



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

Hertfordshire PDU

The Probation Service – East of England region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, July 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

Staff of all grades in the Hertfordshire Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) were committed, which was supported by the leadership team introducing innovative approaches to support the delivery plan. However, the plans were not yet translating into consistent and sufficient service delivery. The main deficits related to the work to keep other people safe, a theme that has been consistent across all our recent inspections. Out of the four service delivery standards, three were rated 'Inadequate' with reviewing rated 'Requires improvement.' Based on these ratings, as well as recognising some strengths in organisational arrangements and activity, the PDU has been given an overall rating of 'Requires improvement'.

Hertfordshire PDU faced challenges with staffing levels, with workloads too high across all grades. The leadership team were working hard to mitigate these pressures and effectively used internal systems to identify pressure points to reallocate staff and resources where required. Given their workloads, staff were not consistently prioritising their own continuous professional development. E-learning for core skills training was not considered effective, so the PDU plan to increase the amount of face-to-face learning was welcomed by staff. Despite workload pressures, we were encouraged by some positive elements of the work to engage people on probation and to support their desistance.

Too often, initial assessments and sentence plans did not incorporate key information related to domestic abuse and child safeguarding. This resulted in subsequent work not sufficiently meeting the needs of actual or potential victims. It was concerning that managers were countersigning these risk assessments. Structured forums had been introduced in response to serious incidents to identify key learning from serious further offences and other serious incidents. The PDU had identified gaps within police and child safeguarding work, leading to additional assurance processes being put in place. This had some impact, with slight improvements to the review of risk of harm work within our case inspections.

The PDU was focused to ensure that the culture of the organisation was inclusive and responsive to all staff. Although some actions had been taken to address concerns raised, further work remained to achieve the aspiration of psychological safety for all members of staff.

The PDU had adopted strong approaches to engaging with people on probation. Lived experience peer mentors provided support for people on probation and were represented within PDU boards, commissioning processes and recruitment activity.

The PDU had access to a number of services, with some positive and innovative provision available across Hertfordshire. We found a lack of oversight around their equitable implementation across the four offices. This meant that practitioners were not always using the best available resources in order to progress sentence plans.

A focus on the development of practice to identify, analyse and respond to the risk of harm, along with the improved coordination of available services to support the implementation and delivery of sentence plans is necessary for the development of the PDU in managing cases robustly. With the appropriate priority given to these aspects of probation work, improvements should be possible.

Martin Jones

Martin Jones CBE
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Hertfordshire PDU

Fieldwork started: 15 April 2024

Score **4/21**

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



P 1.2 Staffing

Requires improvement



P 1.3 Services

Requires improvement



2. Service delivery

P 2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



P 2.2 Planning

Inadequate



P 2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



P 2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement



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.

Hertfordshire PDU should:

1. ensure that Hertfordshire PDU has sufficient staffing resources in place to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation
2. 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
3. improve the use of interventions and services to support the desistance of people on probation
4. ensure domestic abuse and safeguarding information is analysed sufficiently to inform the quality of assessment, planning and management of people on probation
5. develop practitioners' 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 that people on probation with protected characteristics have appropriate access to interventions and services
7. ensure all staff receive the necessary training to undertake their roles.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Hertfordshire PDU over a period of two weeks, beginning 15 April 2024. We inspected 37 community orders and 17 releases from custody on licence where sentences and licences had commenced during two separate weeks, between 25 September 2023 and 01 October 2023 and 23 October 2023 and 29 October 2023. We also conducted 45 interviews with probation practitioners.

Hertfordshire PDU is one of eight PDUs in the East of England probation region. Many core services within the PDU are managed regionally, including unpaid work, some interventions and victim liaison.

There are four offices across the PDU – Stevenage (north), Watford (south and west), Cheshunt (east) and St. Albans (mid). Staff based at the Watford office receive a London weighting allowance within their salary.

Hertfordshire PDU aligns to the Hertfordshire County Council, 10 district council areas and Hertfordshire Constabulary. The PDU is serviced by two magistrates' courts, one Crown Court and a remand court. There is one prison – HM Prison The Mount – with resettlement staff provided by the East of England region. Hertfordshire has no approved premises located within the county. The population of Hertfordshire is 1,204,588,¹ with proven reoffending rates of 24.2 per cent.²

The head of the PDU has been in post for seven years, supported by a deputy head of PDU, in post for two years. At the time of the inspection announcement, the PDU had 9.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) in post. In total, there were 85 FTE probation practitioners³.

