one of five newly agreed shorter structured interventions<sup>5</sup>. Where compliance was an issue or where there were specific individual needs, toolkits<sup>6</sup> were offered as an alternative, delivered by the offender manager (London)
- 'surgeries' delivered by interventions staff to advise practitioners of the options available when requirements cannot be delivered (East of England)
- the introduction of peer mentors to support compliance rates (also East of England)
- the Thinking Skills programme is now in a rolling format to maximise the number of people starting it (North East).

While a good range of domestic abuse interventions are available, in practice we have found little delivery of structured interventions. The Probation Service has not carried out a comprehensive analysis to understand what delivery volume should be expected. On the Building Better Relationships (BBR) programme, oversight at a national level is less clear than oversight at a regional level (where programme managers do monitor the volume of delivery). As a consequence, we have not been able to establish the proportion of people on probation with a requirement for BBR who complete this. For our domestic abuse thematic inspection, we obtained details of all 6,723 BBR requirements made between 21 June 2021 and 30 September 2022. As at 09 November 2022, a total of 3,287 of these men had started the BBR programme. The remaining waiting list comprised 2,757 men, as 679 had been taken off the list for other reasons. Of these, 489 (18 per cent) had already waited over 52 weeks to start the programme. By 09 November 2022, a total of 594 of the BBR requirements that had started had been terminated, 187 (31 per cent) because they had successfully completed the requirement, and 407 for a range of other reasons, including revocation of their order or licence (245) or activation of a suspended sentence order (95).

## The views of people on probation

A new addition to our inspection methodology has been an increased emphasis on the views of people on probation. Since March 2022, we have commissioned [User Voice](#) to seek the views of people on probation in every local inspection to inform our findings and recommendations. User Voice does this through both surveys and one-to-one interviews. Between March 2022 and January 2023, it gathered the views of 1,353 people on probation in the PDUs we inspected. In our summary below, we include both analysis of the views of this cohort of people on probation and direct quotes from interviews. We do not attribute quotes to individuals, but do state the PDU where they were being supervised.

---

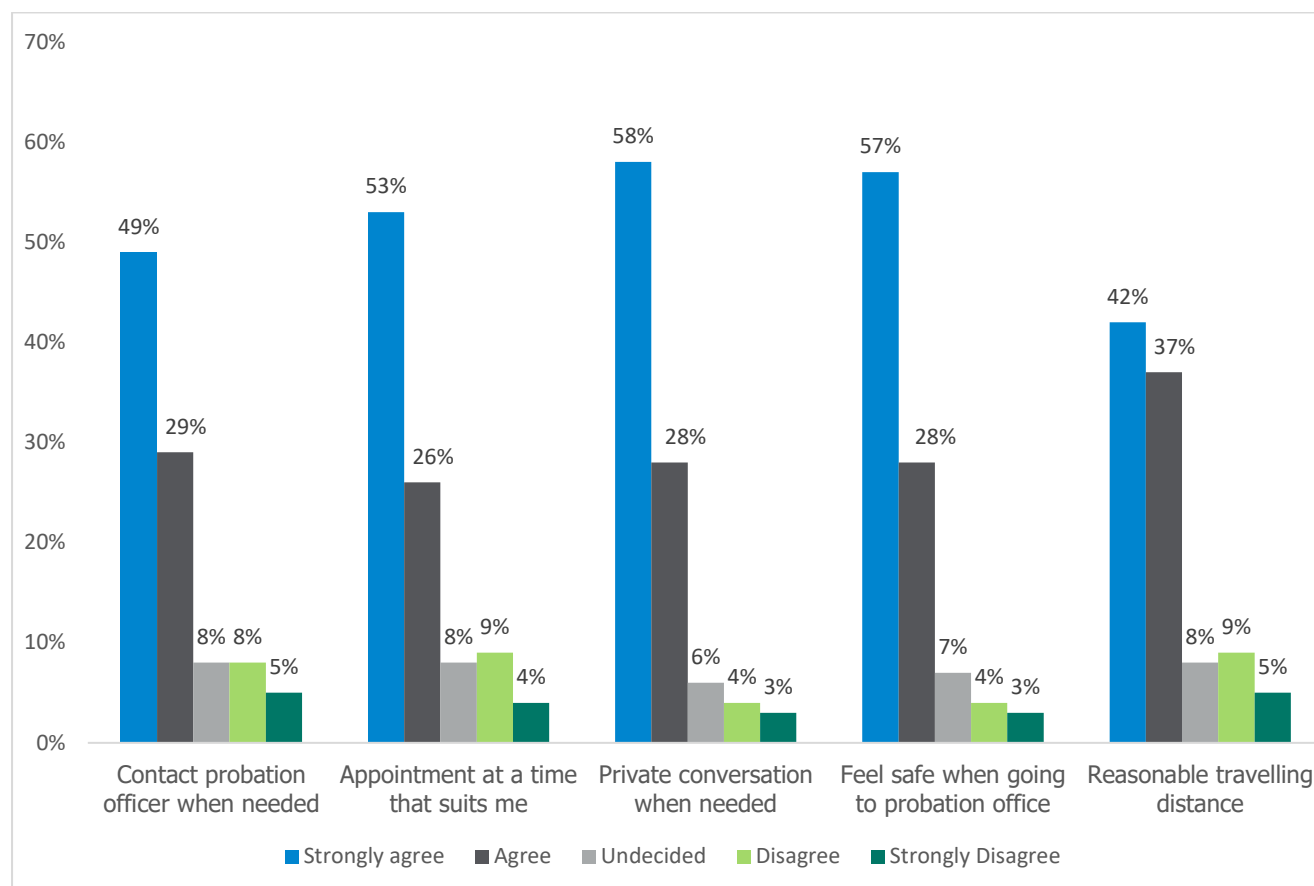
<sup>5</sup> Structured interventions are rehabilitative interventions with a consistent delivery model for lower risk individuals not suitable for an accredited programme. They are aligned to need and address broadly similar issues to the accredited programmes.

<sup>6</sup> Toolkits are formally approved exercises with practitioner guidance and participant worksheets.

## Access to probation

In terms of the basic operation of their supervision, most of the people on probation consulted by User Voice agreed that they were able to contact their probation officer when needed, have an appointment time that suited them, speak to their probation officer in private, and felt safe when accessing the probation office. Most also found that the location of supervision appointments, courses or support were within a reasonable travelling distance. Chart 9 shows the data in full.

Chart 9: Satisfaction levels with basic access to probation (n = 1353)



*"They are really easy to contact and always manage to fit appointments around my time schedule, especially if I am late for reasons beyond my control."*

North and North East Lincolnshire

*"I do now as my PO tailors my appointments to my needs. He knows I suffer with anxiety so doesn't give me an appointment at a busy time for example."*

Sheffield

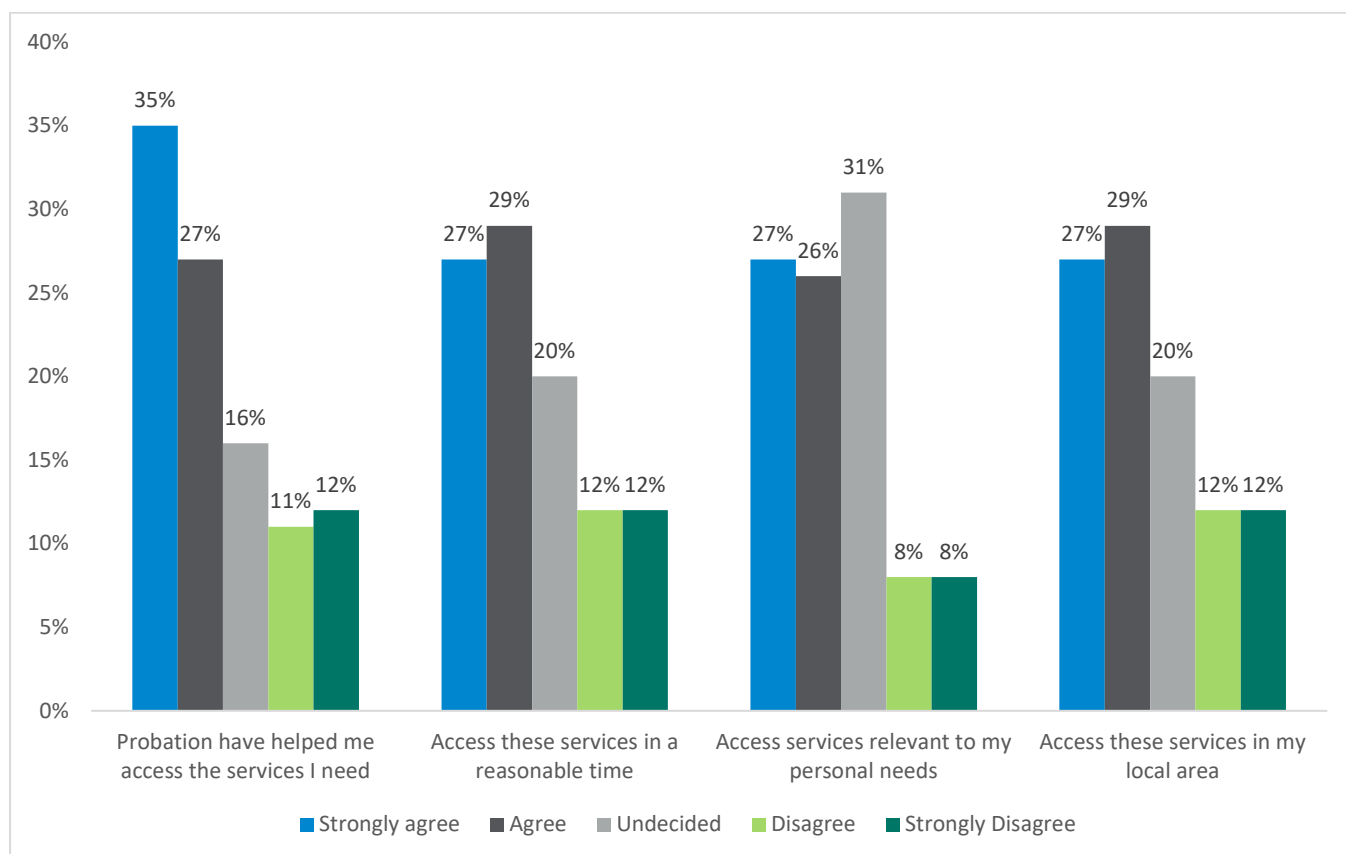
*"It takes me more than an hour to get here and costs me over £6.00. They often keep me waiting for ages after my appointment time, but I am not allowed to be late otherwise I get marked as absent. One rule for them and another for me."*

Ealing and Hillingdon

## Access to services

People on probation were also asked whether probation helped them to access the services they needed, with additional questions about whether those services were relevant to their personal needs, were local and could be accessed within a reasonable time. On this important issue, views were still positive but not to the same extent. More than six out of 10 people (64 per cent) said that the Probation Service had helped them access the services they needed. Over half (56 per cent) of people on probation said that they could access services in a reasonable time, with similar proportions saying that the services were relevant to them personally (54 per cent) and were in their local area (56 per cent). Chart 10 shows the data in full.

