



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:  
The Probation Service – **Kent, Surrey and Sussex region**

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2024



# Contents

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<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Ratings .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Background.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. Organisational arrangements and activity.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. Service delivery .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Annexe one – Web links.....</b>	<b>31</b>

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## Foreword

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This was the first regional inspection of probation services in Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) since the commencement of the Inspectorate's new probation inspection programme in October 2023. There were clear strengths in the region's overall strategic arrangements, but the quality of work delivered to manage people on probation was insufficient in five out of six of our standards of casework, with particularly poor and concerning results in the quality of court reports and public protection. Statutory victim work was, by contrast, delivered to a high standard and the results were impressive. Overall, we have rated this region as 'Requires improvement'.

Staffing in the region was in a fragile position. Despite improvements made to staffing numbers as a result of proactive recruitment, significant gaps were still present with a 30 per cent vacancy rate for Probation Officers (POs). The national recruitment model has consistently failed to provide the region with its required number of allocated learners. National recruitment limitations and insufficient salaries to cope with the cost of living in the region were hampering the region's ability to resource the service appropriately.

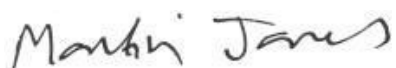
Levels of experience in the region were limited, with 22 per cent of staff having joined the service within the past 12 months. Deficits were found with Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) training, and with the region not preparing learners adequately for their role post qualification. Like other areas of the region, court had resourcing issues, with a third of the target staffing not in place, and with a number of staff working remotely. Significant improvements in the quality of court work were required, with only 14 per cent of cases inspected being judged to be of sufficient standard, which has the potential to impact on the confidence of sentencers.

Improvements were needed in the quality of work to assess and manage the risks that people on probation pose to the community. This was particularly poor in implementation and delivery, where only 22 per cent of cases we inspected were judged sufficient to effectively support the safety of other people.

On the contrary, statutory victim work was very strong, rated 'Outstanding'. It was particularly impressive that 100 per cent of victims whose cases were inspected were able to make relevant contributions prior to the release of perpetrators.

Whilst the results on the ground were disappointing, we found that the leadership team were resilient, innovative and responsive to the challenges the region faced. This included implementation of additional roles to improve quality, and the targeted approach by unpaid work leaders to address enforcement issues. A consistent message around improving culture had been delivered well. Leaders had been persistent in addressing unacceptable behaviour appropriately and decisively. This challenging piece of work should be marked as a positive achievement for the region.

KSS will be disappointed with the overall findings of this inspection, given the strengths in leadership and strong delivery in victim work. The current recruitment model is unlikely to address the issues it faces regarding resourcing, and a more localised and incentive-based approach is required. A number of achievements have been made by the region, but it does continue to face challenges going forward. If the staffing difficulties can be addressed and there is a focus on the quality of casework and embedding learning, the region can progress on a continued positive trajectory.



**Martin Jones CBE**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Ratings

### Kent, Surrey and Sussex

Fieldwork started: 22 January 2024

Score **5/24**

#### Overall rating

Requires improvement



#### 1. Organisational arrangements and activity

R 1.1 Leadership

Requires improvement



R 1.2 Staffing

Requires improvement



#### 2. Service delivery

R 2.1 Public protection

Inadequate



R 2.2 Desistance

Inadequate



R 2.3 Court work

Inadequate



R 2.4 Unpaid work

Inadequate



R 2.5 Resettlement

Inadequate



R 2.6 Statutory victim work

Outstanding



# Executive summary

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## Introduction

KSS region is one of 11 probation regions in England, with a further region in Wales. Five Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) make up the region, consisting of: Brighton and East Sussex, West Sussex, East Kent, West Kent and Surrey.

Staffing levels are at 90 per cent, which equates to 1,170 members of staff. Vacancy rates differ depending on roles, with the largest vacancies being at PO grade, which is currently 70 per cent of target staffing. Probation Services Officer (PSO) grade was staffed at 128 per cent as part of an approach to remedy resourcing issues in the region.

