



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

West Sussex PDU

The Probation Service – Kent, Surrey and Sussex region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, February 2024



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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Foreword

We last inspected West Sussex Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) in 2022. The intervening period has seen a significant change in the senior leadership of the PDU, as well as large numbers of new staff being recruited into the organisation. HM Inspectorate of Probation has also introduced an updated inspection methodology from autumn 2023, meaning that direct comparison to previous findings is not possible. Disappointingly however, West Sussex PDU has once again received an overall rating of 'Inadequate' following this inspection, with insufficient progress made against most recommendations made following the last inspection.

Despite the strategic ambitions of leaders to protect the public and improve the quality of casework, the strategy was not being delivered in a way that supported those ambitions.

Recruitment has led to improved staffing figures in large parts of the PDU and reasonable average caseloads for many staff. It has also, however, resulted in a significant proportion of staff having limited experience in service delivery. This will take time to develop and the supportive culture of the PDU will contribute to that development. However, implications for the quality of work delivered in West Sussex are clear; casework across all four service delivery standards we inspected was 'Inadequate', with work to keep people safe being the weakest area of practice.

Staff were motivated to do their best for those being supervised by West Sussex PDU, and managers were visible and dedicated to staff wellbeing. However, middle managers' considerable spans of control meant that oversight of casework quality was poor. Managers' ability to coach and develop less experienced staff was hampered by large numbers of substantial lead responsibilities and a lack of clear direction about areas for focus. National and regional learning and development provision was not having the desired impact on the confidence and competence of all practitioners.

Whilst many partner agencies spoke positively about their working relationships at strategic and operational level, this had not led to improvements in deficiencies in service delivery. There were significant gaps in understanding the diversity needs of people on probation and the impact of service deficits on marginalised groups.

Significant backlogs in receiving domestic abuse information from Sussex Police and inconsistent use of child safeguarding information were both leading to insufficient assessment and management of risk. We saw too few examples of good quality sentence implementation aimed at promoting desistance and reducing the risk of harm.

Leaders in West Sussex must improve the strategic and operational management of risk to protect victims effectively. A focus on improving professional curiosity, staff confidence, service provision and structured delivery of the sentence of the court will be key to securing improvements in this PDU.



Sue McAllister
Interim Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

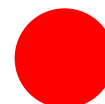
West Sussex

Fieldwork started December 2023

Score **02/21**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staffing

Requires improvement



1.3 Services

Requires improvement



2. Service delivery

2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



2.2 Planning

Inadequate



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate



Recommendations

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

West Sussex PDU should:

1. ensure domestic abuse and safeguarding information is analysed sufficiently to inform the quality of assessment, planning and management of people on probation
2. improve the use of interventions and services to manage the risk of harm and support the desistance of people on probation
3. understand the needs and address the actual and potential barriers for people on probation to promote equality, diversity and inclusion
4. ensure middle managers have sufficient capacity to provide the appropriate level of oversight according to the needs of staff members and casework in the team
5. develop practitioner's confidence and skills in the use of professional curiosity and challenging conversations to identify, analyse, assess, plan and respond to indicators of risk effectively
6. ensure all staff receive the necessary training to undertake their roles.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in West Sussex over a period of two weeks, beginning 04 December 2023. We inspected 18 community sentences and 11 releases on licence from custody where community sentences and licenses had commenced between 08 May and 14 May 2023, and 05 June and 11 June 2023. We also conducted 29 interviews with probation practitioners.

West Sussex is one of five PDUs in the Kent, Surrey, and Sussex (KSS) region of the Probation Service. It is currently led by an interim Head of Service, in post since August 2023, having acted up from their previous role as Deputy Head. The interim Head of Service was therefore familiar with the PDU landscape at appointment and their transition was supported by a handover from the substantive Head of Service.

The PDU also had an interim Deputy Head of Service in post since October 2023. The PDU is currently operating in amber under the national Prioritisation Framework¹ meaning that some activity has been deprioritised. This national guidance is produced by the Probation Service to enable PDUs to manage demand where staff capacity is low. At the point of inspection announcement, there were 118 staff working in the PDU across all grades, representing a 13 per cent increase from 113 staff over the preceding 12 months. At the time of inspection, 62 per cent² of Probation Services Officers (PSOs) in West Sussex had less than two years' experience in post.