Chart 10: Satisfaction levels with access to services (n = 1353)



*"Oh god, plenty. I've been to the SYAS and some wellbeing service. The wellbeing one was fantastic; I got a sort of lifestyle coach and support to have days out myself, which is amazing as I'm a full time carer and hardly ever have any time to myself."*

Birmingham North East and Solihull

*"Actually, they did. As part of my sentence I had to get a mental health assessment and treatment for PTSD. It was a really long wait to start my CBT course and my PO got me 8 or 10 group sessions that helped with anxiety and depression."*

Essex North

*"No. I need help with mental health and with housing but they ain't done anything. Just write it down and nothing ever happens."*

Barking, Dagenham and Havering

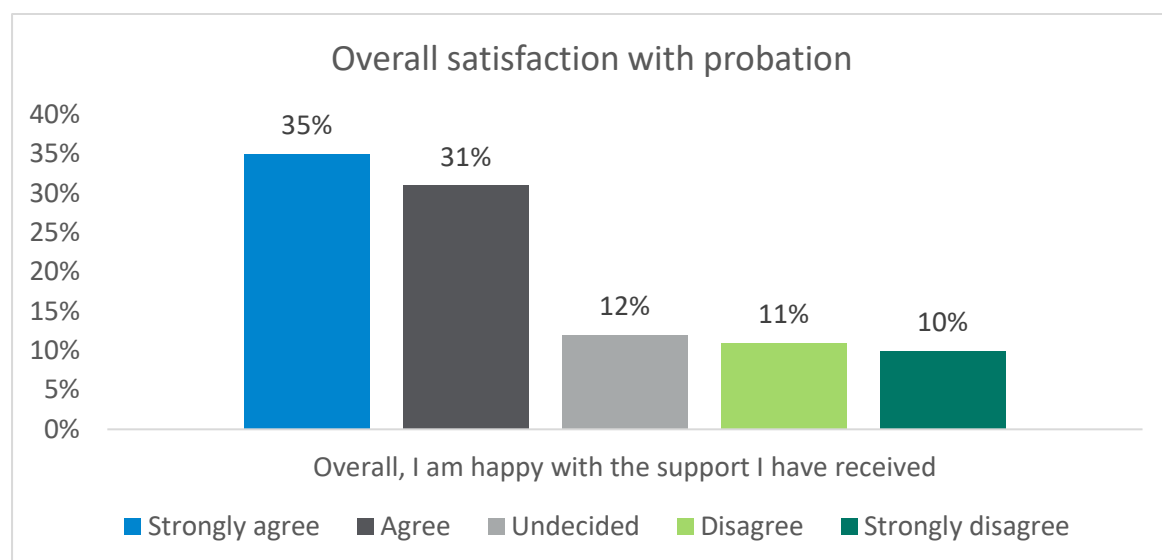
## Views on supervision

People on probation were also asked what was good, if anything, about their probation experience. Nearly three out of 10 people (29 per cent) said there had been no positives about being on probation. However, over four in 10 (42 per cent) cited their relationship with their probation officer and approximately one in six (16 per cent) found their appointments positive.

Conversely, those consulted were also asked what their biggest issue was while on probation. Just over a third (34 per cent) said that nothing could be improved, but the two most significant areas of complaint were appointments (20 per cent) and their relationship with their probation officer (15 per cent).

When asked for their overall views on whether they were happy with the support they received from probation, almost two-thirds (66 per cent) agreed<sup>7</sup>, with just under a quarter (22 per cent) disagreeing<sup>8</sup>. **Chart 11** shows the data in full.

Chart 11 – Overall satisfaction levels with probation (n=1353)



*“Probation has been really supportive of me and I’m so glad to have them. I was really worried about my future and probation continue to help me keep calm and focus on the future not the past.”*

Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough

*“I had a domestic violence offence and probation helped me to understand my behaviour.”*

Hull and East Riding

*“No, does it sound like I’ve had anything positive? I’d be better going back to prison cos at least I would have a roof, food, and my meth script.”*

Birmingham North East and Solihull

<sup>7</sup> This figure combines those who strongly agreed and agreed with the statement.

<sup>8</sup> This figure combines those who strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement.

## Co-production

Less than half of people agreed<sup>9</sup> (46 per cent) that they had been asked for their views about being on supervision. Just over four out of 10 (40 per cent) disagreed,<sup>10</sup> with the remaining 14 per cent undecided.

*"I am currently involved in the Engaging People on Probation Service user consultations. I have been going since November and have had 2 meetings. Have been able to discuss things we would like to see changed and this has been received very well."*

Hull and East Riding

*"Yes. The procedure is clear on the wall, my PO said I could always talk to her about it, or another member of staff if it was about her. But honestly, nothing has ever come close to a situation like that."*

Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough

*"Ah man, to complain and get it up the ranks to the senior person who can do something is a joke, it never happens. You speak to the receptionist and they say they pass concerns on, but I know it doesn't go anywhere."*

Lambeth

*"What like can I have input into decisions that probation make? No way, why would they care what I say, I'm the problem in their eyes."*

Staffordshire and Stoke

---

<sup>9</sup> This figure combines those who strongly agreed and agreed with the statement.

<sup>10</sup> This figure combines those who strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement.

## Chapter 4: Public protection and risk of harm

---

### Assess, Protect and Change

The over-riding purpose of the Probation Service is reflected in its tagline 'Assess, Protect and Change'. These three elements are inter-linked, and we recognise that the challenge for probation practitioners is to establish a positive and empathetic relationship with the person they are supervising, while at the same time being willing and able to challenge behaviour and recognise feigned compliance through the exercise of professional curiosity. When staff get this right, they are able to achieve a balanced approach that both protects the public and supports individual's in their journey from criminal behaviour to desistance.

Quite naturally, it is the 'protecting the public' function of the probation role that is regarded as the most important by both the government and members of the public. The sad reality is that almost the only times that the Probation Service gets into the news is when public protection fails and people under probation supervision commit very serious further offences. This year, we carried out dedicated independent investigations into the murders perpetrated by Damien Bendall and Jordan McSweeney, who were both under probation supervision at the time of their offences.

As the Chief Inspector has already emphasised, it is this area of practice that is our biggest concern. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the Probation Service's current performance in protecting the public.

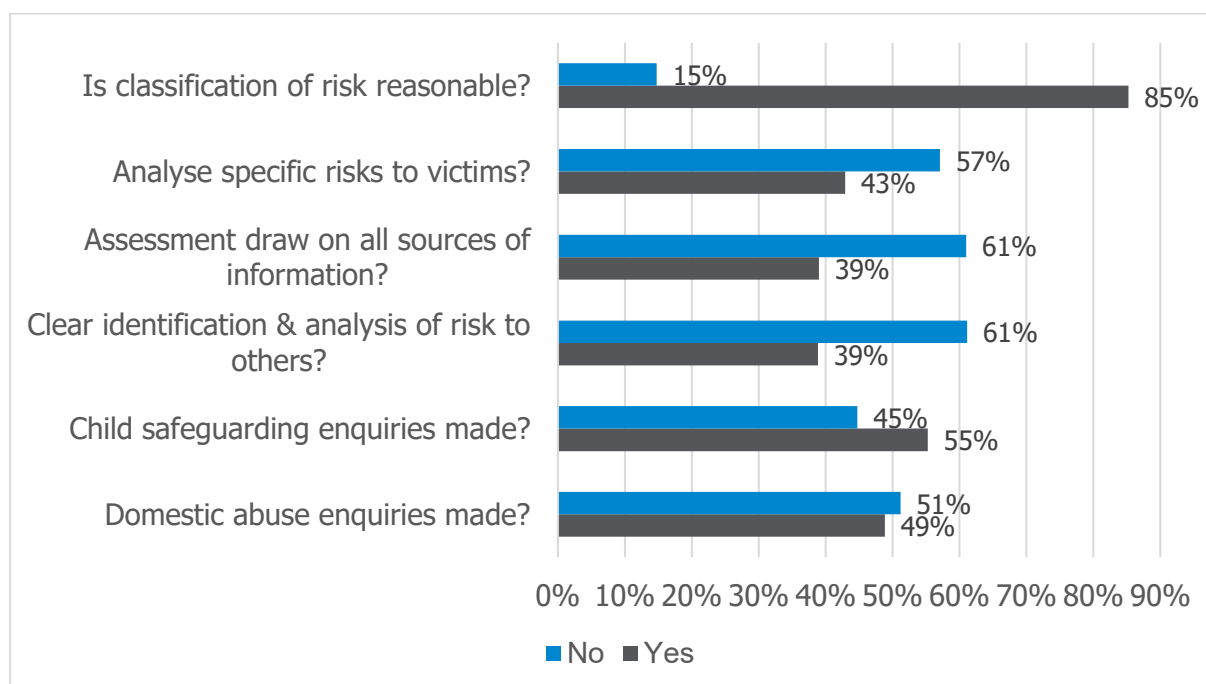
### Risk of serious harm

Over recent years, inspectors have highlighted the Probation Service's failure to accurately assess and robustly manage potential risks of serious harm from people on probation on a consistent basis. This was already the weakest area of performance before the pandemic, and has deteriorated further since re-unification. We have rated a large majority (67 per cent) of the individual cases we inspected as insufficient in this respect, and the picture is even worse for medium risk cases. This is particularly important as more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of the murders committed by people on probation are perpetrated by those assessed as low or medium risk.