The PDU had a community sentence caseload of 1,003 and post-release caseload of 675 individuals on probation. The custody caseload was 554. Despite workload and resourcing pressures in the PDU currently, the PDU was operating under 'green' within the prioritising probation framework.⁴ As such, they were not subject to any demand management principles in respect of what was required to be prioritised within service delivery.

Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) were provided by Interventions Alliance for accommodation support, Advance Charity for women's services and the National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (Nacro) provided personal wellbeing services. Interventions Alliance were providing education, training and employment support but the national contract ceased in March 2024. Additional services had been commissioned utilising grant funds including finance, benefit and debt support delivered by Nacro and a regionally commissioned service to provide mentoring support for those from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background by the English Football League Trust.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics (November 2023), UK Population estimates, mid-2022.

² Source: Ministry of Justice (April 2024), Proven reoffending statistics: July 2021 to June 2022.

³ Source: Hertfordshire PDU data (January 2024).

⁴ Prioritisation Framework: Post-pandemic tool to help regions adapt how they deliver probation services locally according to numbers of available staff.

1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1. Leadership



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

Requires improvement

The PDU had an ambitious vision and strategy, with some innovative approaches to learning by the leadership team. Key messages were disseminated to staff via daily lean boards. Significant work remained to fully engage staff in order to develop a culture that was inclusive and open to meet the needs of all staff. Approaches to understanding gaps in service provision were not sufficiently focused upon disproportionality and protected characteristics. Leadership was not yet enabling the consistent delivery of high-quality probation services, resulting in an overall rating of 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths:

- The PDU delivery plan sets out a clear vision and strategy, aligned to national and regional priorities. The plan prioritised quality and learning, with appropriate governance and local delivery arrangements in place through the Quality Matters Board, regular performance sprint meetings and daily team lean meetings. Staff were generally aware of the PDU delivery priorities, and of those responding to the staff survey, 25 out of 36 said that the vision and strategy drives a high-quality service for all people on probation.
- Whilst the stance to prioritise quality over performance had yet to be realised in full, delivery arrangements were enabling some strong engagement and desistance scores in the cases we inspected across all grades of staff.
- The PDU leadership team led, and contributed to, significant partnership activity. The leadership team utilised these partnership arrangements effectively to contribute to local strategic needs analysis, explore commissioning options and identify learning opportunities, including from serious incidents for PDU staff.
- Fishbone analysis exercises were widely used by the leadership team in the event of a serious incident to identify learning, which showed real potential. Systems have been reviewed and changed based on the learning from these exercises.
- As part of the role as chair of the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) executive board, the head of PDU oversaw an effective partnership for the C2 Choices and Consequences programme. This included engagement with police and judiciary, with strong engagement and multi-agency working being demonstrated in the relevant cases inspected.
- The PDU understood key risks to service delivery. As an example, the lack of police and safeguarding information available upon sentence was identified as a significant business risk which led to a review of processes, resulting in additional assurances of the process. As a consequence of this, the number of outstanding enquiries had reduced significantly from 600 to 54. Although

further work was required to ensure that responses were recorded accurately, we saw more effective reviews relating to risk of harm than at the assessment stage within domain two cases.