The PDU operates from three office locations: Crawley, Littlehampton, and Worthing. There are three courts operating within the PDU: Crawley Magistrates' Court; Worthing Magistrates' Court; and Horsham Magistrates' Court. The court teams are managed within the PDU. There is one prison operating in West Sussex; HM Prison Ford, which is an open prison for adult males.

The PDU aligns with West Sussex County Council and Sussex Police. The county has a population of 885,055 and comprises coastal, rural and urban areas, as well as a mix of socio-economic groups. Whilst 91 per cent of the population identifies as white British, the locality of Gatwick Airport means that local communities are diverse and sometimes transient. The demography of the local areas largely reflects that of the PDU's staffing and caseload.

The total caseload of the KSS region at the point of inspection announcement was 14,474³, with West Sussex comprising 1,048 people on community sentences and 448 people on post-release supervision. There were a further 554 cases in the custodial estate.⁴

A range of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) were delivered across the PDU: Seetec are responsible for accommodation and education, training and employment (ETE) services. The Forward Trust delivers personal wellbeing services. Brighton Women's Centre (BWC) are responsible for women's provision. Change, Grow, Live provide dependency and recovery services.

Accredited programmes are managed regionally. Stand-alone unpaid work orders are managed by specialist practitioners who are embedded within the PDU but managed at a regional level.

¹ Prioritising Probation Framework – Post-pandemic tool to help regions adapt to how they deliver probation services locally according to numbers of available staff.

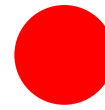
² Information from PDU HR Business Partner.

³ KSS organisational data.

⁴ West Sussex PDU data.

1. Organisational arrangements and activity

1.1. Leadership



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

Inadequate

In this inspection, all four domain two standards were rated 'Inadequate'. Despite attempts to maintain a consistent approach to senior leadership across the PDU and to support staff, there was little evidence that this had improved the effectiveness of casework. Systems were target focused and did not provide robust assurance about the quality of delivery. There was no clear strategy to improve the current situation. These factors have resulted in an overall rating for leadership of 'Inadequate'.

Strengths:

- Staff at all grades spoke highly of middle managers being visible and supportive. Inspectors observed a very positive culture within the PDU, with good morale and professional relationships. A regional HM Prison and Probation Service Tackling Unacceptable Behaviour Unit assessment had recently been commissioned to better understand the local culture of the PDU.
- Staff reported in our survey that they felt the PDU was a safe place to report concerns or raise complaints should they need to. Of the 27 respondents to our survey, 19 felt that the leaders paid sufficient attention to their wellbeing.
- Of those respondents to our survey that had required reasonable adjustments in the workplace, 10 out of 11 said these had been made for them.
- Of the 27 respondents to our survey, 19 felt valued for the work they do. Case administrators we spoke to also felt valued by colleagues and managers.
- Middle managers and experienced practitioners had strong links with police and safeguarding teams. As an example, the multi-disciplinary Family Safeguarding team took an evidence-based, preventative approach to the management of a small cohort of domestic abuse perpetrators. Practitioners in this team worked with approximately 45 families. The PDU provided a seconded Probation Officer (PO) and two PSOs into this team.
- Of the 27 respondents to our survey, 24 felt that sufficient attention was paid to their safety. Buildings have recently been renovated. They were largely fit for purpose and accessible for service users who also reported feeling safe when accessing office spaces.

Areas for improvement:

- The vision and business plan for the PDU had been communicated by the Head of Service in various ways, including a focus on public protection. However, this had not translated into frontline practice, as evidenced by the

'Inadequate' service delivery data scores across all four standards, and a tension between performance targets and effective practice.

