



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

West Kent PDU

The Probation Service – Kent, Surrey and Sussex region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, March 2024



Contents

Foreword.....	3
Ratings.....	4
Recommendations	5
Background.....	6
1. Organisational arrangements and activity.....	8
2. Service delivery.....	18
Annexe one – Web links.....	29

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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

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Foreword

At West Kent Probation Delivery Unit (PDU), the leadership team, managers and staff were committed on providing a responsive service for people on probation. Significant staff shortages, particularly at Probation Officer (PO) grade, meant that the vision and strategy to deliver a high-quality service for all people on probation had not been fully realised. As a result, frontline practice did not do enough to keep other people safe, and this led to a 'Requires improvement' rating for the PDU.


The leadership team is almost entirely new since our last inspection (2022), and we found a deliberate approach to meeting diverse needs and clear communication of PDU priorities. There was a positive culture, and staff were motivated to do their best in difficult circumstances. Staff were well supported and involved in several positive initiatives, including engaging people on probation forums and equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) champions in each probation office.

Workloads were difficult to manage across all grades of staff, including practitioners, middle managers and administrators. Workloads were actively managed as much as possible, for example through the deployment of agency staff. Staff received regular case-focused supervision, though management oversight was effective in just 14 of the 64 relevant cases.

Some innovative services were in place, including women's projects across West Kent, foreign national offender (FNO) leads, and the Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) hub in Medway providing programmes of work with young adult males. Services were not used consistently to address offending-related need due to service provider staff shortages and difficult-to-follow referral processes which hindered access to services. Services worked better where there was co-location in probation offices. For example, dependency and recovery services and Integrated Offender Management (IOM) were positive examples in this regard.

There were some promising signs of improvement in service delivery since our last inspection. Assessment focused on the factors linked to desistance was a strength. We also found improved scores in seven out of 12 summary judgments. Nonetheless, work to keep other people safe was inadequate across the board. There were good arrangements for requesting and receiving child safeguarding and domestic abuse information, for example through the Kent and Medway safeguarding hub, but this key information was not sufficiently utilised to inform case management delivery.

Much progress has been made since our last inspection of West Kent, and the right foundations of strong leadership and a positive culture are now in place to further drive improvement towards delivering high-quality probation services that continue to change people's lives for the better.



Martin Jones CBE

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

West Kent PDU

Fieldwork started: 08 January 2024

Score **4/21**

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership

Good



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

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 Kent PDU should:

1. improve the use of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) to support the desistance of people on probation
2. ensure that disproportionality in the impact of service provision on people on probation with a protected characteristic is monitored and addressed
3. ensure domestic abuse and safeguarding information is analysed sufficiently to inform the quality of assessment, planning, and management of people on probation
4. ensure effective management oversight is provided with sufficient frequency.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in West Kent PDU over a period of two weeks, beginning 08 January 2024. We inspected 46 community orders and 20 releases on licence from custody where sentences and licences had commenced between 05 June to 11 June and 19 June to 25 June 2023. We also conducted 37 interviews with probation practitioners.

West Kent is the largest PDU within the Kent, Surrey and Sussex probation region and accounts for 28 per cent of the regional caseload, amounting to 4,022 people on probation at the time of inspection announcement. Of these, 1,878 were in the community, 984 were post-release and 1,160 were in custody. There are four offices ranked in terms of size: Medway (Chatham), Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. The Gravesend office is subject to full closure on 01 March 2024.

There were 190 staff in post across all probation service grades, representing a vacancy rate of 12 per cent. The vacancy rate for POs was disproportionately high at 41 per cent. At the point of inspection, West Kent PDUs were formally in red status in Gravesend but were working towards amber status in Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Medway under the prioritising probation framework (PPF). This included concessions in respect of not completing 'business as usual' activities and greater use of a blended supervision model, for example through increased use of telephone rather than face-to-face reporting.