- Engaging people on probation was a strength of the PDU. The PDU leadership team were supported by regional staff. Four peer mentors were available and used to engage people on probation in various activities. Peer mentors and people on probation had representation within the local Quality Matters Board, regional commissioning processes and recruitment activity. People on probation were consulted by SPOs where possible to aide quality assurance using the Regional Case Audit Tool (RCAT) Plus. This led to new initiatives, including the neurodiversity room within the Stevenage office.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a lack of a strategic approach to commissioning services to specifically meet diverse needs. Regional commissioning and partnership teams worked with the PDU to identify gaps in service provision but did not focus sufficiently on disproportionality. As a result, gaps remained in service provision for women, ethnic minorities and young adults.
- There was a disconnect when implementing strategic priorities. While there was a reasonable understanding of the needs of people on probation, in some cases coordination and resourcing was lacking, undermining confidence that impacted on practitioners' engagement with them. This included work with young adults linked to IOM as well as women's provision.
- There was significant work required to develop a culture where all staff feel psychologically safe. A staff engagement strategy was underway which included 'roadshows' to all offices. Staff were encouraged to share their view and concerns in meetings; however, this was not having sufficient impact.
- Only 19 out of 36 staff surveyed indicated that the culture of the PDU promoted openness, constructive challenge and ideas, with just 14 out of 35 staff feeling valued. While it was important that staff were professionally challenged, some practitioners did not always feel supported to undertake their roles, nor confident to share views and concerns with managers; for example, in relation to staffing and workload. This was compounded where staff were new and at the start of their learning. Only 14 out of 34 staff in our survey responded positively when asked about whether their wellbeing was sufficiently taken into account.
- When making changes to systems, the impact was not always fully assessed. The decision to change the police and child safeguarding enquiry process led to partnership systems being inundated with requests. Significant levels of information returned to the PDU meant that information was not always recorded correctly or consistently. Despite the positive impact of this system with some groups of staff, they were not always confident in how to use the information they received. It was encouraging that the PDU had identified a skills and knowledge gap and was planning to implement an enhanced training package for new Probation Services Officers (PSOs), where there was the greatest number of staff at the beginning of their learning.

P 1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Hertfordshire PDU faced significant challenges with staffing. Staffing levels were insufficient and workloads too high. The leadership team were using workforce planning processes to effectively coordinate, actively manage and reallocate resources where required. Continuous learning was promoted and had influenced positive changes to process and procedure. However, staff did not feel that they had the capacity to consistently incorporate learning into their practice. Overall, this has resulted in a rating of 'Requires improvement' for staffing.

Strengths:

- PDU and regional leaders actively engaged in regular workforce planning meetings with human resources to monitor and forecast staffing levels. This allowed shortfalls in staffing to be mitigated. The leadership team used weekly performance sprint meetings and daily lean boards to manage workloads and reallocate resources where required.
- The PDU leadership team were maintaining their partnership commitments, whilst also ensuring that sentence management teams were prioritised and strengthened where possible. Arrangements were in place with the Hertfordshire Youth Justice Team to provide funding instead of staff, with a part-time post providing support for transitions work.
- The daily lean board had been adopted in addition to the allocate a person on probation (APOP) tool to address the disparity of workloads between officers and grades. Of those we inspected, cases were allocated appropriately. Our practitioner survey reported that 96 per cent of practitioners felt they had the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to manage the inspected case.
- The PDU had a significant intake of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) trainees prior to inspection fieldwork, with a further large intake planned for later in the year. The PDU had adopted the Probation Operational Delivery (POD) model to support in the mentoring of new staff and PQiP trainees. There was evidence that this was having some impact within the reviewing activity to support the safety of others.
- Learning and continuous improvement was actively promoted in the PDU. The leadership team used various techniques to identify learning, including the use of RCAT Plus and fishbone analysis. This had led to a number of changes, such as greater structure and oversight for recall and enforcement decisions and a greater focus on the four steps of risk assessment. We saw examples of the impact of these changes in cases we inspected. Of the staff responding to our survey, 20 out of 35 respondents indicated that the PDU actively promoted a culture of learning and continuous improvement.
- The PDU had recognised the level of instability within the PSO grade, with 61 per cent of all PSOs in post for under two years and attrition at 19 per cent. An enhanced induction and training package had been devised and was due

to be implemented in the coming months. This involved a greater degree of face-to-face training, shadowing and mentoring opportunities, whilst having a protected workload.

Areas for improvement:

- There was an established culture of practitioners working over and above their contractual hours in order to manage their caseload and meet deadlines. In our survey, 32 out of 35 staff did not believe that staffing levels were sufficient. In our case interviews, only 12 out of 38 practitioners said that their workload was manageable. There were substantial variations in workload to account for new staff. Whilst the average workload for Probation Officers (POs) was 117 per cent on the workload management tool, some POs were in excess of 150 per cent.
- SPO workloads were too high, and their spans of control too wide. Gaps in administration staff and practitioner grades meant that they were experiencing role drift. The target staffing model did not allocate a sufficient number of SPOs to manage the target operating model SPO to PP staffing ratio. This impacted on the ability of managers to provide effective management oversight. Practitioners identified that generally managers were supportive; however, their casework oversight was only sufficient in 30 per cent of cases we inspected.
- Supervision was not being offered in the PDU consistently enough. In total, 10 out of 35 staff responding to the staff survey said they were not receiving supervision sufficiently frequently.
- There were insufficient numbers of administration staff, with only 58 per cent of target staffing in post. Just under two thirds of all administration staff had been in the organisation for under two years. As a result of high workloads, the PDU was not able to fully realise the benefits of the POD model, with limited capacity of case administrators to provide proactive support. Greater oversight was required of their work, with many tasks being self-allocated, so more complex work was at risk of being deprioritised.
- The PDU had utilised the competency-based framework, linked to pay and reward to review and appraise staff learning and development. This was not meeting staff needs, with only 12 out 35 staff responding to our survey indicating that their potential was developed in the PDU.
- Training was not fully meeting the needs of staff. Many staff simply did not feel that they could prioritise their own development due to the pressure of their workload while others found remote training unengaging. Despite attempts to introduce alternative face-to-face workshops, attendance remained disappointingly low. As an example, Spousal Assault Risk Assessments were of insufficient quality within our domain two case assessments, and from the PDU's own evaluation. However, only 41 out of 95 eligible staff had attended the relevant training.

P 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

There were some innovative services available across Hertfordshire PDU. However, insufficient focus had been given around the equitable implementation and delivery of some services within the PDU, including CRS. This meant that practitioners were not always using the best available resources in order to progress sentence plans. There remained gaps in provision for individuals with diverse needs and protected characteristics. Services has therefore been rated as 'Requires improvement'.

Strengths

- Generally, those services available in Hertfordshire met the level of demand consistently. Senior leaders were proactive at co-commissioning in conjunction with the regional partnership and commissioning managers where possible. This included: providing additional resources to support drug and alcohol misuse interventions across Hertfordshire and a housing navigator post in Stevenage; Hertfordshire Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders to support positive activities and social inclusion; and piloting a social navigator post to assist people on probation to integrate back into the community and to support the improvement of their social capital.
- There was strong practice to support desistance and when engaging the person on probation. Strengths and protective factors were consistently considered by practitioners within assessment, planning and delivery of services in Hertfordshire.
- Despite accredited programmes and unpaid work teams being managed regionally, the PDU leadership team had incorporated those staff in PDU meetings and structures. Good relationships had therefore been fostered, with any barriers to delivery being proactively addressed.
- There was no significant waiting list for either unpaid work or accredited programmes. Where cases were inspected with accredited programme requirements, these started at an appropriate time, including pre-programme work in eight out of 10 cases.
- Four practitioners, two full time and two part time were embedded in the family safeguarding team offering liaison between the two services and improving child protection support. Some ongoing development work with new practitioners was also beneficial.
- While there was no specialist team managing resettlement cases or those individuals subject to licences, practitioners were giving more consistent and sufficient attention to protecting victims where individuals were subject to licence than those managed under community orders. Within these cases, the involvement of other services was better coordinated, and the practitioner was engaging key individuals in the person on probation's life.

- Although there was an underuse of some toolkits and structured interventions in the cases we inspected, practitioners were undertaking rehabilitative activities with people on probation, with only three relevant cases having no interventions delivered when they should have. This led to some promising delivery of work to support desistance. The PDU recognised that practitioners had required further input to raise their confidence when delivering toolkit work, with training being supported by the regional quality development officer.
- Despite concerns raised around the provision of women's services, dedicated women's practitioners were trained in structured intervention, fostering identity, resilience and strengths. We saw some positive approaches, particularly to desistance where this model was adopted. As a consequence, work in our case sample was similar in quality to those for males.
- Most services were delivered in appropriate venues and over three quarters of people on probation said the distance necessary to travel to access them was reasonable.

Areas for improvement:

- The absence of monitoring the effectiveness of services meant that practitioners were not always using the best available resources to progress sentence plans for people on probation. The involvement of other organisations in the delivery of services was sufficiently well-coordinated in less than half of the cases inspected.
- The PDU did not consistently take a deliberate, strategic and informed approach to meeting diverse needs or when considering disproportionality. Despite some gaps in service provision in relation to those with protected characteristics, the partnership and commissioning team had not identified or planned any associated activity to address these gaps.
- Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 had limited availability in some geographic areas due to budgetary constraints, with a limited provision for women. The lack of affordable and available housing meant that there was a gap in move-on accommodation to prevent repeated homelessness after 84 days.
- The staff and leadership team had lost confidence in some CRS provision and expressed frustration with some of the national contracts. CRS should have been utilised, and was not, in 15 out of 44 relevant cases. Despite some oversight by SPOs and regional contract teams, there was insufficient analysis of referral patterns or outcomes to effectively rectify shortfalls. There was no PDU-wide approach to reducing barriers to engagement with a view to co-locating services where appropriate.
- The quality of some CRS provision had been inconsistent. The demand for accommodation services meant there was a waiting list of 200, resulting in a high number of referrals being cancelled. Staff lacked confidence in the provision for women and remote delivery and felt frustration at the lack of suitable or accessible women's centres.