- Some staff reported a lack of PDU and regional senior leader visibility in offices across the PDU. Some middle managers also reported infrequent and reactive supervision.
- The region had supported a Deputy Head of Service position until March 2024, reflecting the wider needs of the PDU. However, this role was being underutilised as a cohesive link between strategy and operations to drive quality improvement.
- Middle managers were overwhelmed by their range of responsibilities and were lacking the capacity to deliver the strategy as intended; one manager said "it is the worst time in a decade to be an SPO [Senior Probation Officer]". We heard varying examples of what managers thought they should prioritise, from performance-focused, target-driven tasks to simply retaining staff in the workplace. This was illustrated by one manager who said "we are told don't do everything but do everything", which underpins this point and was further demonstrated in the poor casework we inspected.
- The PDU staffing position had stabilised across all grades in the last 12 months. However, this had resulted in 62 per cent of PSOs⁵ with less than two years' experience, requiring additional training and personal development. This compounded the workload of already busy middle managers and was a barrier to providing the necessary support for a less-experienced workforce.
- Managers were countersigning assessments that were poor quality and lacked key information and a focus on public protection.
- Despite strong links with police and safeguarding teams, and the ability of some staff to access child safeguarding systems, these links were not being adequately utilised to overcome long-standing barriers to obtaining necessary domestic abuse and safeguarding information in a timely manner. There were child safeguarding concerns in 17 out of 29 cases we inspected.
- Where safeguarding information was returned on request, it was of insufficient quality in seven cases. When domestic abuse enquiries were made with Sussex Police, information was either not returned or of insufficient quality in 18 cases we inspected. We saw evidence of delays of approximately eight weeks in receiving domestic abuse information from Sussex Police.
- Despite efforts from pan-Sussex PDU leaders, there remained a backlog of more than 1,000 enquiries which had significant implications for the quality of court work, assessment and planning. Even when information was received, staff were not consistently analysing it, with only six cases we inspected making sufficient use of this information to inform assessment.
- Despite revisions to governance systems such as the Probation Operational Delivery (POD) model and performance meetings, these were not acting as a robust safety net in supporting practitioners to ensure all relevant activity linked to casework was completed. Middle managers did not have capacity to follow up on actions set in POD meetings nor to assess the impact of performance activity on case quality.

⁵ Information from PDU HR Business Partner.

- We saw no overarching strategic approach to diversity and inclusion in relation to people on probation. Despite the ethnicity of the workforce being broadly representative of the ethnicity of those being supervised in West Sussex, we saw no evidence of a focus on the impact of services on marginalised communities.
- Despite strong scores from User Voice respondents, significant gaps in service delivery were identified by staff and managers, such as accommodation, provision for women and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people on probation and those with mental health concerns. There was no clear strategy to address these gaps.
- The foundations of the PDU's Engaging People on Probation strategy have been laid, with forums set up and terms of reference established. However, progress against these plans were in their early stages and we saw no evidence of how this strategy had improved service delivery for people on probation.
- There was a lack of understanding about how to access the Regional Outcomes and Innovations Fund (ROIF) and subsequently none of that money had been spent. The PDU was not engaged in sufficient co-commissioning arrangements with local partners. Regional and partnership support for PDU leaders is required to develop this activity.

1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Although staffing had improved across all grades in West Sussex, the Crawley team continued to have vacancies which was affecting service delivery. We did not see good enough management oversight, which had implications for the quality of work produced. This has resulted in an overall rating for staff of 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths:

- Managers, practitioners and administrative staff were motivated and committed to doing their best for people on probation. Of respondents to our User Voice survey, 85 per cent said they had a good relationship with their probation practitioner.
- The average caseload for POs was 30 cases, and for PSOs it was 27 cases. In our staff survey, 14 out of 18 respondents, and 15 out of 22 practitioners we interviewed, said they had caseloads lower than 40. With some exceptions at PO grade, we heard many practitioners describing their workload as manageable.
- Staffing and workforce considerations were actively managed at the PDU workforce planning board. The staffing situation had improved across the PDU, with some grades, namely PSOs and SPOs, staffed above the target operating model.
- Staffing in Worthing and Littlehampton had stabilised considerably, and workloads there were beginning to reflect that improvement.
- The Crawley team had more challenging staffing issues, with eight PO vacancies. However, it was encouraging that it was anticipated that the target operating model would be achieved by spring of 2024, and considerable efforts had been made to manage resources until that time.
- Case administrators felt their line management structure was positive and enabled them to learn their roles and develop professionally. They felt part of the broader PDU and well equipped to do their work. Staffing at this grade had improved considerably in the last 12 months.
- West Sussex PDU described "growing our own staff" and we heard several positive examples of staff progressing into different roles and being promoted. Staff were also seconded into partnership agencies, including the Youth Justice Service (YJS) and the Family Safeguarding team, to support service delivery.
- Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) practitioners were largely positive about their experiences of training in West Sussex. Targeted PQiP SPO resource and access to Practice Tutor Assessors meant that they felt well supported to engage in their training.