Courts in the PDU include three magistrates courts – at Maidstone, Medway and Sevenoaks – and a Crown Court at Maidstone. There are three prisons in the PDU's area: HM Prison (HMP) East Sutton Park – an open women's prison; HMP Rochester – a training and resettlement prison; and HMP Maidstone, which specialises in FNOs. There is an approved premises in Maidstone which is a Psychologically Informed Planned Environment Unit. Medway Council is a unitary authority separate to Kent County Council, which covers the rest of the PDU's area.

Kent is in the top 20 most dangerous counties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The crime rate in Kent in 2022 was 88 crimes per 1,000 people, and the most common crimes were violence and sexual offences, which happened to roughly 42 out of every 1,000 residents. Some of the safer parts of Kent are in West Kent.

The population in Kent is just over 1,500,000. Residents aged 50 to 64 comprise 20 per cent of the population. Eleven per cent of residents are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and 25 per cent are disabled with long-term physical or mental health conditions as defined by the Equality Act.

The PDU vision is to be responsive to diversity and different types of offending, with specialist work with women, FNO, IOM and substance misuse. CRS providers supply a range of services including accommodation, education, training and employment (ETE), personal wellbeing and women's services. In addition, the Medway Activity Hub offers services to women, young people and registered sex offenders (on different days), as well as women's projects and bespoke mentoring and employment services.

West Kent PDU received an overall rating of 'Inadequate' in our previous inspection in 2022. The inspection found that the PDU was in 'survival mode' with chronic staff shortages and high workloads, and there was no clear strategy or long-term plan to address those issues. The inspection made five recommendations to the PDU, and progress made against previous recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

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.

Good

The leadership of this PDU had considerably improved since the previous inspection in 2022. This had led to cultural changes, improvements in staff motivation but most critically, a clear vision for reducing reoffending and empowering staff and managers to deliver their responsibilities. While there was further work to do to improve the work to keep people safe, the necessary enablers are in place to achieve high-quality service delivery. As one Senior Probation Officer (SPO) told us, "We're now on the front foot."

Strengths:

- Governance arrangements were clearly set out, including lines of accountability and escalation arrangements. Local delivery arrangements were clearly communicated. Most staff understood how the delivery model should operate, and roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. Twenty-six out of 37 of respondents to our PDU staff survey felt that the vision and strategy enabled the delivery of a high-quality service always or most of the time.
- The leadership team engaged well with partners to support the delivery of the reducing reoffending plan. There was a planned approach to influencing key stakeholders, including Kent local authorities' chief executives, the Kent Criminal Justice Board and the Reducing Reoffending Board, in the delivery of their strategic plans.
- Risks to service delivery were understood, and appropriate mitigations were in place. For example, Probation Services Officers (PSOs) have been overrecruited to support overstretched POs, whilst long-term efforts to fill outstanding PO vacancies continue.
- Senior leaders and staff across the PDU were taking various approaches to meet diverse needs for both staff and people on probation. For example, through women's projects, FNO leads and the CFO Medway hub targeting services at young adult males.
- The impact of carrying out changes to service delivery was understood and appropriate action was taken. This was seen in the recent closure of the Gravesend office which was planned in a short space of time at a strategic and operational level, including the planned movement of staff and communication to people on probation.
- There was a positive culture in the PDU, and this emanated from the senior leadership team and was built on the premise that all staff are equally respected and have a valued contribution to make.