In regard to workload, the average caseload across the region was 31 for POs, 33 for PSOs and 10 for PQiPs. The grade that had the most challenging workload was POs, where the regional average for the workload measurement tool was 123.8 per cent.

## Methodology

We conducted fieldwork in each PDU across KSS between 27 November 2023 and 26 January 2024. We reviewed 223 cases, of which 151 were subject to a community sentence and 72 were subject to release on licence. From each of these cases we collated data for our public protection and desistance ratings. We also conducted 241 interviews with probation practitioners. We reviewed 147 court reports and 72 cases subject to resettlement provision. We inspected 51 unpaid work cases and 14 statutory victim cases from across the region where community sentences and licences had commenced between 26 June 2023 and 30 June 2023.

## 1 Organisational arrangements and activity

### R1.1 Leadership

Our inspection found a strong and dedicated regional leadership team in place across KSS, who were well sighted on the challenges they faced regionally and nationally. Focus remained on: delivering a quality service in all parts of the region; working closely with strategic partners; and being a leadership team that were resilient in difficult circumstances.

A theme of innovation and responsiveness was present in leadership in order to improve the quality of work delivered in the region. There were several examples of this, including the delivery of the 'Fundamentals First' training programme to embed a consistent baseline of practice across staff and the implementation of additional regional and PDU leadership posts to drive improvement.

Addressing cultural issues had been prioritised, with leaders delivering a consistent message around this. The region had worked closely with the Tackling Unacceptable Behaviour Unit (TUBU) and appropriate action addressing unacceptable behaviours was evident, with staff being dismissed when required. Continued poor performance was not tolerated in the region, with improvement plans being in place for staff members when required. The impact of improving culture was being felt by staff, with over three quarters of staff surveyed reporting to be motivated and proud to work for probation.

The strengths in leadership had not translated to casework as evidenced by the poor casework results. Leaders understood where the deficits were and where the key improvements needed to be made.

There was a need for an increased use of commissioning, with an underutilisation of opportunities such as the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF). The commissioning process nationally was overly complex, meaning the procurement of services was challenging. With pressures facing frontline leaders, there was a reduced priority for commissioning in some areas of the region.

The prioritisation framework (PF) added very little assistance to workload pressures across the region. Although leaders had attempted to be clear with their messaging, this was not consistently recognised by staff. Consideration at a national level regarding the impact and value the PF was adding is essential.

## **R1.2 Staffing**

Regional staffing was in a more stable position than that of PDUs, although there remained some gaps. However, for services to function appropriately, staffing at PDU level needs to be sufficient, which is where the main issues were evident.

The overall staffing picture in the region had improved as a result of continuous recruitment drives using local media and universities. PSO recruitment numbers had increased, with the region focusing on 'growing their own' with PSOs progressing on the PO training.

An ambitious programme of 'Fundamentals First' training had been delivered with learning for practitioners, managers and case administrators. This had been delivered in a classroom setting in response to feedback from staff to move away from online learning.

PO staffing levels were fragile, with some PDUs in the region having just over half of their targeted staffing for POs. A number of factors were hampering recruitment, including high cost of living in the region, whereby the salary offered for roles within the service was not attractive compared to competing employers. Although geographical allowance was in place in one office within the M25, this was not available elsewhere, adding further challenges to recruitment.

The national recruitment model had consistently failed to provide the required number of PQiP trainees, with very limited suitable external applicants. There was a need for a more localised approach to this area of recruitment as the current arrangements were not providing the region with adequate future POs. Training for PQiPs had limitations and did not equip qualifying officers sufficiently for their role.

A major issue for the region was around levels of experience, with 22 per cent of staff being in post less than 12 months. The impact of limited experience was seen in casework, particularly around risk and keeping people safe. Further support for newly qualified officers needed to be in place to improve practitioners' confidence and skills within their role.

## **2 Service delivery**

### **2.1 Public protection**

Deficits in public protection work were found across the region. Leaders were candid in recognising that the overall standard of public protection work was weak, despite ongoing efforts to address this. The quality of training and levels of inexperience contributed to practitioners' limited confidence in public protection work, and although staff understood the process, for example to gather safeguarding information, there were gaps in using this effectively.