- Some services were not always delivered in appropriate ways and there were inconsistencies across some offices. For example, the Shaw Trust was co-located four days per week in the Watford office but offered only remote appointments to individuals reporting to the Cheshunt office.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 77 people on probation as part of this inspection. They completed eight online surveys and 62 face-to-face surveys. A further eight in-depth interviews were conducted which are not included in the quantitative survey data (one individual completed both a survey and an in-depth interview). There was a slight under-representation of females in the survey when compared with the PDU caseload, with a positive representation of those individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

- The initial allocation systems, supported by the APOP tool and daily lean boards, were broadly supporting the allocation and timely induction process within the PDU, although seven individuals stated that they did not receive an induction. Practitioners utilised induction appointments to provide people on probation with clear expectations of their supervision (66 out of 70).
- Despite the staffing and workload pressures within the PDU, 51 out of 63 respondents to the User Voice survey said that practitioners took the time to understand their needs during inductions. This set a good foundation on which to build effective relationships to support and address the risks and needs of people on probation.

“I received an induction, I felt well treated due to my attitude of wanting to help myself and was honest with my situation.”

- In concordance with the strong probation practitioner approaches to engagement when delivering services in the cases we inspected, the people on probation surveyed generally indicated that they were offered appointments at a time that suited them, the distance they were required to travel was reasonable and that they felt safe accessing the probation office. When attending appointments, 52 out of 70 individuals indicated that they started on time.
- Practitioners were fostering some effective relationships with people on probation, with 47 out of 69 respondents to the User Voice survey stating that they had a positive working relationship with their probation practitioner. Where necessary, practitioners were reminding people on probation of their appointment times. Overall, 55 out of 70 individuals felt that they had appropriate levels of contact.

“We have a good professional working relationship. Gone above and beyond, even texts me at weekends.”

- Of those people on probation indicating that they needed access to specific services, just over half (29 out of 54) indicated that probation had assisted them with access. People on probation described particular difficulties in accessing sufficient mental health support, finance, benefit and debt advice, and accommodation services.
- The leadership team prioritised work to engage with people on probation as part of the PDU delivery plan. Of those responding to the User Voice survey, 42 out of 70 participants stated that probation had asked their views about being on supervision and that they had felt listened to.

“I was offered the chance to attend a meeting of 40-50 people on probation recently where they asked us to take part. I felt that they were respected and have people with past experience working there too.”

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

- The East of England probation region had commissioned the English Football League Trust to work with up to seven individuals at any one time from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This mentoring service was available for all of Hertfordshire and was delivered in Stevenage.
- Workforce planning in the PDU sufficiently considered the diversity and protected characteristics of staff. These factors were considered within decisions around work-life balance requests and reasonable adjustment decisions. The ethnic diversity of the workforce was sufficient to meet the needs of the PDU caseload.
- Engaging people on probation was a strength of the PDU. The leadership team were supported by regional staff. Four peer mentors engaged people on probation in various activities. There was strong engagement from practitioners when delivering services to people on probation. Peer mentors had representation within the Quality Matters Board, RCAT Plus meetings and within recruitment activity. This led to new initiatives, including the neurodiversity room within the Stevenage office.
- Our case delivery data indicated that building strengths and enhancing protective factors was central to the delivery of services in Hertfordshire PDU. Delivered services built upon the strengths and enhanced protective factors in 74 per cent of inspected cases.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a lack of a strategic approach to commissioning services to specifically meet diverse needs. Regional commissioning and partnership teams worked with the PDU to identify gaps in service provision but did not focus sufficiently on disproportionality. As a result, gaps remained in the provision for women, ethnic minorities and young adults.
- A lack of coordination of CRS women's services meant that barriers to effective working had not been addressed. The concerns of some staff regarding remote working, or the lack of available and suitable venues, was a factor in lower than predicted referrals.