- Staff were highly engaged and were motivated to do their best in difficult circumstances. Sickness absence levels had been significantly reduced to a low level.
- Appropriate attention was paid to staff safety, through monthly health and safety audits and through a responsive approach to any concerns raised.
- Leaders ensured that reasonable adjustments were made for staff. In our PDU staff survey, reasonable adjustments were made in all cases where these were required.
- Staff were enabled to raise concerns should they feel discriminated against. Staff were supported and unacceptable behaviour was addressed informally or through formal disciplinary procedures where required.
- Leaders understood and used diversity information to drive improvement. EDIB champions were in place in each office, and comprehensive data was gathered to inform responses to any workforce disparities and to further develop accessible services for people on probation.
- The PDU had a proactive approach to engaging with people on probation. Where views had been gathered, these led to identifiable improvements in services such as placing art and plants in offices to improve office environments.
- Prompt action was taken in response to performance monitoring, audit and inspection. Cases of concern were identified and robustly monitored; training was delivered to improve practice in response to audit; and significant steps were taken in response to the previous inspection of the PDU.
- There was a consistent approach to learning from things that go wrong, including from serious further offences (SFOs) and coroner's reports. A supportive approach was taken through the head of service reassuring practitioners and managers throughout SFO learning processes, whilst any necessary action was taken.
- Learning was communicated effectively. Twenty-five out of 35 of respondents to the West Kent PDU staff survey felt that there was a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Areas for improvement:

- The vision and strategy were not yet fully leading to sufficient quality of frontline practice, particularly in relation to public protection.
- Guidance about services did not sufficiently cover which services are the most suitable for addressing the specific needs of people on probation at various points in the individual's journey, and the referral processes required.

1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Staffing levels were insufficient due to a significant shortage of POs. This resulted in high workloads which negatively impacted on the capacity of probation practitioners to consistently deliver high-quality services. Strenuous efforts were continuing to be made to address this shortfall, and encouragingly PSOs were overrecruited against the staffing target to enable the PDU to “grow their own” POs to meet medium to longer-term staffing requirements.

Strengths:

- A culture of learning and continuous improvement was actively promoted. Provision included the West Kent quality management framework, the Kent Best Practice People Board, a focus on action learning sets and performance management quarterly reviews undertaken by SPOs. The over recruitment of PSOs and the support to enable them to progress through the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) to become POs was a further example of the PDU’s commitment to continuous improvement. Of the 35 respondents to our PDU staff survey, 25 felt that a culture of learning is actively promoted always or most of the time.
- A workforce planning strategy was in place to promote staff development from within to achieve sufficient PO staffing levels in the medium to long term. Local recruitment initiatives had been successful in appointing PSOs and administrative staff to commence employment in the near future.
- Sentence management middle managers had practicable spans of control which enabled them to provide supervision and support for team members and to hold them accountable for their work.
- Workloads were actively managed through recalling secondees from non-promotional roles, recruiting agency POs and focusing resources on agreed priorities.
- The workforce adequately reflected the diversity of the local population: 11 per cent of all staff were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and 26 per cent of all staff had a declared disability. Census data for Kent registers that 11 per cent of the local population were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and 25 per cent declared a disability.
- Cases were allocated to staff who were appropriately qualified, which was carried out with enhanced management oversight. Ninety-eight per cent of practitioners interviewed for case inspection felt they had the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to supervise the case always or most of the time.
- The potential of staff was identified and developed through the staff supervision framework and support was provided to undertake development opportunities, including shadowing and apprenticeships.

- An effective staff induction programme was in place. Thirteen out of 20 respondents to the PDU staff survey felt that they had fully or mostly received an effective induction into their new role.
- Sentence management staff received regular case-focused supervision and were well supported by SPOs.
- Performance management was rigorously used to develop and promote staff and to manage poor performance.
- Staff learning needs were identified and met through a variety of means including role-specific face-to-face training, monitoring of completion of mandatory training, development plans progressed through staff supervision, and best practice forums involving all grades of staff.
- Poor staff performance was identified and addressed through consistent application of informal action planning and formal disciplinary processes where required.