The quality of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) work was of concern. MAPPA chairs were supported with shadowing opportunities and training, yet there were still concerns for less-experienced Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) in their role as chair. The quality of referrals needed to improve along with timeliness, particularly for individuals being released from custody, to ensure appropriate planning to manage the risks individuals posed.

A backlog of electronically monitored curfews that had not been fitted had accumulated in the region. Although there were nuances as to why some of these had not been fitted, the backlog was a cause for concern. The region had put assurances in place to mitigate the risks and escalated the issue nationally, whereby action had been taken to clear the backlog.

There were strengths in the delivery of the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathway service, with this being well established across the region. A robust offer was in place supporting both practitioners working with challenging individuals and people on probation. The take-up of the service was variable but OPD teams had continued to work with PDUs to raise the profile and benefits of working with their service.

## **2.2 Desistance**

Although this area of work scored better than that of public protection, there were still too many deficits in desistance work, resulting in an overall rating of 'Inadequate'. Delivery was much stronger in assessment with practitioners recognising the needs of people on probation, but our inspections found that supporting these needs did not occur sufficiently as orders and licenses continued.

Key services to support individuals from further offending differed, with strengths in delivery of Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3)<sup>1</sup> accommodation services and Creating Further Opportunities 3 (CFO3)<sup>2</sup> hubs in some areas of the region. There were challenges in other areas, for example there was no finance, benefit and debt (FBD) service provision available to support people in the region. Quality of referrals needed to be improved, with contract managers having to address too many inappropriate referrals for services such as commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) accommodation.

Ambitious strides had been made to improve the overall approach at both a strategic and operational level to improving the use of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs). Work with PDUs, courts and practitioners was ongoing, but there were clear gaps in knowledge and confidence in areas such as substance misuse, with individuals receiving Rehabilitation Activity Requirements as opposed to a specified intervention such as a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement.

Accredited programmes, which play a key part in supporting individuals' desistance, had faced challenges with morale and resourcing, impacted by the national job evaluation. Reasonable rates of completion and delivery were in place for sexual offending programmes, but for general offending programmes there were extreme variations, with Kent PDUs having poor completion rates. Staffing had improved for the accredited programmes team in recent months, with optimism that this will lead to a more consistent delivery across the region, ensuring this key area of delivery is in place to support desistance for people on probation.

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<sup>1</sup> CAS3 provides temporary accommodation for prison leavers for up to 84 nights.

<sup>2</sup> CFO3 are service hubs to support with issues such as employability. Separate from CRS contacts.

### **2.3 Court work**

There were deficits in court work across each of the PDUs and in the unpaid work cases we inspected, with each area being rated 'Inadequate'. The region's implementation of strategic leads for court and enforcement were an appropriate response to the need to improve quality in court work across the region; however, the pace to achieve progress has been slow.

As with a number of other teams in the region, court's faced significant resourcing issues with only 66 per cent of their target staffing being in place. This was coupled with limited levels of experience in some court teams and with some agency staff working fully remotely. This impacted on confidence levels of staff vital in court and learning opportunities from more experienced officers who did not have an office presence.

One of the biggest issues that court teams faced in the region was the competing demands of His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). Although probation's focus was on quality and ensuring that enquires had taken place for appropriate sentencing, the demands of HMCTS for 'speedy justice' did outweigh this and probation's voice needed to be louder to ensure quality reports were being written.

There were difficulties in some parts of the region in gathering domestic abuse and safeguarding information; additionally, when information was obtained it was not being used appropriately to inform court risk assessments. An example of this was in relation to domestic abuse information; 116 out of 136 cases were judged to have insufficiently considered relevant domestic abuse information in the court report.

### **2.4 Unpaid work**

Despite the overall rating for unpaid work, there were a number of strengths in its delivery in the region. Failures to address the crucial risk of harm needs that an individual posed in assessment, led to the 'Inadequate' overall rating for this area. Improvements in this area would lead to a much stronger delivery of unpaid work.