2. Service delivery

P 2.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁵ for assessment is 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?	59%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	65%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	17%

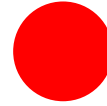
- Court work was not rated or reported at a PDU level. There were particular staffing pressures at court, meaning that sessional staff had to be utilised to support the team. Inconsistent processes meant that insufficient information had been obtained at court on which to base a thorough assessment of risks to others. There appeared to be an overreliance on the information provided at the pre-sentence stage within initial assessments. Gaps in key risk information were generally not identified within subsequent initial assessments and did not prompt further necessary enquiries.
- The risk of harm assessment did not identify and clearly analyse all relevant risk of harm factors. Only 16 out of 54 cases had sufficient levels of information sharing with police about domestic abuse and 19 out of 54 had sufficient information regarding child safeguarding. Where enquiries had been made but gaps in information remained within the responses of other agencies, this was not routinely followed up. The consequence of this meant that 11 out of 54 cases we inspected had an inaccurate risk of harm classification. Despite these deficits, managers were countersigning these assessments as being of sufficient quality.
- There were promising approaches to identifying and analysing offending-related factors with previous probation assessments utilised. Practitioners across all grades and levels of experience were approaching assessments with a strength-based approach and consistently considered individuals' protective factors within their approaches to desistance. This would be further improved with consistent liaison with partnership

⁵ 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 at Hertfordshire.](#)

organisations to identify and analyse individuals' progress with previous or current involvement with their services.

- Diversity characteristics were discussed with people on probation in 74 per cent of cases inspected. Practitioners were routinely considering the impact of personal circumstances on the ability of the person on probation to engage with service delivery. However, this was not consistently the case when analysing an individuals' protected characteristics. Females on probation were allocated to specialist practitioners who had undertaken specific training as part of their roles. The analysis of protected characteristics of this group was significantly more likely to be assessed as sufficient compared to those undertaken with males on probation.

P 2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁶ for planning is 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?	63%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	74%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	41%

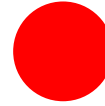
- In total, 25 out of 53 cases inspected did not sufficiently address risk of harm factors and prioritise those that were most critical. Many of the gaps in risk management planning was a result of insufficient information being gathered and analysed within assessments.
- There was a lack of professional curiosity in identifying the involvement of other agencies working with the person on probation. Their work should have been referenced in the risk management plan and was not in 25 out of 52 of the cases we inspected. There was a slightly higher proportion of cases assessed as having sufficient risk management planning when they were completed by POs. There was a greater proportion of POs that had been in post for over three years when compared with other grades, suggesting a greater degree of knowledge and experience within this aspect of risk management planning⁷.
- The planning to support desistance of individuals built effectively on the promising approaches seen within assessment activity. Despite staff and managers lacking confidence in some available services, plans broadly identified appropriate services. These included identification of work via available toolkits and sequenced where other teams – such as unpaid work or IOM – were involved. As identified in assessments, plans were appropriately balanced to strengthen protective factors, as well as addressing offending-related factors.

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

⁷ The findings relating to practitioner grade have not been subject to Relative Rate Index analysis, which is a test used to compare rates of incidence.

- Planning to engage people on probation was flexible and took into account individual needs. This reflected similar findings within the User Voice survey of people on probation that practitioners were taking the time to understand individual needs. Practitioners were sufficiently taking into account the readiness and motivation of the person on probation where necessary and would identify methods of reminding individuals of appointments via text message or telephone contact.
- Some practitioners cited high workloads and tight deadlines for the completion of initial sentence plans as a reason why the person on probation was not always meaningfully involved in their planning.

P 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 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?	80%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	54%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	39%

- Insufficient attention was given to protecting actual and potential victims in just over half of all cases inspected. The process put in place to ensure that appropriate police and children's services enquiries were made in all cases was promising. However, it did not always lead to sufficient liaison between practitioners and the key agencies involved. Liaison should have taken place with children's services in 16 out of 34 relevant cases and with police in 16 out of 29 relevant cases we inspected. Where liaison did take place, it was not always sufficiently focused on all potential victims, or those residing outside of Hertfordshire.
- Staffing and workload pressures meant that practitioners often felt that they did not have sufficient resources to undertake all necessary tasks across their caseloads. This meant that opportunities to manage risk of harm had not been fully utilised. In 21 out of 43 relevant cases we inspected, key individuals in the person on probation's life were not sufficiently involved in supporting the effective management of risk of harm. Home visits were not undertaken in 20 out of 48 relevant cases.
- The allocation and induction processes were broadly supportive of the prompt or appropriate start of the requirements of the sentence in 41 out of 51 relevant cases. The promising approaches to assessment and planning for the engagement of individuals enabled practitioners to provide sufficient focus to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation in 83 per cent of cases.