Areas for improvement:

- As the service delivery casework scores indicate, improvements in staffing numbers and workloads had not had the desired impact on casework quality.
- Management oversight was absent or ineffective in 90 per cent of the cases we inspected. This was a significant cause for concern in the context of large numbers of inexperienced staff. The approach to management oversight and supervision relies too heavily on practitioners identifying cases of concern themselves and raising issues with their manager for discussion.
- Our service delivery case review results evidence that some staff were not always aware of gaps in their practice or in the information they hold about those they supervised. Actions set during management oversight were not always completed, poor quality assessments were counter-signed and contact entries did not provide adequate rationale for decisions made.
- The PDU required staff to engage in the regional Fundamentals First initiative, a learning and development package aimed at securing a baseline assurance about the quality and consistency of practice across the staffing group. Newer staff members with less experience spoke positively of this initiative and found the input and opportunity to engage in reflective group development sessions with more experienced colleagues beneficial. There were bespoke sessions for court staff and SPOs. Disappointingly, we did not see the impact of the Fundamentals First initiative in terms of improving casework. Managers were not following up on Fundamentals First beyond whether practitioners had attended. There were no systems in place to examine the impact of sessions on individual staff learning or practice.
- Completion rates for all staff in key areas of training were very low. Only 23 per cent of staff had completed mandatory Multi-Agency Public Protection (MAPPA) training; 41 per cent of staff had completed 'Working with individuals convicted of sexual offending' e-learning and just eight per cent had undertaken the classroom event. Only six per cent of staff had completed training to manage violence and aggression.
- There had been a focus on the completion of safeguarding and domestic abuse e-learning where rates were higher; however, only 41 per cent had completed the child safeguarding classroom event and 12 per cent had undertaken the face-to-face domestic abuse event. The national learning and development provision did not adequately meet the needs of new PSOs. Training was often online, delivered after practitioners were allocated cases and lacked skills practice. There had been no comprehensive training needs analysis of the impact of training on staff competence and professional confidence.
- Many staff, especially those new to the service, lacked experience and confidence to apply their training in practice. More was required to develop this further, to improve professional curiosity and appropriate challenge, and the delivery of one-to-one interventions such as toolkits.
- We saw limited evidence beyond performance-focused meetings, that managers were effectively held to account for quality improvement expectations within their teams.

- Most practitioners reported that they received regular supervision that they found effective. However, we saw limited evidence of this improving staff confidence or casework quality in the cohort we inspected.
- PSO attrition rates have increased from six per cent to 22 per cent in the last 12 months. Some of this was attributable to moves to other government departments; however, this did not give the full picture and leaders lacked a strategy to address it. Whilst it was positive that PSO recruitment had been a focus, retaining these staff members was crucial to maximise the resource input that is required to train them.

1.3. Services



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

Requires improvement

Partnership structures were functioning satisfactorily in forums such as MAPPA and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). However, the use and provision of CRS was not meeting the risks and needs identified in the cases we inspected. Gaps in service delivery and the potential impact of these were not adequately understood by leaders. This has resulted in an overall rating for services of 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths:

- MARAC forums were embedded across the PDU, with five meetings per month, all achieving good levels of attendance from practitioners and co-chaired by SPO leads. The volume of referrals from probation practitioners was above the national average and partnership dip sampling indicated the quality of these referrals was sufficient. There was also a MARAC+ which focuses on the top five cases of concern relating to domestic abuse. We saw some positive information sharing through MARAC in some of the cases we inspected, although this was not always reflected in assessments and plans.
- The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) model was embedded across the PDU with the co-location of police staff in the Littlehampton and Crawley offices. Although some of the cases we inspected were mixed in terms of the added value of IOM, practitioners and police staff gave clear examples of joint working and clear lines of communication to support the management of this cohort.
- MAPPA Level 1 processes were well embedded despite an increase of around 27 per cent in the last 12 months, with effective tracking arrangements in place, supported by dedicated case administration support for managers. Managers were well sighted on the reasons for this uplift, namely an increase in eligible offences, increased capacity for police to investigate online sexual offending and the efforts made to reduce court backlogs. Leads were confident in the quality and benchmarking of referrals to Levels 2 and 3, and although these had increased in the last 12 months, there were good working relationships between partners to resolve issues at the lowest level and to work collaboratively in this forum.
- Just 13 per cent of West Sussex's caseload were aged 18-25. There was positive feedback about the approach to transitions for young people from the YJS into adult services. This approach facilitated co-working between YJS and probation staff for nine months pre-transition with effective sharing of assessments and collaborative planning for young people.
- Overall, access to accredited programmes was reasonable and completion rates were high.