Areas for improvement:

- PO staffing levels were insufficient. Just 58 per cent of POs were in post against the staffing target.
- Practitioners did not have manageable workloads. At the time of inspection announcement, the workload measurement tool average for POs was 131 per cent, though this had reduced from 147 per cent in the 12 months prior to announcement. The workload measurement tool average for PQiPs was 113 per cent, albeit a reduction from 115 per cent in the previous 12 months.
- Eighty-one per cent of the probation practitioners interviewed by inspectors stated that their workload was “not so” or “not at all” manageable.
- Administrative staff workloads were excessive. Eighty-two per cent of case administrators were in post. Some administrators were undertaking overtime to try and keep up with work demands.
- Sentence management middle managers were unable to effectively focus on staff development due to time-consuming human resource responsibilities.
- Management oversight did not sufficiently enhance the quality of work with people on probation. Management oversight was insufficient in 50 out of 64 relevant cases inspected. Managers felt that workload demands meant their role was often reactive with insufficient time to focus on case management practice development.

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

Services were not consistently delivered to meet the offending-related needs of all people on probation. There were some positive examples of integrated service delivery and co-location of CRS providers. Access to services was often hindered by complicated referral processes and was further frustrated by staff shortages in some service providers, which led to waiting lists for some services.

Strengths:

- A diverse array of services was in place to meet the needs of people on probation across a range of protected characteristics including for women, FNOs and young adult males.
- PDU staff and services actively built on the strengths of people on probation. For example, through the women's project's focus on building confidence and self-esteem through a range of activities including poetry workshops.
- The PDU paid specific attention to diversity factors in the way that services are delivered. For example, through establishing specialist teams to concentrate on working with marginalised groups including women and FNOs.
- Services were reasonably accessible, and consideration had been given to the suitability of specific locations, for example following the closure of the Gravesend office.
- The delivery of services was informed by monitoring and review through regular SPO single point of contact interface meetings with service providers. Meetings focused on improving referrals and sought to resolve any practical difficulties, including with referral processes.
- Some services were available in a timely manner, such as dependency and recovery, and women's projects.
- There were effective working relationships with some agencies. For example, through co-located services and local IOM arrangements. This also included access to the safeguarding hub for Kent and Medway.
- Courts were kept up to date with the services available to support sentencing decisions through regular interface with sentencers at Crown Court and magistrates' court level.

Areas for improvement:

- Access to high-quality services was not available consistently to always address offending-related need. For example, services and interventions to address lifestyle were not delivered in 38 out of 45 relevant cases where they should have been.

- Referral routes for suitable services were not consistently understood by all staff. For example, referrals were made seeking to work collaboratively with some CRS providers to help the person on probation achieve a more stable lifestyle. In such instances, providers required that the person on probation was stable before they were able to work with them.
- There were waiting lists for some services, for example there was a three-month waiting list for CRS women's services.
- Working arrangements with CRS providers were inconsistent, leading to delays for people on probation accessing services. Dependency and recovery services were co-located in probation offices and this worked well, whilst other services including ETE were delivered from separate locations and were less well understood.
- The volume of services available did not consistently meet demand. For example, accommodation services were oversubscribed.
- The percentage of successful completion of programme requirements for individuals convicted of a sexual offence was 67 per cent and the percentage of successful completion of accredited programme requirements other than for individuals convicted of a sexual offence was 15 per cent at the time of inspection announcement, which was insufficient.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 86 people on probation through 21 online surveys, 60 face-to-face surveys and seven in-depth interviews as part of this inspection.

Experience with inductions was positive. The majority, 73 out of 81 survey participants, stated that they understood what was expected of them whilst on probation. The majority, 54 out of 80 survey participants, stated that their probation practitioner took the time to understand their personal needs during induction.

Experience with appointments was positive. Almost two thirds – 50 out of 81 survey participants – stated that their appointments are useful in helping them and their rehabilitation.

| *The feeling that I have someone to talk to."*

There were positive relationships with most probation practitioners. Almost three quarters, 59 out of 81 survey participants, stated that they had a good relationship with their probation practitioner.

| *"Really good. I feel like I can be open with her, I tell her my problems and she does sort anything she can. She's trying to sort out that I don't have to go to court because I stopped going to the group."*

Though some people on probation expressed frustrations, for example:

| *"It was unrealistic. I had a 1-2-1 and thought that they'd be able to sort my biggest problem (housing), but all they can really do is hand me a load of leaflets for charities who are trying to help too many people with the same problem. You start off positive and end up disappointed. I don't think I have a sentence plan."*

Access to services was positive overall. Of those that stated they did need access to services, the majority (32 out of 47) stated that probation had helped them access services relevant to their personal needs, strengths and circumstances.