The leaders of unpaid work in the region were responsive to trying to improve all areas of delivery in their service, with the innovative approaches to addressing enforcement being an example. Since October 2023, enforcement for all unpaid work elements of orders now sits under the unpaid work teams, for all orders commencing from this time, in a bid to improve the need for better-quality enforcement.

Nationally, one of the main priorities for unpaid work had been to deliver hours at a 155-percentage rate compared to pre-Covid-19 levels. Although the region was not achieving this figure, its delivery was at an impressive 118 per cent, with proactive approaches to ensure people on probation can complete their hours promptly. The offer of projects in the region was wide. There were some variations, but there were projects on offer across the week, women-only groups and indoor projects for those with mobility issues.

Their unpaid work team was also the winner of 'Team of the Year' at the Probation Awards in 2023, in recognition of their achievements. Leaders were engaged with teams and relationships were recognised as positive. The unpaid work teams were ambitious about improving their offer and delivery going forward.



## **2.5 Resettlement**

Similarly to other areas of casework, there was a disappointing rating for resettlement. The quality of work did vary, with three PDUs performing stronger on this area than two others. Nearly three quarters of the cases inspected were short sentence, as opposed to the remaining cases being part of the Offender Management in Custody<sup>3</sup> (OMiC) cohort. Information sharing between prison and probation staff was well delivered, improving the planning for release for individuals.

It was extremely challenging for the region to deliver the OMiC model with significant resourcing challenges. Some prisons had extremely limited probation resource, with others not having any at all. However, in response to this, leaders had implemented PQiP placements for periods of four months in custody, enhancing knowledge, skills and experience of members of staff working in this environment. This approach was viewed positively and increased interest in qualifying officers opting to work in custody in the future.

Despite the challenges, probation had well established and maintained strong relationships with prison partners. Custodial leaders valued and understood the benefits of the joint working relationship with probation, particularly with their knowledge around understanding the risk of harm individuals could pose.

## **2.6 Statutory victim work**

The 'Outstanding' rating that this area achieved was a key for the region. Contact with victims was timely with relevant information being shared, ensuring any views and contributions of victims were considered prior to individuals being released.

In contrast to other areas of the region and PDUs, there were high levels of experience within victim liaison teams as well as stable staffing numbers. Recent job evaluations that had taken place nationally for Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) roles, had graded the role at band four, recognising the importance of the role and enhancing retention of staff in this area.

Workloads were high in victim liaison teams but were moving to more manageable levels than where they had been previously. Staff reported excellent working relationships with line managers and senior leaders, and viewed the priority of victim work to be increasing within the region.

Further work was required with sentence management staff to understand and recognise the importance of effective working with VLOs for an appropriate service for victims.

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<sup>3</sup> OMiC cases are those who have been sentenced to over 10 months in custody and therefore should have been allocated a prison offender manager to oversee their case in custody.

## Recommendations

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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.

### **Kent, Surrey and Sussex region should:**

1. ensure newly qualified probation officers are fully supported in their role, particularly through their newly qualified protected period
2. improve the quality of court reports to inform sentencing, ensuring domestic abuse and safeguarding information is used effectively
3. work with sentencers to ensure advice from probation court staff is obtained for appropriate pre-sentence
4. increase timeliness and quality of referrals for multi-agency public protection arrangements
5. improve the quality of work to assess, plan for, manage and review risk of harm
6. ensure that learning delivered by the region is embedded by managers and practitioners
7. improve the delivery of work of engaging people on probation to strengthen service delivery
8. ensure robust quality assurance of sentence management is in place, with appropriate manager workloads to deliver this effectively.

### **HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:**

9. improve the quality of the national training delivered to trainee members of staff, including skills-based practice and a blend of online and classroom-based learning
10. provide support that allows sufficient public protection arrangements to sites assessed as 'amber' or 'red' under the prioritisation framework
11. improve the commissioning processes to allow regions a more streamlined approach to procuring services for people on probation
12. consider a geographical allowance to improve recruitment in 'hard to recruit' areas of the country
13. ensure regions have active local input in all forms of recruitment, particularly for trainee probation officers to improve recruitment levels and retention
14. diversify the criteria for applications to the PQiP, with clear expectations of what the role entails
15. ensure that agency staff are mandated to attend their office bases when required
16. consider the geographical design of PDU structures to ensure they align with manageable workloads for PDU leaders and partnership arrangements.