- Almost two-thirds of people who responded to our User Voice survey (40 out of 63) said that they needed access to services, and it was positive that of these, 70 per cent said they could do so within a reasonable length of time and within a reasonable distance.

Areas for improvement:

- In our staff survey, 17 out of 21 respondents and 22 out of 28 practitioners we interviewed felt that there was sufficient access to an appropriate range of services to meet the needs and risks of people on probation. Despite this, and the responses to the User Voice survey, from our own case review the implementation and delivery of services supported desistance effectively in only 28 per cent of the cases we inspected and services to support the safety of other people were sufficient in just 17 per cent of cases.
- Although CRS providers felt they had good lines of communication with senior leaders and middle managers, this did not consistently lead to the resolution of service difficulties. Providers told us that there were often issues with both the numbers and quality of referrals from practitioners. Practitioners expressed some frustration with the services offered and suggested provision was often dependent on individual service delivery staff.
- Across the suite of CRS provision, the conversion rate from referrals to starts was just 50 per cent in the 12 months up to August 2023. Accommodation conversions from referrals to starts was only 38 per cent.
- The four female cases we inspected had disappointing engagement, desistance and safety scores and overall women's provision in West Sussex was insufficient. The CRS contract was delivered through BWC. There was capacity for just 30 women to access this service at any one time, compared to around 200 women supervised in the community in West Sussex. Staff described waiting lists in operation, leaving women, sometimes in crisis, with significant delays in accessing services and this was demonstrated in the female cases we inspected. Women must access all required services via BWC and cannot be referred directly to other CRS providers. This reduced the options available for practitioners and led to inequity of access for women in comparison to men.
- The PDU operated women's breakfast clubs in Worthing and Crawley. However, while these services were positive, they offered limited additional provision to the CRS. In Crawley, there were concerns about the space not being dedicated exclusively to women and its continued viability in its current format, due to partnership resourcing issues. The SPO lead for women was allocated only one day per month to progress provision and half of that time was spent managing ongoing concerns such as the CRS waiting list.
- The PDU did not have a structured short sentence function to support the delivery of pre-release resettlement work. In Worthing, efforts had been made to develop a short sentence POD to begin to meet this need. Resettlement work that we saw was largely insufficient. To manage demand at the Crawley office where staffing was lower, those cases that were in the resettlement window were being managed remotely by Worthing staff. While this situation was likely to be resolved by spring of 2024, in the interim, concerns about the negative impact of this approach on engagement and consistency raised by staff were seen in the resettlement cases we inspected.

- We saw no delivery of any of the suite of three structured interventions in the casework we inspected. Regionally, this is acknowledged as an area for improvement, and an opt out approach had recently been adopted to drive up the use of structured interventions by including eligible people unless a practitioner identifies a reason not to do so. Groups will be delivered on Saturdays to enhance accessibility for eligible candidates, and there was an aspiration to run a female-only group in Crawley.
- We saw no evidence that senior leaders within the PDU used data to inform funding bids with partners to meet the needs of people on probation. There were gaps in provision identified by the regional services heatmap but at the time of the inspection there was no evidence that work was being progressed to resolve this.
- Similarly, the ROIF was not being accessed nor was any co-commissioning being undertaken. This was disappointing given the progress made elsewhere in Sussex.
- The quality of court work in the PDU was a significant concern, with 94 per cent of the reports we inspected being of insufficient quality. Reports were not adequately informed by third party information, did not have a sufficient focus on risk of harm and victim impact, and did not always make appropriate recommendations for sentence.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, completed 58 face-to-face surveys and five online surveys with people on probation. Of respondents, 84 per cent were male and 16 per cent were female, a slight overrepresentation of the broader caseload in West Sussex which comprised approximately 10 per cent females. 40 per cent of respondents had spent time in custody and 52 per cent were on a community sentence, whilst eight per cent were unsure of their sentence type. Of people who engaged with User Voice, 12 per cent were from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background which was largely representative of the cohort of people supervised by West Sussex PDU.

- Of survey respondents, 97 per cent said they understood what was expected of them whilst on probation. People on probation generally felt they had good working relationships with their practitioner and 90 per cent said they could contact them when necessary.