Procedural justice and being heard was positive overall. The majority, 60 out of 81 people on probation in West Kent PDU, knew how to raise complaints. Almost two-thirds, (51 out of 81) of survey participants felt like probation services had asked their views about being on supervision and they felt listened to.

| *"I know you can, and actually I should have done that when I was struggling to attend the sessions."*

The majority felt supported by probation.

| *"When I was doing my actual community service hours, the lady that took them helped me mentally when I was in a bad way."*

Peer-led solutions included the call for a more joined-up service where probation had greater reach to engage with housing services in the region. Other suggestions included more opportunities for people with lived experience to provide peer support to people on probation, probation to commit to hiring a more diverse range of staff so people on probation can feel they can relate to staff more easily, and better communication between probation practitioners so that the level of support remains consistent when there is a change in staff.

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

- A deliberate approach was taken to meeting diverse needs, for example through the establishment of women's teams, PDU women's champions and women's projects. Initiatives included an innovative project with close links to a local prison to work with women convicted of sexual or violent offences.
- PDU leaders fully ensured that reasonable adjustments were made for staff where these were required.
- Staff were supported to raise concerns if they felt discriminated against or experienced discrimination. A positive culture contributed to any such concerns being addressed through informal or formal disciplinary processes.
- Leaders used diversity information to drive improvement. EDIB champions were in place in each office. Events celebrating diversity took place in the Medway office, and there was a plan to roll these out across the PDU. Seven-minute briefings on protected characteristics were delivered in team meetings as part of ongoing staff training. Accurate data on staff diversity characteristics had been collated and there were plans for this to be reviewed at the quarterly EDIB board.
- Doing What Really Matters and SPIEL¹ were commissioned to provide coaching and mentoring to people on probation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.
- The workforce reflected the diversity of the local population. Eleven per cent of all staff were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Twenty-six per cent of all staff had a declared disability. This was directly reflective of the local population with 25 per cent disabled as defined under the Equality Act.
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and disabled staff were properly represented in management grades. Thirteen per cent of SPOs were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and 25 per cent had a declared disability in line with the all-staff group.
- A diverse range of services that meets identified risks and needs were in place including for women, FNOs and young adult males.
- Services were delivered in appropriate and accessible locations.
- A reflective and pragmatic approach to work with transgender people on probation was evident through the specialist support provided by the lead SPO. Inspectors observed case discussion which appropriately focused on the welfare of staff as well as the needs of the case.

¹ Self-belief, Perception, Engage, Inspire, Learn.

Areas for improvement:

- The equality impact assessment in relation to the recent closure of the Gravesend office was completed at a regional level, though local implementation of the office closure was not fully cognisant of the likely impact on people on probation with protected characteristics.
- Seventy-eight per cent of all staff were female. This was disproportionate to the 51 per cent female sex demography in Kent. This reflected the probation workforce profile at a national level.
- The implementation and delivery of services to support desistance and to keep other people safe was less effective for females in inspected cases. Delivery supported keeping other people safe in 28 per cent of male cases, and in just eight per cent of female cases.
- The implementation and delivery of services to support desistance was less effective for individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Delivery supported desistance in 39 per cent of white ethnic cases and in just 23 per cent of cases from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.² There were some gaps in service provision, for example in relation to fully meeting mental health needs.
- Issues of disproportionality could be further explored to ensure that minority groups have equal access to services and are not overrepresented in recall decisions.

² 'The findings relating to Black, Asian and minority ethnic group cases have not been subject to a relative rate index analysis, which is a test used to compare rates of incidence, we report on our findings with that caveat.'