### Assessment of risk

In our inspections of case supervision, we ask a range of questions at the assessment stage to determine whether that assessment focuses sufficiently on keeping other people safe. These include whether domestic abuse and child safeguarding enquiries were made and whether the assessment identified and analysed clearly any risk of harm to others. **Chart 12** shows that where inspectors judged that these enquiries needed to be made by the probation practitioner, child safeguarding enquiries were carried out in 55 per cent of cases, domestic abuse enquiries were only carried out in 49 per cent of cases and risk of harm was only properly addressed in 39 per cent.

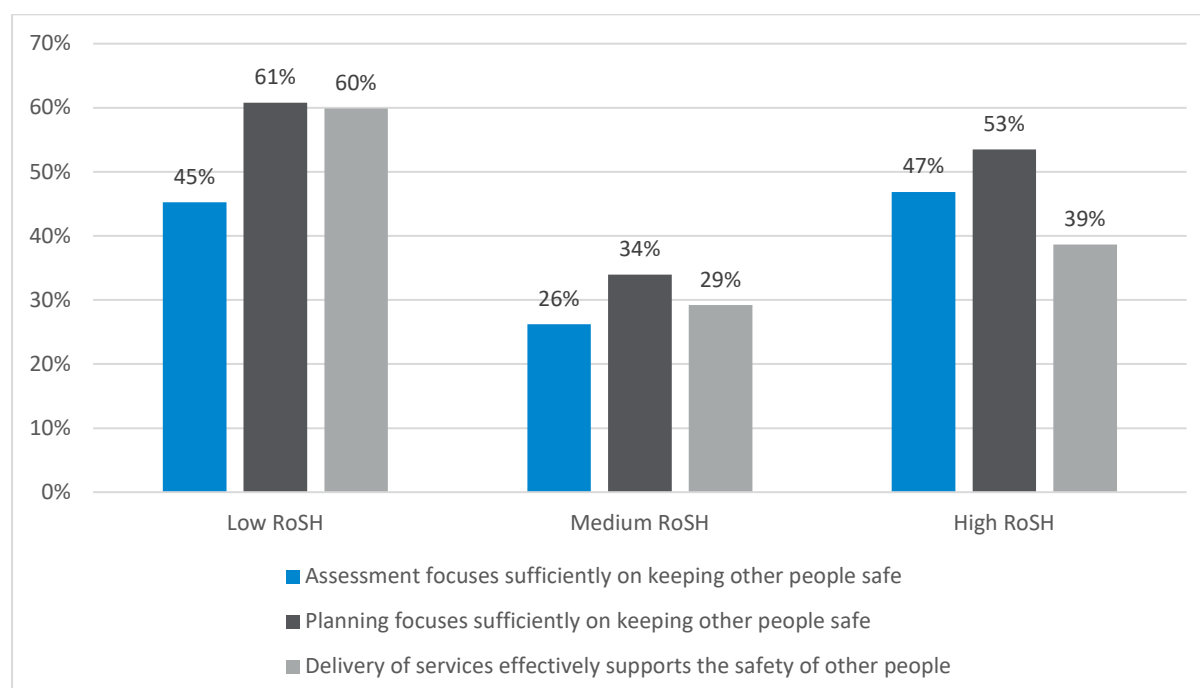
Chart 12: Assessment – keeping other people safe (n=1,509)



Appropriate assessment of risk of harm is of course only the first stage in the process designed to protect the public. Our inspectors found that having failed to undertake rigorous assessment in a majority of cases, practitioners' poor performance persisted through the other stages of supervision. Inspectors judged that supervision plans did not focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe in a majority (58 per cent) of cases. They also found that practitioners failed to implement and deliver services that supported the safety of other people effectively in almost two thirds (65 per cent) of cases.

As we have mentioned, inspectors were particularly concerned about the poor quality of risk assessment and management for people on probation who were designated as medium risk of serious harm. **Chart 13** below shows that work relating to public protection was least likely to be judged effective for this group of people at all three case supervision stages (assessment, supervision and implementation/delivery). For those classified as medium risk, inspectors judged that work which focused on protecting the public was inadequate in a large majority of cases at all three stages. Assessments were not to the required standard in almost three-quarters of cases (74 per cent), planning was inadequate in two-thirds (66 per cent) and the delivery of supervision itself was sub-standard in three quarters of cases (71 per cent).

Chart 13: Protecting the public – performance split by risk of serious harm (RoSH) – percentage of cases that reached a sufficient quality standard on risk related key questions (n = 1,509)



The staffing shortages that we discussed in chapter 2 are part of the reason for this poor performance in assessing and managing risk. Large caseloads mean that probation practitioners are struggling to dedicate sufficient time to each case; in the same way over-worked senior probation officers lack the time to review every case fully and provide the support and supervision that practitioners need.

Inspectors found that, in addition to not carrying out the required public protection enquiries (in relation to domestic abuse and child protection) in so many cases, practitioners, perhaps through a lack of time, often focused solely on the individual's most recent conviction when assessing risk. Consequently, past evidence of risk, such as violence against previous partners or evidence of weapon use or gang membership was being missed.

Worryingly, despite the new structures bedding in and some increases in staffing levels, we have seen no improvements in public protection performance in our PDU inspections over the last 18 months.

## Serious Further Offences

The reason that we focus so much on risk of serious harm is that poor practice can lead to tragic consequences. In every case where a person on probation commits a serious violent or sexual offence (of which there are around 500 reports each year), the Probation Service is required to undertake a formal review to investigate the quality of probation supervision up to the point of the serious offence. The review must also identify any learning to reduce the chance of a similar offence happening again. Since 2021, we have inspected the quality of 20 per cent of these Serious Further Offence (SFO) reviews undertaken by the Probation Service. In June this year, we published our [second annual report](#) dedicated to this audit process, in which we reported on the quality of 86 SFO reviews that we quality-assured between April 2022 and April 2023.

Compared with last year's findings (April 2021 – April 2022), we have seen a decline in the overall quality of these reviews. The proportion of SFO reviews rated 'Requires



improvement' or 'Inadequate' has increased from 31 per cent to 47 per cent, and the proportion given a composite rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' has fallen from 69 per cent in 2021-2022 to 52 per cent this year.

It is critical that these reviews are of the highest standard to generate learning to reduce the number of future SFOs by people under probation supervision. Inspectors found that from the quality assurance feedback, it was clear that rigorous internal countersigning was not being completed to a sufficient standard in the probation region before the SFO review was submitted for quality assurance.

We also had some concerns about the grade and independence of those undertaking this work. Senior probation officers tasked with undertaking these reviews told us that they would sometimes have liked to explore management and policy issues at a more senior level, but did not feel empowered to do so. They expressed concern that their ability to scrutinise and potentially criticise the practice of their own senior leaders could be limited by their own role, grade and links to the region concerned. We recommended that greater independence within the SFO review process and a more senior grade of reviewer might bring greater and more robust challenge.

Of further concern is the proportion of SFO reviews that met a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' rating for our victim's standard. SFO reviews should be an accessible and informative document for the victim of the SFO or their family. However, this year we have seen the proportion of SFO reviews receiving a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' rating for this standard decrease significantly from 80 per cent to 47 per cent. The proportion rated as 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate' increased substantially from 20 per cent to 52 per cent.

### **Learning from recent SFO reviews**

Overall, from our quality assurance of SFO reviews, our inspectors identified the following key lessons for frontline staff:

- practitioners are underestimating the nature and level of risk of serious harm posed – in 52 per cent of the cases we reviewed, the practitioner had assessed the original risk of serious harm as only low or medium
- enforcement action is not always being used consistently or in line with policy guidance, particularly with licence cases
- diversity is not always fully considered and there is insufficient liaison between prison and probation staff
- there is sometimes a lack of professional curiosity, with practitioners not using all available resources to manage the risks posed by people on probation in the community
- practitioners often did not use the range of approved toolkits available for them to work through with those subject to probation supervision
- there is a recurring failure (also evident in our local inspections) to undertake adequate enquiries with the police and local councils about domestic abuse or child and adult safeguarding risks
- high workloads and poor management oversight are having a clear impact on the quality of work to protect the public.

In addition to this quality audit of 86 SFO reviews conducted by the Probation Service, we were also commissioned by the Secretary of State for Justice to undertake our own independent SFO reviews into the supervision of Damien Bendall and Jordan McSweeney. These were published in January 2023.

### **Damien Bendall SFO**

Mr Bendall committed four murders while under probation supervision. He murdered Terri Harris (aged 35), John Paul Bennett (aged 13), Lacey Bennett (aged 11) and Connie Gent (aged 11). He also raped Lacey. These crimes took place in September 2021 in Killamarsh, Derbyshire. He pleaded guilty in December 2022 and was later sentenced to a whole-life prison term.