“She seems like she genuinely cares and wants to help me and takes her role seriously. She helped me with a housing referral.”

- The majority of respondents stated that more often than not their appointments started on time and were within a reasonable travelling distance. Two-thirds of those surveyed stated that their appointments were useful in helping them and their rehabilitation.

“She is very helpful and has got me in touch with alcohol treatment services and Alcoholics Anonymous as I turned to alcohol in my time of need. The appointments are getting me back on track.”

- Unfortunately, we did not always see this focus on rehabilitative activity in the cases we inspected.
- Four-fifths of respondents knew how to raise a complaint should they need to do so but not all were confident that the outcome would be effective.

Diversity and inclusion

We were not satisfied that there was a strategic or operational focus on diversity considerations in West Sussex and, while there was a regional approach, this was not consistently filtering into the PDU. There was no assessment of the impact of service delivery on minority groups.

Strengths:

- People on probation had been asked about diversity needs and personal circumstances at the start of their period of supervision in 79 per cent of the cases and in 69 per cent of the court reports we inspected.
- There was a commitment from partners in the MARAC forum to collate improved data around referrals and outcomes to monitor the impact of this forum on marginalised groups.
- At the time of inspection, the ethnicity of the West Sussex staff group was broadly representative of the population of people on probation. There were 10 per cent of staff from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background compared with 11 per cent of the caseload supervised in West Sussex.
- The PDU had noted an increase in occupational health referrals for neurodiverse staff and in response were in the process of establishing a staff forum for this group to access peer support and the staff disability network.

Areas for improvement:

- Despite collating some data on diversity and personal circumstances at the outset of supervision, there were several data gaps in terms of understanding the protected characteristics of people on probation.
- Only 52 per cent of assessments we reviewed analysed the protected characteristics of people on probation. Just 41 per cent of plans took sufficient account of the impact that factors such as neurodivergence, literacy and childcare might have on engagement and compliance.
- Sufficient focus was given to maintaining an effective working relationship and considering diversity needs when delivering the sentence in less than two-thirds of cases that we inspected.
- Service provision for women was underdeveloped, and the PDU services heatmaps showed deficits in provision for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and people on probation who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning.
- In our case inspections, we saw examples of letters being sent in English rather than the individual's own language and several instances where interpreters were required but not provided in key sessions such as assessment and planning discussions.

- A middle manager in the PDU has developed a 'Diversity Digest'. This SharePoint platform contains links and information about various protected characteristics and resources both for staff and for those they supervise. Whilst this was a comprehensive resource, use and awareness of its availability by frontline staff was disappointing.

2. Service delivery

2.1. Assessment



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

Our rating⁶ for assessment is 'Inadequate' based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	55%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	45%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	28%

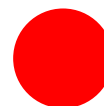
- Where we saw positive examples of people on probation being engaged in their assessment, practitioners identified potential barriers to compliance, recognised diversity factors and made the voice of the individual apparent. This was consistently done well in six of the eight high-risk cases we inspected and was more often done well by POs than PSOs. Levels of engagement in low- and medium-risk assessments were more variable. We saw examples of assessments being absent or completed on a sessional basis without contact with the person on probation. Those released on licence were less well engaged in their assessment than those subject to community sentences.
- Almost three quarters of assessments we inspected (21 out of 29) did not draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and information from other agencies where appropriate. Only 15 out of 29 (52 per cent) assessments sufficiently identified and analysed offending-related factors.
- We saw several examples of individuals who had previously been resident abroad, with no enquiries made about their behaviour prior to arriving in West Sussex. Key areas lacked analysis and professional curiosity such as the relationships people on probation had with others and the behaviour they had displayed in custodial settings. There was an inconsistent approach to holistic

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

risk assessment, with some inexperienced staff being unaware of the extent and nature of information they should access to inform assessments.