2. Service delivery

2.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating³ 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?	53%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	68%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	24%

- Assessment analysed the motivation and readiness of the person on probation to engage and comply with the sentence in 48 out of 66 cases. Assessments of females and of individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were strongest in this regard and this may reflect the benefits of deploying a concentrator model of specialist practitioners assigned to work with diverse groups.
- Assessment analysed the protected characteristics of the individual and considered the impact of these on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery in 31 out of 66 cases. Again, assessments of females and of individuals from ethnic minority groups were stronger, though overall there were gaps in assessing the impact of protected characteristics such as dyslexia. Many assessments were generic and not sufficiently personalised.
- Offending-related factors were identified and analysed in 55 out of 66 cases. Assessments considered the appropriate dynamic factors linked to the risk of reoffending including alcohol misuse, peers and associates, entrenched attitudes towards offending, relationships, thinking and behaviour and emotional wellbeing.
- Assessments drew sufficiently on available sources of information in 43 out of 66 cases. There was insufficient communication with other agencies, for example to assess mental health, alcohol and substance misuse needs, and this contributed to insufficient analysis. Some assessments drew too heavily

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

on information from the person on probation without this being verified, such as their employment status.

- Sufficient information about domestic abuse was obtained in 30 out of 46 cases where it was required. Sufficient information about child protection and child safeguarding was obtained in 40 out of 64 cases. This provided the opportunity for the assessment of the risk of serious harm (RoSH) to be sufficiently informed by police intelligence information, and safeguarding information in respect of any children's service involvement in the case.
- Information about domestic abuse was used in assessing the case in only 16 out of 54 applicable cases. Whilst sufficient information was often received from the police, it was not used to fully assess the picture in respect of domestic abuse to partners, or to assess the suitability of addresses provided by people on probation.
- Information about child protection and child safeguarding was used, where required, to assess the case in 23 out of 56 cases. Inspectors assessed cases where children's social care checks had been returned, though, where there had been previous children's social care involvement, this was not followed up by the practitioner and was not analysed within the formal assessment. There was insufficient analysis of some risk classifications and deficient rationales regarding how risk levels had been arrived at. Some risk assessments were inaccurate as information received and changes in circumstances were not sufficiently used to reassess the level of risk posed.

2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁴ 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:

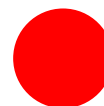
Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	47%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	58%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	33%

- Planning set a level, pattern and type of contact sufficient to engage the person on probation in 44 out of 66 cases. Positive practice examples included planning done collaboratively with people on probation and agreeing set tasks and objectives. Planning in this regard was strongest for individuals from ethnic minority groups.
- Sufficient account of the protected characteristics was taken in 23 out of 59 applicable cases. Plans did not always adequately consider chaotic lifestyles and did not sufficiently sequence objectives. There were gaps in identifying how planning would address diversity needs, such as considering how literacy difficulties may impact on engagement and compliance.
- Planning focused sufficiently on engaging the person on probation in 31 out of 66 cases. Some plans were generic and not specific enough to identify protective factors or the areas of work to be completed. The focus on engagement was significantly stronger in resettlement cases and this may reflect the work of resettlement panels which provided a coordinated approach to managing the prisoner's release from custody.
- Planning sufficiently reflected offending-related factors and focused on supporting desistance in 38 out of 66 cases. Planning to support desistance was stronger in community cases.