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 at Hertfordshire PDU.](#)

- The delivered services were those most likely to reduce offending and support desistance in 56 per cent of cases. Some workshops had been provided to improve staff confidence in the delivery of interventions and approved toolkits, although further training was required for staff. In all but three relevant cases, practitioners were delivering some interventions to support individuals subject to rehabilitative activity requirements.
- Available local services were only engaged and utilised effectively to support desistance during the sentence and beyond in 24 out of 50 relevant cases. CRS were not utilised where they should have been in 15 out of 44 relevant cases inspected. Whilst SPOs had some responsibilities for maintaining relationships with services including CRS within the PDU, there were some inconsistencies as to how these were embedded across the four offices in Hertfordshire PDU. In half of all cases inspected, the involvement of other organisations in the delivery of services was insufficiently coordinated. Whilst relationships were reported to be positive with Change, Grow, Live (CGL) for the support for individuals with alcohol and substance misuse issues, the recording of delivered interventions could be improved, including where there was a community sentence treatment requirement.

P 2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁹ for reviewing is 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?	67%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	63%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	52%

- Additional processes had been put in place to ensure that appropriate liaison had taken place with police and children's services. The PDU had also implemented a POD system to ensure that PQiP trainees and new staff had increased exposure to colleagues with a range of knowledge, skills and experiences. This had generally led to more effective reviews of the risk of harm posed to others than within initial assessments.
- Further work was still required to ensure that staff had the appropriate skills and knowledge to incorporate and use key risk information within their practice to ensure the safety of other people. This included new staff, many of whom were within the PSO grade at the time of inspection. An example of this would be for the PDU to empower staff to have the knowledge and confidence to involve the person on probation (and where appropriate, any key individuals in their life) meaningfully in reviewing their risk of harm. This was only sufficient in 16 out of 42 relevant cases.
- Formal reviews were not consistently undertaken as often as they should have been in order to review individuals' compliance and engagement, support desistance and keep other people safe. The PDU leadership team had prioritised an approach to case recording which captured reviewing activity within contact records. Whilst this did not capture a holistic review of the changing risks and needs of individuals, it did allow practitioners to make amendments to individuals' plans in response to some changing circumstances.
- Where reviewing activity was delivered well, this included engaging the person on probation about their progress, barriers to engagement and compliance. Reviewing considered compliance and engagement levels, with

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.

relevant barrier and necessary adjustments being made in 33 out of 47 relevant cases. Where recall had been a consideration, we saw use of the recall decision tree with oversight by managers to support effective decision making.

- Whilst some progress was being captured in relation to desistance, this was often based on self-reporting with inconsistent approaches to external verification. Out of 42 relevant cases inspected, only 26 were informed by the necessary input from other agencies working with the person on probation.

Outcomes

Strengths:

- In congruence with the findings around the flexible and adaptable approaches being used by practitioners in delivering the requirements of the sentence, there was sufficient compliance in 43 out of the 54 cases inspected.
- Whilst it may be difficult to draw any direct causality between the quality of the interventions delivered by the PDU and reoffending rates, only 10 out of the cohort of 54 cases had been convicted of a new offence throughout their sentence. This is below the Hertfordshire proven reoffending rate¹⁰ of 24 per cent.

Areas for improvement:

- Sufficient improvements in those factors most closely linked to offending, relating to both developing strengths and addressing needs, were only evidenced in 19 out of 54 cases. This reflected some of the gaps we saw within sentence implementation and delivery.
- Improvements to the individual factors linked to risk of harm were only evidenced in 13 out of 54 cases inspected. This largely reflected what we had seen in relation to the quality of work delivered to ensure the safety of other people.

¹⁰ Source: Ministry of Justice (April 2024). Proven reoffending statistics: July 2021 to June 2022.

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)