Inspectors found that the Probation Service's assessment and management of Bendall at each stage of the process from initial court report to his supervision in the community were of an unacceptable standard and fell far below what was required. They highlighted serious mistakes at every point in the process.

Vital information about the serious risks posed by Mr Bendall to those he lived with, and the public, was not included in the Probation Service's report and recommendations to the judge when he was sentenced for an arson offence in June 2021. The probation practitioner who prepared the court report following Mr Bendall's arson conviction took his account and version of events in relation to his offending and circumstances at face value. The court report author did not read relevant information on his past behaviour, including from the prison service and police. They therefore wrongly concluded that Mr Bendall posed a medium risk of serious harm to the public, and a low risk of harm to partners and to children, when his actual risk to both should have been rated as 'high'.

This initial mistake resulted in Bendall being given an entirely inappropriate curfew order by the court, requiring him to live with Terri Harris, and in his supervision being allocated to an inexperienced probation services officer rather than a qualified probation officer who would have been appropriately experienced and trained and better able to manage him at the higher risk of serious harm level his past history warranted.

Inspectors found that successive probation practitioners and their line managers missed opportunities to ensure that vital information known about Damien Bendall was included in assessments and plans to manage and address the risk of serious harm he posed to both women and children. Practitioners did not carry out safeguarding enquiries when he was sentenced for his most recent offence of arson, nor was Terri Harris consulted about the curfew condition.

### **Jordan McSweeney SFO**

Jordan McSweeney was also under probation supervision nine days after his release from prison, when he followed Zara Aleena as she walked home in Ilford, East London, in June 2022, subjecting her to a sustained physical and sexual assault before murdering her. He was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of 38 years to be served.

Like Bendall, McSweeney was wrongly assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm. Inspectors concluded that his level of risk should have been escalated to 'high', based on the range of information available on his past history of violence as well as acquisitive offending. Information known about the risks he presented in custody, such as possession of weapons and violent and threatening behaviour, was not communicated to the supervising probation officer in the community. The officer requested custody records, but these were not supplied. Inspectors criticised the case allocation process as 'confusing and cumbersome'. In Mr McSweeney's case, although he was sentenced to 16 months' imprisonment, he only had two months to serve when he was eventually sentenced (having spent a long period on remand). Delays in allocating his case to a probation officer in the community, which happened only nine days before release, made it difficult for his supervising probation officer to carry out a thorough risk assessment.

If he had correctly been assessed as high risk, McSweeney may well have been released to a probation hostel, with curfew conditions and restrictions on his drinking, and been subject to joint MAPPA management with the police. Both of these measures would have resulted in more supervision and knowledge of McSweeney's risks and movements. It is also likely that he would have been more promptly recalled after missing his first probation appointments on release, thereby maximising the time the police would have had to arrest and return him to custody.

## Learning

In both reviews, inspectors found clear failures in the quality of individual probation practice, but also a number of systemic problems. In addition to concerns about overworked practitioners and line managers, inspectors also identified other key learning points. These included:

- poor risk of harm assessment and management, in particular concerns about a failure to investigate risk beyond the current offence
- the cumbersome case allocation process and the failure to carry out any proper resettlement planning in the case of Mr McSweeney (a key issue that we discuss at length in our chapter on resettlement practice)
- poor information-sharing between prison and probation services
- no formal process for contacting adult residents at a proposed curfew address to gain their consent to a residence requirement with them
- the need for trainee and newly qualified probation officers to have an experienced mentor.

In addition to publishing learning from our quality assurance of SFO reviews, we have also published a pair of effective practice guides on how to improve 'professional curiosity'. The first is a [resource to help probation practitioners](#) develop their skills in this area and be routinely able to go beyond the simple assessment of risk based on previous assessments and what people on probation tell them. The [second guide is designed for middle managers](#) to help them consider how they can create a culture that enables and promotes professional curiosity.

Our definition of professional curiosity encompasses all aspects of work in probation practice, including the quality of assessments, planning, implementation and delivery and reviews. It also relates to how people remain curious about their practice and pursue continuous professional development.

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, and clarifying and reflecting on information received to analyse what it means in context for that individual. We believe it is vital that probation practitioners do not use a single source of information but instead seek multiple sources. This is so they can triangulate information from a range of sources, analyse behaviour and make informed decisions.

We believe that these skills, implemented in an empathic manner, allow the practitioner and manager to understand more about the individual, including their identity, motivations, capacity, resources, strengths and risks.

A better understanding of the individual's identity, and what motivates them, will strengthen engagement (bearing in mind that people on probation often do not choose to attend) and ensure that practitioners implement the most effective strategies to manage risks and/or change behaviour, thus promoting desistance.

We have also explored the themes of risk of serious harm and public protection across three thematic inspections this year. In the next section of this chapter, we share the findings of these inspections in detail.

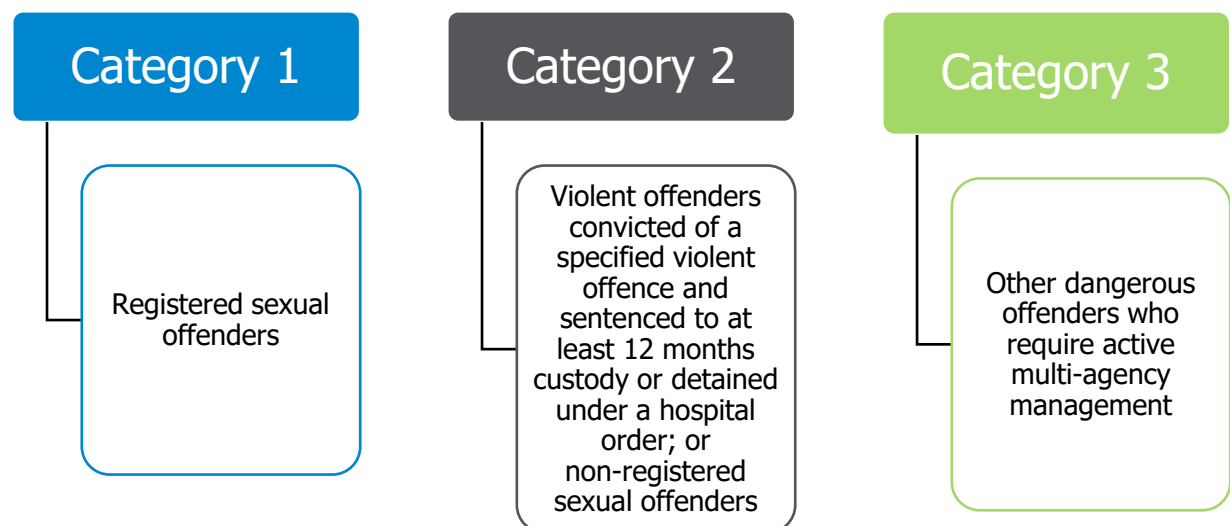
## MAPPA thematic

Our [joint inspection report on Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements](#) (MAPPA) was conducted with our colleagues from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) to mark 20 years of MAPPA. The report was published in July 2022.

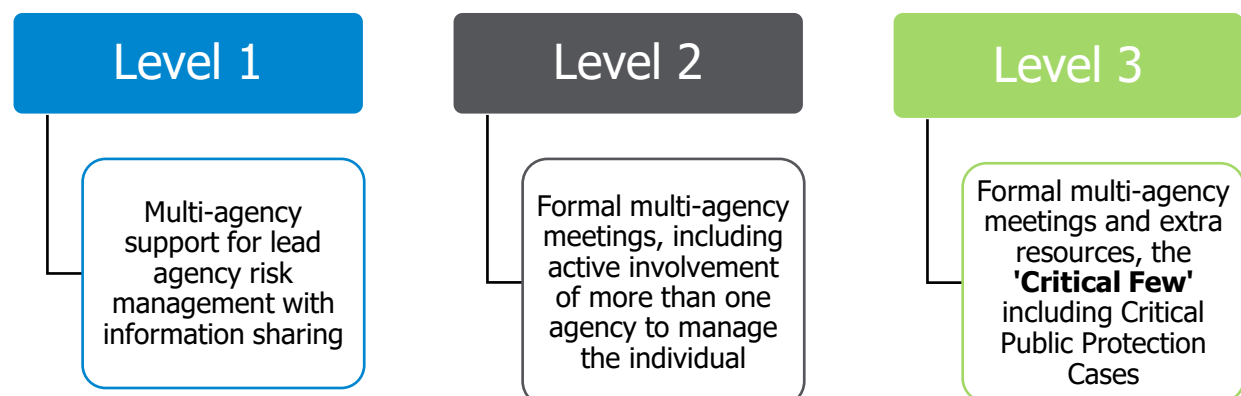
MAPPA is the process through which various agencies such as the police, the prison service and probation services, work together – through collaboration and sharing information – to protect the public by managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community. MAPPA cases can also include people who are in prison, preparing for release or in mental health facilities. As at 31 March 2022, there were 89,438 offenders under MAPPA management in the community in England and Wales compared with 79,790 people in prison around the same date (1<sup>st</sup> April 2022).

## MAPPA levels and categories

Individuals become eligible for MAPPA management by falling into one of three categories. Eligibility for categories 1 and 2 is automatic due to the sentence an individual has received.



Once identified as eligible for MAPPA, a level of management is determined. Category 3 cases only exist at Levels 2 and 3.



Our report traced significant changes in MAPPA, particularly the fact that while the overall MAPPA caseload has increased by 70 per cent since 2011, the proportion being managed through formal multi-agency forums has halved and is less than two per cent of the total.

The majority of MAPPA cases (98.4 per cent) are managed at level 1. Having been convicted of serious sexual or violent offences, level 1 cases should be subject to regular reviews, and the information gained shared between all agencies working with that person.