## Background

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Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) was the first region to be inspected under the new round of inspections, having had a regional review under the previous inspection programme in 2022. All PDUs were inspected followed by one week of regional case fieldwork between 22 January 2024 and 26 January 2024, where we had a separate sample of 51 cases that had an unpaid work requirement that commenced between 26 June 2023 and 30 June 2023. Additionally, we inspected 14 cases that had a statutory victim requirement. Following on from this, two further weeks of regional fieldwork took place between 12 February 2024 and 16 February 2024, and 19 February 2024 and 24 February 2024.

KSS is one of the 11 probation regions in England, with a further region in Wales. There are five PDUs in the KSS region, comprising of West Kent, East Kent, Surrey, West Sussex, and Brighton and East Sussex. The regional management arrangements oversee a number of teams including unpaid work, accredited programmes and victim liaison services. Although these teams have regional oversight, they are linked to each of the PDUs.

There are 17 courts in the region inclusive of both magistrates' courts and Crown Courts, as well as 11 prisons, with 10 of those being managed by HMPPS. Probation staffing in prisons is a challenge. Sites in areas such as the Isle of Sheppey have limited transport connections, making recruitment difficult.

The region has a mixture of large towns and cities, as well as more rural areas. KSS has country-wide partnership arrangements, numerous local authorities and two unitary local authorities, Medway and Brighton & Hove. Where there are unitary authorities, this can present as a resourcing challenge to some PDUs due to the duplication of partnership meetings at an operational and a strategic level.

In terms of population, the region as a whole has 4,772, 275<sup>4</sup> people with the probation caseload being 14,190<sup>5</sup> inclusive of both community and custody cases. Of that caseload, 12.4 per cent is from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background.

A range of Commissioned Rehabilitation Services (CRS) are delivered across the region. Services for accommodation are delivered by Seetec and services for dependency recovery are delivered by CGL. Both of these contracts are pan-region, however other services such as women's services have different providers depending on the PDU. There was no contract in place for FBD services in the region and the education, training and employment (ETE) contracts were ending in March 2024 nationally.

The proximity to London and high cost of living has meant that recruitment is a challenge to the region. As a result of resourcing issues, four out of the five PDUs in the region were operating at 'amber' or 'red' status under the Prioritisation Framework<sup>6</sup> model. Whilst rated as 'red' or 'amber', PDUs continue to operate to national standards but are allowed to make concessions such as lower expectations to face-to-face appointments and prioritisation of cases assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics (December 2022). UK population estimates 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice (2023). Offender Management Caseload Statistics as of 30 June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The framework is designed to assist regions in identifying areas of flexibility in response to capacity and workload concerns. This has been developed nationally by HMPPS.

# 1. Organisational arrangements and activity

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## R 1.1. Leadership



Regional leadership drives the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all people on probation.

Requires improvement

It was recognised that the delivery of the majority of the domain two case data was rated 'Inadequate', aside from victim work, which was rated 'Outstanding'. However, offsetting this, strengths were identified within strategic leadership arrangements, which led to the rating of 'Requires improvement'.