- We identified several deficits in work to keep people safe at the point of assessment in West Sussex. Almost two-thirds of assessments (18 out of 29) did not clearly identify and analyse factors linked to the risk of harm to others.
- There were significant backlogs in obtaining high-quality domestic abuse information from Sussex Police. Staff were not consistently aware of an escalation process or plans to resolve this issue. Domestic abuse enquiries were not made at the point of assessment in five out of 29 cases we inspected. Even when in receipt of domestic abuse information, staff used it to inform their assessments sufficiently in just six out of 29 (21 per cent) cases we inspected.
- Inspectors identified child safeguarding concerns in 17 out of 29 cases inspected. However, sufficient quality safeguarding information was present in just nine assessments and in seven cases, no information was requested by practitioners. We did see some examples of requests for child safeguarding information being returned on the same day as the enquiry was made, which was positive.
- We disagreed with the classification of risk of serious harm in five out of 29 cases we inspected (17 per cent), with almost two-thirds of assessments failing to identify and analyse the risk of harm to others sufficiently. Of note, none of the four female cases we inspected assessed the risk to others sufficiently well. The ability of practitioners to fully recognise all risk-related factors is hindered by consistent limitations in the information used to inform assessments. Just eight out of 29 assessments made sufficient use of available sources of information. This resulted in an insufficient focus on risks to actual and potential victims in 15 out of 27 relevant cases, with some assessments failing to identify all relevant groups at risk of harm.

2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁷ for planning is 'Inadequate' based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	45%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	45%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	21%

- Where we saw people well engaged in planning activity, plans were personalised, addressed barriers to engagement and built on the individual's strengths. Of respondents to our User Voice survey, 58 per cent stated that they were involved in creating their sentence plan with their probation practitioner. In the cases that we inspected, more than two-thirds of plans considered readiness and motivation to change. High-risk cases managed by POs were most consistently engaged in sentence planning activity.

Good/Poor practice example

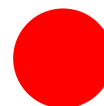
C was a 52-year-old male sentenced to 126 months custody for sexual offences against children. Religious faith was important to C and on release he asked permission to attend church services. The practitioner produced a personalised plan with a robust focus on public protection and safeguarding, informed by multi-agency partners. This allowed the practitioner to take a strength-based approach to enabling C to engage in his faith whilst keeping people safe.

- However, in our case inspections fewer than half of plans (12 out of 29) sufficiently considered the impact of protected characteristics on engagement and compliance. Practitioners described the completion of diversity checklists at induction but acknowledged some gaps in their practice beyond that process-driven activity. This included a lack of confidence in planning for the needs of neurodiverse people on probation and those with mental health issues.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

- Fewer than half of plans reflected the identified offending-related factors nor prioritised the most critical. Given our finding that key areas were omitted at assessment stage, there is likely to be a connection to the limitations we saw in subsequent plans.
- To improve planning activity around desistance, an increased focus on strengths, protective factors and sources of support would be beneficial. In addition, clarity about the roles and responsibilities of other agencies in reducing reoffending would enhance planning practice. We saw this in just over half of cases (15 out of 29) with this rising to six out of eight (75 per cent) high-risk cases which are more likely to be involved with other agencies and services.
- Planning activity in West Sussex did not keep people safe in enough cases we inspected. More than two-thirds of plans did not sufficiently address and prioritise factors linked to risk of harm. This was largely underpinned by the lack of robust information from partner agencies and other sources.
- Plans did not adequately set out the offence-focused work required to address the risks identified, nor clearly outline the roles that other agencies would take in reducing risk of harm.
- Contingency planning was insufficient in two-thirds of cases. Plans should address the current and previous behaviour indicative of harm and where other agencies were involved with the person on probation, links should have been made to their plans of work. Effective plans should clearly set out activity aimed at protecting actual and potential victims, including restrictive conditions where required. However, out of 28 cases where such conditions should have been included in the plan, they were absent in almost half.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁸ for implementation and delivery is 'Inadequate' based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

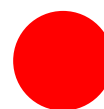
Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	52%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	28%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	17%

- Of the high-risk cases we inspected, six out of eight (75 per cent) sufficiently engaged the individual in the implementation of their sentence, compared with just eight out of 18 (44 per cent) medium-risk cases. Practitioners made efforts to enable people on probation to complete their sentence. This included flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances in 72 per cent of cases we inspected.
- Sentence requirements did not start promptly in enough cases we reviewed. In six out of 29 cases this was due to non-compliance, but in a further 12 cases, this was due to other delays such as waiting lists for CRS provision.
- Just eight out of 29 cases (28 per cent) we inspected had services delivered that were most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance. Implementation and delivery supported the safety of other people in only five out of 29 cases (17 per cent).
- We saw an absence of some services such as finance, benefit and debt (FBD) for which there had been no regional contract awarded. We identified 17 cases that had an FBD need linked to offending and 11 cases where FBD was linked to risk of harm. None of these cases received sufficient service delivery.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