Our inspectors found that over a fifth of the level 1 cases we examined for this report should have been managed through formal multi-agency panel arrangements at level 2, which was a concern. They also found that, for too many of the level 1 caseload, this status had little meaning, and only enhanced the management of risk of harm in just under a third (32 per cent) of the cases we inspected. In only just over half (53 per cent) of cases in the community was the level and nature of contact with the individual sufficient to support the case management plan.

Additionally, we found the use of MAPPA varied considerably by area. Some areas interpreted the MAPPA criteria differently and were not referring enough cases for formal, multi-agency management. Overall, the report concluded that MAPPA is underused: for cases managed at the lower level 1, contact is not sufficient, reviewing is too often unsatisfactory and pre-release communication between prisons and community probation staff is limited and happening too late.

By contrast, our inspectors concluded that for cases managed at levels 2 and 3 (which involve formal multi-agency meetings), MAPPA largely achieves its aims of managing the risks that violent and sexual offenders pose to the public.

Overall, inspectors from all three agencies agreed that the implementation of MAPPA presented a mixed picture with many positive examples of multi-agency work, particularly with those managed at the higher levels but many people managed at level 1 were not receiving the attention needed to protect the public.

## **Domestic abuse thematic inspection**

In July 2023, we published our [thematic inspection](#) into the work undertaken and progress made by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims. The impact of domestic abuse is significant and far-reaching. An estimated 2.4 million adults were victims of domestic abuse across England and Wales last year, and one in seven children live with domestic abuse at some point in their childhood. Those responsible for this abuse account for a very significant part of the Probation Service caseload. On 30 September 2022, 74,996 of the 240,674 (31.2 per cent) people managed by the Probation Service were identified as a current or former perpetrator of domestic abuse on probation case management systems.

When we last inspected this topic (in 2018), we reported that too many individuals were drifting through their sentences without being challenged or supported to change their abusive behaviours. Very concerningly, despite some positive developments in policy, our new inspection concludes that little appears to have improved in practice, and, in some respects, things have deteriorated. Only 28 per cent of the cases we inspected for this thematic report had received a sufficient assessment that analysed the risks of further domestic abuse, and only 23 per cent had been adequately reviewed to consider significant changes in the case. We made it clear that this level of performance is unacceptable and is leaving far too many potential victims at risk.

People on probation can be offered a range of interventions aimed at helping them make positive changes in their lives and equipping them to have safe and healthy relationships.

However, too few people gain access to these interventions; 45 per cent of our case sample should have had access to an intervention but had not. In addition, we found insufficient monitoring of referral, take-up and completion rates for interventions at a national level to understand the overall picture. We were particularly concerned that requirements to undertake a domestic abuse perpetrator programme made as part of sentencing are not delivered in many cases.

Staffing shortages in the Probation Service have led to reductions in expectations around minimum levels of contact with people on probation, partnership working and the delivery of interventions. In domestic abuse cases, this has led to worrying deficits in the standard of sentence management. Probation staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work, often working well over their expected hours, but high caseloads often prevent them from completing meaningful work. In addition, recent changes in legislation through the *Domestic Abuse Act 2021*, such as the recognition of children affected by domestic abuse as victims in their own right, have not been incorporated into probation practice.

We also found that probation staff are not being properly equipped to work with the perpetrators of domestic abuse. People who abuse those close to them have often experienced significant trauma themselves and have developed poor coping strategies that lead to abusive behaviours. The quality of training provided to probation practitioners does not currently support them to work effectively at this level of complexity, and there is not enough contact or cross-agency training for probation staff to learn from organisations that are experts in this field.

There is an urgent need to improve the shared understanding of roles and responsibilities among agencies working with domestic abuse, and to ensure that information is shared to safeguard victims.

We made a number of recommendations, including that HMPPS should publish a domestic abuse strategy for the Probation Service and review progress against it regularly. This should include monitoring the delivery of all domestic abuse interventions to identify and address unmet need. We also recommend that the Probation Service develops local multi-agency training and awareness-raising events with partner agencies in order to support practitioners and managers to develop their understanding of the complexity of domestic abuse, the roles of other agencies that can offer support and information sharing arrangements.

## **Terrorism Act offenders thematic inspection**

Our third risk-related thematic over the past year was a [joint inspection](#) with prison and police inspectorate colleagues, published in July 2023, of arrangements for supervising and monitoring terrorist-risk and terrorist offenders. In this inspection, we found a much more positive picture of progress.

Three key organisations are responsible for managing terrorist and high concern terrorist risk cases: the National Security Division (NSD), part of the Probation Service; the Counter Terrorism Nominal Management (CTNM), part of Counter Terrorism Policing; and HM Prison Service (HMPS).

A total of 27 prisoners held for terrorist or terrorist-connected offences were released from custody in Great Britain in the year ending 30 September 2022, and were supervised by staff in the NSD. The NSD had a total caseload of 344 cases in March 2023.

Inspectors found that the NSD was sufficiently staffed by probation officers with good levels of skill and knowledge, who were delivering a good-quality service. Supervision in the community was assessed as robust overall, balancing rehabilitative needs with tight risk



management parameters. Handovers from prison offender managers to their community counterparts was described as timely, with a good level of engagement by community offender managers prior to release.

Counter-terrorism work is intense, which led inspectors to question how long practitioners and managers could continue to demonstrate the 'gold standard' of practice expected as case numbers continued to rise with many people remaining under supervision for several years and new cases released from prison on a regular basis.

Inspectors also concluded that, while the current model, to keep all terrorist-convicted cases as MAPPA level 3 for an initial 12-months, was understandable as an initial response to the terror attacks, it is no longer an efficient use of resources. In particular, it is not an efficient use of the senior NSD and CTNM managers who are required to chair level 3 panels. They recommended that, once all risk management is in place and the individual has achieved a period of stability, cases could reasonably be managed at level 2, given the knowledge and expertise of these multi-agency panels. Individual cases could, of course, be escalated back to level 3 at any time if required.

## Victims

The Probation Service is responsible for keeping the victims of serious crimes updated about the sentencing, progression through the prison system, parole and (critically) the release of the person who has perpetrated a crime against them.

The Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) applies to victims (or bereaved relatives) where the offender was convicted of a specified violent or sexual offence and sentenced to 12 months or more in prison (or detained in a hospital for treatment under the *Mental Health Act 1983* with or without a restriction order). HMPPS data indicates that the overall VCS caseload was made up of approximately 60 per cent violent cases and 40 percent sexual offences.

Victims have the right to be automatically referred within 10 working days of sentencing to the VCS and to be assigned a victim liaison officer (VLO). From April 2021, the Probation Service has been required to contact the victim within 20 working days of receipt of the referral from the Witness Care Unit (operated by the police and Crown Prosecution Service). This makes access to the service prompter than the previous 40-day requirement.

The VCS is offered to all eligible victims; however, it is entirely the victim's choice to accept the offer of a VLO and to be updated on their perpetrator's progress through the prison system. There are currently a number of pilots taking place across the Probation Service, which are looking at expanding the scheme's to include cases such as stalking and harassment where a custodial sentence of less than 12 months has been imposed.

On 16 January 2023, 43,074 active victims were in the Victim Contact Scheme. This ranged from 2,454 people in the South Central probation region to 4,957 in London.

Our inspectors assessed the quality of victim liaison work in a total of 116 cases across our local inspections, examining them against three principal questions:

1. Does the initial contact with victims encourage engagement with the victim contact scheme and provide information about sources of support?
2. Is there effective information and communication exchange to support the safety of victims?
3. Does pre-release contact with victims allow them to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release?

Overall inspectors assessed the quality of work by VLOs as effective. Initial contact was judged effective in 88 per cent of cases, information exchange was satisfactory in 86 per cent of cases and pre-release contact met the required standard in 93 per cent of cases.

There were, however, a number of areas of concern:

- victims were not informed about the action they could take if the prisoner made unwanted contact with them in 41 per cent of cases
- victims were not referred to or given information about other victim support services in 37 per cent of cases
- victim liaison staff were not involved in MAPPA in 51 per cent of cases where they should have been
- victims were not informed about no-contact licence conditions in 34 per cent of cases where these were made.



## Chapter 5: Resettlement

---

### Introduction

Supervising people on release from prison has been part of the probation service role since the late 1960s, and pre- and post-release cases now makes up a majority of the overall probation caseload. Since the implementation of the *Offender Rehabilitation Act* in February 2015 which stipulated that all offenders on a custodial sentence would be subject to statutory supervision on release from prison, resettlement work has become an even larger share of the probation caseload. Before this date, only people serving 12 months or longer were subject to statutory probation supervision on release from prison.

On 31 December 2022 (the latest figures available), the overall probation caseload included 112,851 court orders, 71,617 people in prison pre-release and 60,910 post-release. Not only had the number of people supervised on post-release licence increased by 56 per cent over this (nearly) eight-year period, but the resettlement cohort now made up a quarter (25.3 per cent) of the overall caseload.

### What is good resettlement?

To promote best practice, we have published two effective practice guides on adult resettlement. The first deals with [offender management in custody pre-release](#) and the second [post-release](#).

We have a clear set of expectations about what good resettlement practice looks like. Key elements include:

- pre-release planning by prison-based probation staff to address both practical needs (depending on individual needs, these include: accommodation, identification documents and a bank account, benefit claims and immediate income to live on and access to continuity of treatment for substance misuse, physical and mental health needs)
- pre-release planning that addresses risk and ensures that risk management plans are in place including any appropriate licence conditions which should be properly explained to the person before release
- comprehensive and timely handover from prison-based to community-based probation staff and the sharing of sentence management and risk information between prison and probation systems
- community probation officers are expected to supervise people released from prison according to the same standards set out in the ASPIRE case supervision model explained earlier in this report.

Prison-based probation staff also assist with parole and home detention curfew processes, pre- and post-release OASys assessments and liaison between prison and community-based organisations.