⁴ 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.](#)

- Planning set out the necessary interventions to manage the risk of harm and made appropriate links to the work of other agencies in 27 out of 62 applicable cases. Some plans were coordinated with Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences to put in place arrangements to keep partners safe where there were domestic abuse concerns. There was evidence of plans to assist people on probation in finding independent accommodation, including referrals to housing and CRS support. Work with women and with individuals from ethnic minority groups was stronger in setting out interventions.
- Risk of harm factors were sufficiently addressed in planning in just 22 out of 63 applicable cases. Risk factors were more readily identified in resettlement cases. Some risk management plans were generic, copied and pasted from previous assessments and were not sufficiently personalised or reflective of the person on probation's current circumstances.
- In many of the inspected cases there was a dedicated point of contact for induction, followed by the initial sentence plan being completed remotely. This led to silo working, a lack of consideration of individual needs and people on probation needing to repeat themselves to different practitioners. We were given assurances that this practice was put in place as a short-term fix due to acute staffing shortages in some offices and had been curtailed.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁵ 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?	48%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	35%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	24%

- Sufficient efforts were made to enable the person on probation to complete their sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances in 47 out of 66 cases. Case managers were responsive to the person on probation's changing circumstances in the community, including changes in accommodation, employment and family circumstances, adapting appointments as required. Flexibility was appropriately applied as an alternative to enforcement and to aid compliance.
- Sufficient focus was given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation, considering their diversity needs in 37 out of 66 cases. Positive practice examples included practitioners evidencing a thorough understanding and knowledge of the person on probation, their needs and how best to work with them, taking into account their diversity needs.
- Delivery of services built upon the individual's strengths and enhanced protective factors in 35 out of 66 cases. This practice was strongest in cases that presented a high or very high risk of harm. Other probation practitioner appointments were largely check-ins and lacked focus. This was countered by some CRS interventions and unpaid work, which worked towards addressing desistance factors, for example by the development of coping skills.
- Specialised ventures such as the women's projects and the CFO Medway hub helped to address desistance further by enhancing protective factors including building self-esteem, confidence and employability skills. In some cases, implementation could have been further strengthened by closer liaison with the activity hub to establish progress made.

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

- The services delivered were those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance in just 26 out of 66 cases. Service delivery was stronger for men and community cases. Sufficient services were delivered for ETE in just six out of 18 cases, for finance, benefits and debt in just six out of 32 and in respect to lifestyle and associates, in just seven out of 45 applicable cases.
- The level and nature of contact offered to manage and minimise the risk of harm was sufficient in 27 out of 62 applicable cases. There was an overreliance on self-report and engagement, and attendance with probation was inconsistent and was minimal in some cases. Insufficient work was commenced to address offending behaviour, attitude or thinking skills. Reporting instructions varied, and in cases where these were not scheduled, there were gaps in contact.
- Sufficient attention was given to protecting actual and potential victims in only 14 out of 60 applicable cases. Work with men, community cases and those presenting a high risk or very high RoSH were stronger in this regard. An insufficient number of home visits, 1-2-1 interventions to address risk, consequential thinking or maturity were completed or contact made with family.
- No interventions were delivered for the rehabilitation activity requirement in 23 out of 43 cases where this was required. Those that were delivered were primarily completed by probation practitioners and CRS providers. Structured interventions, toolkits and partner agencies were utilised to deliver services in too few cases.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁶ 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?	53%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	36%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	24%

- Written reviews were completed when appropriate as a formal record of actions to implement the sentence in 31 out of 61 applicable cases. Relatively more reviews were completed in respect of women, resettlement cases and for those presenting a medium RoSH.⁷ Engagement was actively reviewed throughout the sentence through discussions regarding progress in addressing personal circumstances.
- Positive practice examples included practitioners acknowledging that rapport had been challenged through sharing appropriate risk information with other agencies. The rationale and detailed approach to managing this was discussed with people on probation to support their understanding and to encourage continued engagement.
- The person on probation was involved meaningfully in reviewing their progress and engagement in 26 out of 66 cases. Those presenting a high or very high RoSH represented the cases most involved. A lack of handover between new and previous case managers sometimes meant that the new practitioner did not have a holistic understanding of the individual.

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.

⁷ 'The findings relating to specific RoSH levels in cases have not been subject to a relative rate index analysis, which is a test used to compare rates of incidence, we report on our findings with that caveat.'