- Similarly, inspectors identified ETE needs linked to desistance in 13 cases, and five cases in which ETE was linked to risk of harm. Again, none of these cases received sufficient services to address those risks and needs. Despite ETE being a CRS at the time of inspection, we heard from providers that this contract will not be renewed in the next financial year. This had resulted in significant staffing and resourcing issues since the summer of 2023, and practitioners were not able to make onward referrals beyond December 2023. At the point of inspection, leaders and staff were unclear on next steps regarding ETE provision.
- Only 14 out of 28 relevant cases had sufficient levels of contact to manage the risk of harm. Home visits were completed in just eight out of 25 relevant cases.
- Insufficient attention was given to protecting actual and potential victims in most cases we inspected (21 out of 26 relevant cases). Limitations in effective multi-agency information sharing was also a factor, with less than a third of relevant cases sharing child safeguarding and domestic abuse information satisfactorily.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Our rating⁹ for reviewing is 'Inadequate' based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	52%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	31%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	24%

- Where we saw reviewing done well it was responsive to changes in risk and need, and clearly outlined the progress made by the person on probation. However, reviewing activity was insufficient overall.
- Reviews for people subject to licence were somewhat more effective at examining barriers to compliance and making necessary adjustments to planned desistance activity than reviews of community orders.
- We saw several examples of reviews containing inaccurate or out of date information. Two-thirds of relevant reviews were not adequately informed by other agencies involved in managing risk of harm, despite positive working relationships with partners and a level of access to safeguarding information.
- Reviewing activity linked to risk of harm was poor. Only six out of 26 relevant cases we inspected identified changes in risk and made necessary adjustments to planned work. We saw examples of further offending, non-compliance and decline in factors linked to harm that were not adequately reviewed.

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

2.5 Outcomes

Strengths:

- The female cases we inspected demonstrated better compliance than the males, with three female cases out of four compliant most of the time.
- Of medium-risk cases, 12 out of 18 (67 per cent) demonstrated sufficient compliance.
- Although it was disappointing that at the time of the inspection, six individuals whose cases we reviewed were in custody, there was a very slight improvement in those in settled accommodation and a similar reduction in the number who were homeless.

Areas for improvement:

- Only four out of 29 cases we inspected made sufficient improvements in those factors most closely linked to offending. This is disappointing but understandable given the issues identified in implementation and delivery.
- Only two cases made sufficient improvements in factors linked to risk of harm. This further underpins the need for an enhanced focus on public protection and risk management activity in West Sussex.
- Inspectors identified 17 cases where enforcement action should have been taken; however, this was only undertaken in 10 of those cases. Enforcement was less likely to be undertaken in community sentences compared with resettlement cases.

Progress on previous recommendations

Previous recommendation	Action taken and impact	Categorisation	Improvement still required?
<i>From previous probation inspections (May 2022)</i>	<i>Summary of action taken and impact</i>	<i>Sufficient progress/Some progress/No progress</i>	<i>Yes/no If yes, consider repeating the recommendation</i>
Prioritise all staff receiving the training required to move to mixed caseloads, and then roll-out the training promptly to ensure caseload allocations can be made more evenly across practitioners.	Staff had completed the training required to move to mixed caseloads. However, completion rates in key areas of training such as MAPPA (23 per cent), working with individuals convicted of sexual offending (41 per cent e-learning and eight per cent classroom) and violence and aggression (six per cent) were very low. Attendance at this broader training to embed and develop skills was insufficient and will impact on the competence and confidence of staff to hold a wider range of cases.	Some progress	Yes
Ensure staff have the relevant training to use risk and safeguarding information, obtained from key stakeholders, to appropriately inform risk assessments and sentence plans.	There had been more of a focus on mandatory e-learning. However, attendance at mandatory classroom events that support e-learning was very low (41 per cent child safeguarding and 12 per cent domestic abuse). Cases we inspected indicated that staff still do not sufficiently analyse safeguarding information and plan accordingly.	Some progress	Yes
Ensure that administrators receive training and support to better manage the changes to their workload, following unification.	A bespoke induction and training package had been developed for new case administrators, as well as a locally developed handbook which supports the work of case administrators. Their line management framework allows a focus on performance management and continuous professional development which was highly regarded by staff.	Sufficient progress	No

Annexe one – Web links

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

A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website using the following link:

[Glossary \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/glossary)