### Findings from our local inspections

As we described earlier in this report, when we review case supervision as part of our local PDU inspections, inspectors make judgements against the same three key questions at each of the four stages in the ASPIRE process: assessment, planning supervision,

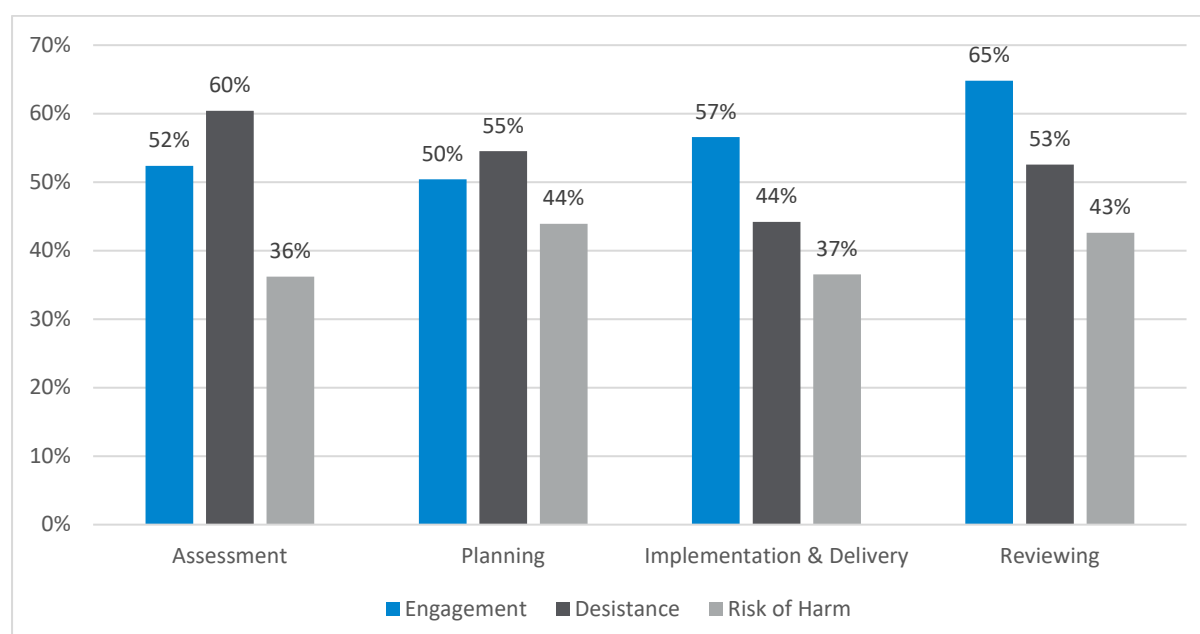
implementing/delivering that plan and reviewing progress. These three questions investigate whether, at each stage of the supervision process, the offender manager is effectively:

1. engaging the person on probation
2. supporting their desistance from crime and so reducing reoffending
3. reducing risk of harm and keeping other people safe.

We also ask specific questions about preparation for release and the adequacy of this.

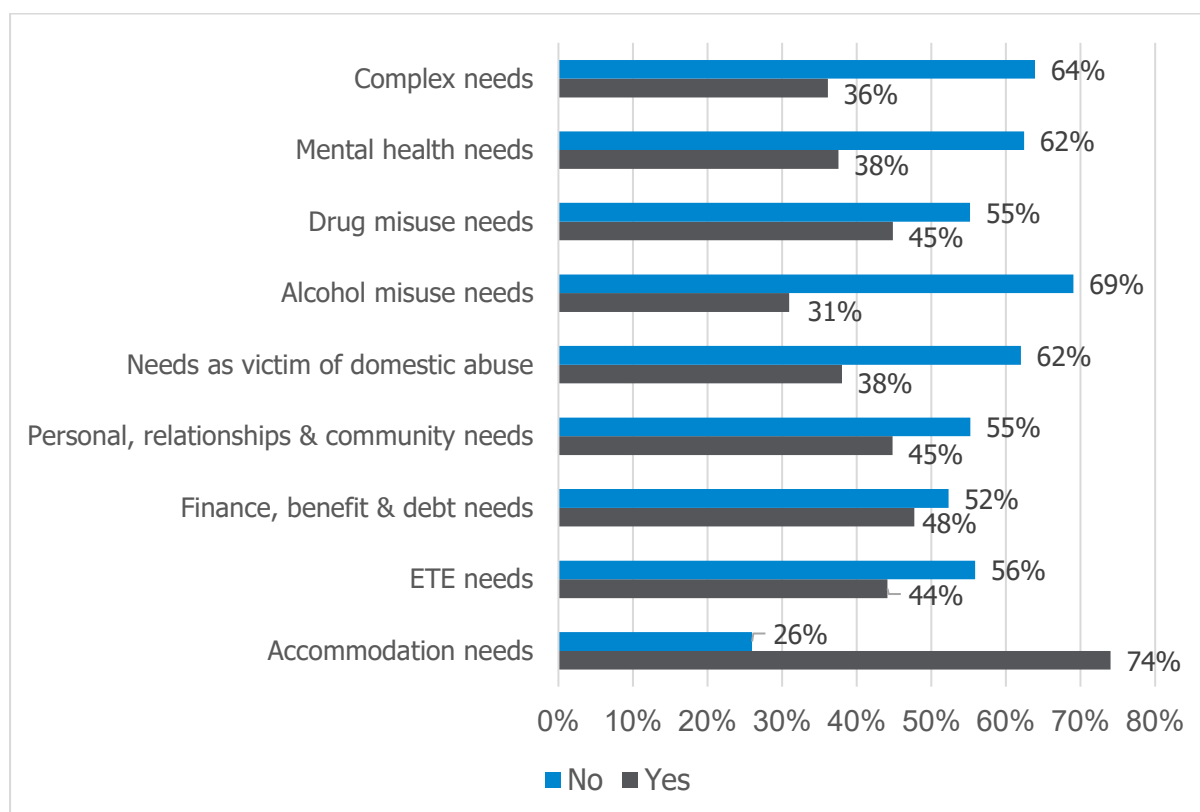
**Chart 14** shows a detailed breakdown of the proportion of cases where each of the 12 criteria were delivered to the level expected by our published standards for people supervised on their release from prison. No element of the supervision process was delivered satisfactorily in more than 65 per cent of the 510 post-release cases we inspected. Performance was particularly poor in relation to keeping other people safe with a minority of cases judged to be of a sufficient standard by our inspectors at each of the case supervision stages: assessment (only 36 per cent sufficient), planning (44 per cent), implementation/delivery (37 per cent) and review (43 per cent).

Chart 14: Proportion of cases delivered to expected level at all stages of case supervision for people supervised on release from prison (n = 510 post-release cases)



**Chart 15** below shows whether sufficient resettlement services were delivered to address a range of specific needs, where these were relevant. Sufficient services were delivered in a majority of cases only where accommodation was the specified need (74 per cent). Sufficient services were delivered to less than two out of five people whose needs related to mental health or domestic abuse (both 38 per cent), were complex (36 per cent) or related to alcohol misuse (31 per cent).

Chart 15: Sufficient delivery of specific resettlement services



## Offender Management in Custody

In addition to our local inspections, we undertook a detailed [thematic inspection into the Offender Management in Custody \(OMiC\) model](#). Roll-out of the OMiC model started in 2018 but was significantly delayed by the Covid pandemic and didn't reach the whole prison estate until 2021. It has involved significant investment of both prison and probation resources, including an additional 2500 prison officers to deliver the keyworker model and 1000 probation officers in prison – including 200 senior probation officers. The model applies only to prisoners with more than 10 months' custody left to serve at the point of sentence. It aims to improve the support offered to prisoners as they leave custody and are reintegrated back into the local community, in order to reduce their risk of reoffending. Separate arrangements apply to prisoners on short sentences or remand. (See appendix 3 for a detailed description of the OMiC process).

We examined both the pre-and post-release resettlement work undertaken with 100 cases. Of the 100 cases inspected in custody (pre-release), 96 were examined in detail up to nine months after release from custody (post-release). Four cases were excluded from the community sample as they had not been released from prison. The inspection of pre-release work was undertaken jointly with our colleagues at His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. We published our findings in two volumes, focusing on [work in custody in our first publication](#) published in November 2022, and on [post-release work in our second publication](#) published in March 2023.

### OMiC pre-release

The main finding from our joint inspection into pre-release work was that OMiC is a lengthy and complex process, which neither prison nor probation officers, nor prisoners themselves, fully understand how to implement. We concluded that OMiC is a fixed model that cannot be

changed to adapt to different types of prisons. This makes it especially difficult for local establishments, where they have a high turnover of prisoners.

On a more positive note, we did find that the transfer of senior probation officers into prisons had helped to boost communication and develop rehabilitative cultures. However, our inspectors found that the probation Prison Offender Manager (POM) role in prisons did not always add value as intended under the model, and identified significant difficulties with the handover process. POMs and managers were not always clear about pre-handover assessment requirements, and POMs did not always fully prepare individual prisoners to work with Community Offender Managers (COMs). Despite the transfer of almost 800 probation officers to POM roles in prisons, our inspectors found very little added value from these posts, particularly in local prisons. Most POMs had little direct contact with prisoners and were not clear about their roles and responsibilities under the OMiC model.

Similarly, regular meetings between prison officer keyworkers and prisoners took place in only 34 per cent of the cases we inspected, and only a slightly higher number (36 per cent) were deemed to be supervised effectively by their prison-based probation officer.

Inspectors were also disappointed to find that communication between prison and probation staff was adequate in only one in eight cases (13 per cent).