- Progress towards desistance was reviewed in 28 out of 61 applicable cases. Relatively more reviews were completed for community cases. Positive practice examples included evidence of reviewing the person on probation's compliance with the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway team to change the approach. Other good practice examples included evidence of liaison with the substance misuse provider around interventions that could be delivered as part of enforcement and breach action.
- Reviewing identified and addressed changes in factors linked to offending behaviour, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work in just 18 out of 60 applicable cases. There was better practice with community cases in this regard. Some practitioners advised inspectors that they wanted to complete formal written reviews but did not have the capacity.
- Reviewing identified and addressed changes in factors related to risk of harm, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work, in just 18 of the 59 cases where this was required. There was an insufficient focus on reviewing changes for individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. There were insufficient reviews of the RoSH category, including examples of ongoing risk to staff not reviewed or known by the current probation practitioner.

Outcomes

Strengths:

- There had mostly been sufficient compliance. Inspectors found some strong examples of engagement to support compliance, including swift enforcement actions being taken in response to non-compliance and enforcement used to encourage compliance. Some practitioners' approaches were supportive and encouraged engagement through routinely addressing barriers to compliance. Positive practice examples include issuing mobile phones, travel warrants and use of the person on probation's preferred name in communications to develop a good working relationship.
- There was an improvement in the person on probation's employment status, from 13 in full-time employment or part-time employment at the start of the order or licence, to 16 in full-time employment or self-employment at the start of the inspection. Positive practice examples in relation to ETE included advocacy, referral to community rehabilitative services ETE providers, completion of online ETE courses as part of unpaid work and the Medway CFO Hub.

Areas for improvement:

- Overall, not enough improvements were made in those factors most closely linked with offending in almost half of all cases. The absence of a consistent probation practitioner led to a lack of purpose and intent to address offending-related need. In too many cases little intervention work was completed, and supervision was a check-in exercise with insufficient evidence of meaningful engagement to address areas of need.
- Not enough improvements were made in the factors inspectors identified as related to risk of harm in almost half of cases. There was insufficient implementation of work to address harm, including domestic abuse. Case managers told inspectors that workload was a barrier to 1-2-1 focused delivery. In some cases, the level of contact was insufficient to keep other people safe, with some high risk of harm cases out of contact for several weeks. Again, case managers interviewed advised inspectors that this was due to workloads and the lack of capacity to maintain weekly contact.

Progress on previous recommendations

Previous recommendation	Action taken and impact	Categorisation	Improvement still required?
<i>From previous probation inspections (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>
Ensure all cases are accurately risk assessed and allocated to the correct grade of probation practitioner	Greater management oversight of allocation processes had been put in place. Inspectors found that classification of the RoSH was reasonable in most cases, though there were some cases where risk classification seemed too high.	Sufficient progress	No
Apply a strategic approach to which cases, and which functions of sentence management, are prioritised, while there are chronic staffing shortages	A strategic approach had been taken to prioritise community sentence management delivery, under the amber exceptional delivery model which takes account of continued staff shortages. Some vacancies were not filled in prisons, quality development and potential seconded roles to ensure sentence management delivery is appropriately prioritised.	Sufficient progress	No

<p>Ensure priorities are clearly communicated and understood by probation practitioners and middle managers</p>	<p>PDU priorities were clearly communicated and understood, for example through the 'West Kent PDU plan on a page'. The amber exceptional delivery model was not fully understood by all staff.</p>	<p>Some progress</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Ensure case supervision is available to all probation practitioners</p>	<p>SPO spans of control had been reduced and managers were held to account for delivery of case-focused supervision. Most staff reported that they received regular supervision that enhanced the quality of their work.</p>	<p>Sufficient progress</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Ensure sentence management staff receive the training they need to fulfil their roles effectively</p>	<p>Sentence management staff have received some face-to-face training aimed at improving case management practice. Inspection case assessment data showed that further training was required to improve work to keep other people safe.</p>	<p>Some progress</p>	<p>Yes</p>

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://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)