Overall, our key areas of concern about OMiC were:

- There were shortfalls in public protection work, information-sharing, and relationship-building between prison staff, probation workers and prisoners.
- There was a distinct culture of two organisations, one prison and one probation, and joint working at a strategic and operational level was hampered by prison groups and probation regions being based in different geographical areas.
- Some keyworkers were providing valuable support, but the needs of prisoners in different types of establishment were not always catered for, and this caused problems on their release from prison.
- Some prisoners were being released without resettlement services being in place; this situation had been aggravated both by probation re-unification and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Successful implementation of OMiC requires a 'rehabilitative culture' in prisons and space on prison wings for one-to-one interventions with prisoners to promote their rehabilitation. Neither of these are in place in most establishments.
- Staff shortages were high in some regions with some probation POMs carrying caseloads over 100 and only three out of the eight offender management units visited fully staffed. Community-based probation officers were too overloaded with work in the community to meet their obligations to those still in custody, who often took a back seat. This undermined the delivery of a high-quality service.
- Prison officer keywork did not join up with probation offender management often enough.

Overall, the joint inspection team concluded that, while the aspirations of OMiC were desirable, it was proving almost impossible to put theory into practice. We concluded that the basics of the model were not being delivered and recommended that HMPPS review and overhaul OMiC at the earliest opportunity.

## OMiC post-release

The [second part of our inspection](#) also revealed poor performance. We tracked the same cohort of prisoners for up to nine months after release from prison in the autumn of 2022, looking at the support put in place (such as housing), services to prevent reoffending, the analysis of risk of serious harm, and the staffing and workload of prison and probation services implementing the OMiC model.

Our inspection highlighted the significant staff shortages that we have discussed at length in this annual report. Inspectors found that under-staffing meant that many practitioners lacked the capacity to undertake structured offence-focused work with prison leavers.

Inspectors found that there was a mismatch between the Commissioned Rehabilitative Services needed to support prison leavers and those that were provided. For example, accommodation services were oversubscribed, leading to long waiting lists, while other services, such as personal wellbeing, were undersubscribed.

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

The importance of the relationship between the practitioner and person on probation was highlighted by DWRM, the lived experience consultants who talked on our behalf to 53 people on probation about their experiences of being supported on release. They reported that people on probation experienced probation induction following release on licence as 'one way'. As with pre-release work, they felt that sentence management was 'done to' them, rather than 'done with' them. All too often, practitioners had not been able to establish a good working relationship with the person on probation, and then had to deliver unwelcome news about the licence restrictions that were now required. The reasons for these restrictions were often not fully explained to the person on probation, or well understood by them.

DWRM found general agreement among the people they consulted that much more could be done before release. Several people reported being made aware of their licence conditions only as they were leaving prison, and some also reported leaving prison without having identification documents or a bank account in place.

People on licence told DWRM that they would be much more able to accept and comply with the conditions set for release if these were explained early enough in their sentence so that they could be incorporated into their sentence and release plans.

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

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

However, the outcomes for our cohort of 96 people released from prison were disappointing:

- Only four in 10 of the prison leavers in the case sample entered settled accommodation on release, and just eight per cent went into full or part-time employment. Some improvement was made in the first few months on licence, though, at the point of inspection, almost three in 10 prison leavers (29 per cent of those where outcomes were known) were still in temporary accommodation, and almost four in 10 were unemployed.
- Not enough improvements were made in the other factors most related to reoffending. Sufficient progress was made in only a minority of cases in regard to lifestyle (27 per cent), alcohol misuse (20 per cent), family and relationships (23 per cent), drug misuse (24 per cent) and attitudes towards offending (25 per cent).
- Improvements in the key factors related to managing the risks of harm to other people were made in less than half of cases.
- There was a significant shortfall in the information received from other agencies, such as police intelligence, and in domestic abuse and child safeguarding enquiries, to keep other people safe. Practitioners experienced difficulties in getting responses to their requests for this information, and in some cases had stopped trying.
- Some practitioners lacked the professional curiosity to fully understand the person on probation's personal circumstances. This meant that they did not always know who was at risk of harm. Inspectors found some cases where the practitioner had underestimated the level of risk or reduced it too quickly following the person on probation's release from custody.
- As a result of all of these factors, recall rates were high, with 30 per cent of the case sample recalled to custody within nine months of their release. The main reason for recall was non-compliance with licence conditions, and this stemmed mainly from homelessness and/or relapse into substance misuse. There was a lack of continuity of care before and after release, which led to prison leavers not being able to access the right levels of support to sustain their resettlement.

Given the difficulties in accessing housing on release from prison, the availability of new community accommodation services (known as CAS3) currently being rolled out across the country was seen as a very positive development. Recall numbers were lower in the regions that had this programme in place, although it should be noted that the temporary supported accommodation available under this scheme only lasts for a maximum of 12 weeks.

## Conclusion

With over 130,000 people within the probation caseload either in prison or being managed after release, it is vital that the quality of support and supervision offered to this group is sufficient. In too many cases, however, our local inspections and thematic work are showing that this is not the case and that resettlement work may even have got worse since re-unification. In the year before re-unification there were encouraging signs that additional investment through the Enhanced Through the Gate (ETTG) funding arrangements was helping to improve performance. We inspected 10 CRCs in 2020 and rated TTG work as 'Outstanding' in eight of these areas and 'Good' in the other two. However, these dedicated TTG teams and contracts with external providers for mentoring, ETE and other services were dissolved during the re-structuring of the new re-unified Probation Service and, as we have seen, current resettlement performance appears to be much lower.

## Appendix 1: Inspections of services

---

### The inspection process

Our approach to inspecting the Probation Service involves three aspects:

#### **Regional review**

The purpose of the regional review is to analyse the functions of the region and to identify the regional enablers and barriers to a Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) meeting our inspection standards.

#### **PDU organisational delivery (domain one)**

In this domain we focus on leadership, people, services, and information and facilities. Before we inspect the PDU, we look at any submitted evidence, identifying any gaps or areas that need clarification. When conduct the fieldwork, we hold meetings and focus groups where further evidence can be gathered, allowing us to triangulate evidence and information.

#### **PDU case supervision (domain two)**

Before we conduct the fieldwork, we identify a cohort of cases using specific criteria. When on-site, we look at those selected cases and assess the quality of practice. In relevant cases, we also look at the quality of the pre-sentence report, pre-release work by the community offender manager, and statutory contact with the victim.

Our inspectors use a set of published standards to ask the right questions and look for evidence to rate the quality of service delivery across each aspect of a service. You can see (and download) our probation standards [here](#).

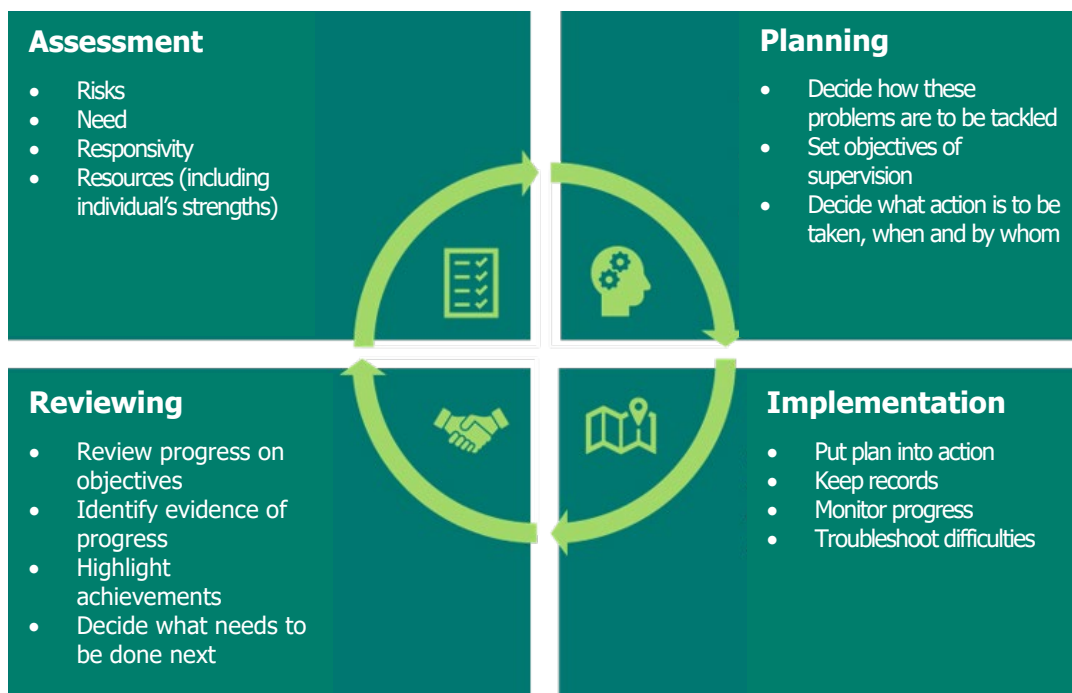
All services are rated overall as either 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate' as well as being rated at the level of individual standards. We use this approach to assist services in targeting their improvement activity. Our reports clearly explain why we have given services a particular rating.

### The ASPIRE Model of case supervision

Contemporary probation practice is based on the ASPIRE model of case supervision (**A**ssessment; **S**entence **P**lanning; **I**mplementation; **R**eview & **E**valuate). In our local inspections, we judge the quality of delivery in individual cases against this ASPIRE process.

As set out in the figure below, the process is cyclical. This reflects the research evidence that desistance is typically a gradual, non-linear and multidimensional process, and thoughtful consideration needs to be given to how relapses should be dealt with. Service users have highlighted the importance of each of the four stages of the ASPIRE process involving real collaboration and co-production.





When we review case supervision as part of our local PDU inspections, inspectors make judgements against the same three key questions at each of the four stages of the ASPIRE process – assessment, planning supervision, implementing and delivering that plan and reviewing progress. These three questions investigate whether at each stage of the supervision process, the offender manager is effectively:

1. Engaging the person on probation;
2. Supporting their desistance from crime and so reducing reoffending; and
3. Reducing risk of harm and keeping other people safe.

We analyse all the cases in our PDU sample using these three questions at each of the four stages of case supervision. This makes a total of 12 key questions that contribute to the rating for each standard. For a case assessment standard to be rated 'Outstanding' a large majority (80 per cent or more) of cases must be rated satisfactory for all three key questions on that standard. A PDU is rated 'Good' against a standard when a reasonable majority of cases (65 to 79 per cent) meet the criteria for all three key questions for that standard; as 'Requires improvement' when just 50 to 64 per cent pass; and 'Inadequate' when a minority (less than 50 per cent) meet the criteria. For a more detailed explanation please see our [inspection guidance manual](#).

## The ratings

In 2022/2023, we inspected 31 PDUs and you can see the details on each of the nine key domains and overall ratings in the table below. Only one PDU (South Tyneside and Gateshead) was rated 'Good'; 15 PDUs were rated "Requires Improvement" and the remaining 15 were rated 'Inadequate'.

The chart below is interactive; if you click on any PDU, you can read the report in full and also see the associated inspection data in detail.



## PDU inspection ratings

☆ Outstanding (3) ● Good (2)

● Requires improvement (1) ● Inadequate (0)

PDU inspected	Overall rating	Published	Composite score (out of 27)	1. Organisational delivery				2. Court work and case supervision						Full report
				1.1 Leadership	1.2 Staff	1.3 Services	1.4 Information and facilities	2.1 Court work	2.2 Assessment	2.3 Planning	2.4 Implementation and delivery	2.5 Reviewing	2.6 Outcomes	
<b>South Tyneside and Gateshead PDU</b> (Probation Service - North East region)	●	22/12/2022	15	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Derby City PDU</b> (Probation Service - East Midlands region)	●	09/02/2023	11	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Blackburn PDU</b> (Probation Service - North West region)	●	01/06/2023	10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Manchester North PDU</b> (Probation Service - Greater Manchester region)	●	25/05/2023	10	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Northamptonshire PDU</b> (Probation Service - East of England region)	●	17/05/2022	9	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>North &amp; North East Lincolnshire PDU</b> (Probation Service - Yorkshire and The Humber region)	●	30/03/2023	9	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough PDU</b> (Probation Service - North East region)	●	23/12/2022	8	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>

<b>Cheshire West PDU</b> (Probation Service - North West region)	●	01/06/2023	7	●	●	●	●	NR	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Hull &amp; East Riding of Yorkshire PDU</b> (Probation Service - Yorkshire and The Humber region)	●	30/03/2023	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Tameside PDU</b> (Probation Service - Greater Manchester region)	●	25/05/2023	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Warwickshire PDU</b> (Probation Service - West Midlands region)	●	18/08/2022	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Wigan PDU</b> (Probation Service - Greater Manchester region)	●	25/05/2023	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Cumbria PDU</b> (Probation Service - North West region)	●	13/07/2023	6	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Gwent PDU</b> (Probation Service - Wales region)	●	03/02/2022	6	●	●	●	●	★	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Newham PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	24/11/2022	6	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Barking, Dagenham &amp; Havering PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	24/11/2022	5	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Kirklees PDU</b> (Probation Service - Yorkshire and The Humber region)	●	30/03/2023	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Lewisham &amp; Bromley PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	24/11/2022	4	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Liverpool North PDU</b> (Probation Service - North West region)	●	29/06/2023	4	●	●	●	●	NR	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Swansea Neath Port Talbot PDU</b> (Probation Service - Wales region)	●	20/01/2022	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>

<b>West Sussex PDU</b> (Probation Service - Kent, Surrey and Sussex region)	●	11/05/2022	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Ealing and Hillingdon PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	18/10/2022	3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Lambeth PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	18/10/2022	3	●	●	●	●	NA	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Birmingham North, East and Solihull PDU</b> (Probation Service - West Midlands region)	●	18/08/2022	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Knowsley and St Helens PDU</b> (Probation Service - North West region)	●	18/10/2022	2	●	●	●	●	NR	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland</b> (Probation Service - East Midlands region)	●	09/02/2023	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Staffordshire and Stoke PDU</b> (Probation Service - West Midlands region)	●	04/08/2022	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Essex North PDU</b> (Probation Service - East of England region)	●	17/05/2022	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Sheffield PDU</b> (Probation Service - Yorkshire and The Humber region)	●	30/03/2023	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>West Kent PDU</b> (Probation Service - Kent, Surrey and Sussex region)	●	11/05/2022	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>
<b>Hammersmith, Fulham, Kensington, Chelsea, and Westminster PDU</b> (Probation Service - London region)	●	18/10/2022	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	NR	<a href="#">Report</a>

## Appendix 2: Publications

---

In this Appendix, we include details of every publication covered by this annual report, including links to read and/or download them.

### Thematic inspections

- [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system – a progress report](#)
- [Twenty years on, is MAPPA achieving its objectives? A joint thematic inspection of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements](#)
- [A joint thematic inspection of Offender Management in Custody – pre-release](#)
- [A thematic inspection of Offender Management in Custody – post-release](#)
- [A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims](#)
- [Counter Terrorism Joint Inspection – National security division and multi-agency arrangements for the management of terrorist offenders in the wake of terrorist attacks](#)
- [Race equality in probation follow-up: a work in progress](#)

### Serious Further Offences

- [Annual report 2023: Serious Further Offences](#)
- [Independent serious further offence review of Damien Bendall](#)
- [Independent Serious Further Offence review of Jordan McSweeney](#)

### Academic Insights

- [A tripartite strategy for unpaid work in the community](#)
- [The Risk-Need-Responsivity model: 1990 to the Present](#)
- [Ethical humility in probation](#)
- [Growth and the core conditions of transformative change](#)
- [Effective practice in Resettlement](#)
- [Older people on probation](#)
- [Professionalism in Probation](#)
- [Desistance, recovery, and justice capital: Putting it all together](#)
- [Using attachment theory in probation practice](#)
- [Putting professional curiosity into practice](#)
- [Systemic Resilience](#)
- [Transitional Safeguarding](#)
- [Refining processes in policy and practice in working with people accused or convicted of a sexual offence](#)

## Research and Analysis Bulletins

- [Probation staff experiences of working with people at risk of suicide and/or self-harm](#)
- [Working with trauma in adult probation](#)
- [The role of engagement for positive outcomes](#)
- [Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – early progress](#)
- [Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – completion and proven reoffending](#)

## Effective practice guides

- [Working with domestic abuse](#)
- [Offender Management in Custody pre-release](#)
- [Offender Management in Custody post-release](#)
- [Professional curiosity insights \(practitioners\)](#)
- [Professional curiosity insights \(middle managers\)](#)

## Appendix 3 – Offender management in custody (OMiC) main processes

### Custody

#### 1. Case allocation

- More than 10 months to serve at the point of sentence – allocate to prison offender manager (POM)
- Qualified probation practitioners based in prisons (probation POMs) manage Tier A and B (high risk) prisoners.
- Band 4 Prison POMs manage Tier C and D (medium and low risk) prisoners

#### 2. Case management in custody

- When responsible for the case the POM undertakes all relevant offender management activities, including
  - OASys risk assessments (including initial engagement with prisoners and completion of Start Custody OASys))
  - Risk management
  - One to one supervision
  - Additional engagement time with eligible prisoners in the women's estate
  - Sentence planning meetings
  - All work in relation to MAPPA, Offender Personality Disorder Pathway (OPDP), Parole, security categorisation and Release on Temporary Licence (RoTL)

### Pre-release

#### 3. POM to Community Offender Manager (COM) handover

- Two types of handover: enhanced and standard
- All enhanced handovers:
  - POM completes pre-handover OASys
  - POM – COM handover meeting (attended by the prisoner, POM, COM and key worker) – for OPD cases the community OPD psychologist may also attend)
- Enhanced handover: standard determinate
  - Cohort = high risk of serious harm, high risk of serious recidivism, MAPPA eligible
  - COM takes responsibility eight and a half months prior to the earliest release date
- Enhanced handover – parole eligible cases:
  - COM takes responsibility eight months prior to parole eligibility date (PED)
  - COM remains responsible for the duration of the sentence
- Enhanced handover – indeterminate sentenced prisoners (ISPs)
  - COM takes responsibility eight months prior to the tariff end date (TED)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ COM remains responsible for the duration of the sentence if parole review is set at 12 months or less, or MAPPA level 2/3, otherwise the POM resumes responsibility.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced handover – early allocation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ COM takes responsibility 15 months prior to the earliest release date</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examples include MAPPA level 3, critical public protection and TACT (Terrorism Act) cases</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Standard handover:</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cohort = all other sentenced prisoners</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ POM completes handover report</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No formal POM – COM meeting</li> </ul>

#### 4. COM pre-release activities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced handover:</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Complete pre-release OASys</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Initial MAPPA screening</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attend MAPPA meeting</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Approved premises referral</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parole report</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced and standard handover:</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Decide licence conditions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Liaise with POM</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review case and engage with prisoner</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ HDC home suitability assessment (if required)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider IOM referral/re-referral</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attend oral hearing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recall reports and recall 3 way meeting following recall</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ OPD screening and formulation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Contact VLO</li> </ul>

#### 5. Prison pre-release staff

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● COM responsibilities include contacting pre-release staff to:</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Obtain details of assessments completed and services accessed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agree actions with probation pre-release staff</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Referral to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS)</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4 – Aggregate data

---

By following the link below you can go to our master spreadsheet, which includes the aggregate data from every PDU inspection. We are making this information publicly available for the very first time via this annual report.

[Aggregate PDU annual report data annexe.](#)