### Strengths:

- The leadership team were dedicated, resilient and cohesive which placed them in a strong position to support PDUs. Leaders recognised the sizeable challenges that they faced in both a regional and national context and were focused on overcoming the barriers to deliver a quality service.
- Strong and well-maintained strategic partnership arrangements were in place at a regional level, the relationship with the custodial estate being an example. Joint working with the police included the introduction of the 'Athena' system in Kent PDUs to allow licences for probation staff to gather police information on domestic abuse to inform probation risk assessments.
- Leaders had taken a bold approach to address the organisational culture across the region. This was delivered consistently and was well understood by frontline leaders and operational staff. This included the completion of TUBU climate assessments and appropriate action being taken against those who had exhibited unacceptable behaviours. Leaders acted decisively and staff were formally dismissed when required.
- Additional strategic positions had been implemented that were outside of the Target Operating Model (TOM), with a focus on improving quality in service delivery. Examples included the strategic court roles and additional deputy head resources at PDU level.
- The priorities for frontline leaders, including PDU heads, were clear and well understood. The focus was on delivering core probation work and aligning to the key regional priorities of public protection, reducing reoffending and cross cutting.
- The region had been responsive and ambitious in the need to address the quality of casework. The 'Fundamentals First' programme had been delivered across the region to practitioners, middle managers and case administrators to try to implement a baseline of consistent practice across staff. Learning from the programme delivery was being used as part of the design of further regional training programmes for staff.
- CRS contracts were managed robustly. Providers were held to account for delivery, and in cases where contract obligations had not been met, payment has been withheld appropriately.

- Innovative and responsive approaches were taken by regional leaders to address practice issues in their lead areas. To address low referral rates, intervention leads introduced a requirement for probation practitioners to have to 'opt out' for specific reasons for those who were eligible for structured interventions. Unpaid work leads implemented robust arrangements around enforcement of both standalone and multi-requirement unpaid work orders.
- Generally, staff were engaged, motivated and proud to work for the probation services. Of staff surveyed, 78 per cent reported that they felt valued for the work that they do always or most of the time. The people survey stated that 66 per cent of staff were proud to tell others they work for the organisation, which is in line with the national figure of 65 per cent.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The efforts to improve casework quality had not been successful, evidenced by the poor domain two results across all five PDUs, together with court work and unpaid work at a regional level. Leaders were well sighted on where the deficits lay, highlighting the scale of the challenges faced by the region.
- There was limited value added by the PF. In areas where 'red' or 'amber' status was applied, it left staff with a feeling of being 'under siege' as opposed to assisting in addressing workload pressures. This was despite consistent messaging from PDU leads regarding the PF. Although the PF system had been designed to offer support, it does not align with the values probation staff operate against and the challenge of scrutiny when things go wrong.
- Commissioning opportunities were underused. The ROIF had not been fully utilised. With the challenges faced by frontline leaders to deliver what they can with limited resources, their focus on commissioning was not always a priority. Frustrations about the commissioning process were clear, with this being resource intensive for the outcomes achieved.
- The services on offer for people on probation were varied across the region. The CRS contract offer for ETE will end in March 2024, resulting in a reliance on what local provision was available within PDUs. There have been various challenges nationally with the CRS provision, which is currently under further review.
- Court work delivery was poor. Although there has been a targeted strategic oversight of court and enforcement, the practice in court was of concern. The region had struggled to ensure probation's voice had the required impact against the competing demands of HMCTS to clear court backlogs and ensue 'speedy justice', resulting in poor scores in this area of work.
- The work to Engage People on Probation (EPoP) was underdeveloped. A regional strategy was in place and there had been some more promising work delivered around EPoP in unpaid work; however, further work across the region was limited.

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## R 1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Each of the five PDUs scored 'Requires improvement' in relation to staffing. While the probation region staffing situation was secure and stable, the same was not the case for the PDUs. Strategically, an entire organisation approach needs to be established in order to lead effectively, and this was certainly not the case at the frontline where the direct delivery of services to protect the public takes place.

### Strengths:

- Following proactive efforts by the region, staffing was at 90 per cent for all grades across the KSS region, presenting an improving picture in terms of staffing numbers. Attrition rates continued to improve, with the PO attrition rate at just over five per cent.
- Regional staffing levels were reasonably stable. Levels of experience in some areas such as practice tutor assessors was extensive, with members of the team being with probation services for over 20 years.
- In recognition of the challenges PDU leaders were facing, regional leaders had absorbed some of their responsibilities to ease the pressure.
- To increase retention, corporate services had taken a proactive approach to ensuring that candidates felt welcomed and informed of updates during vetting periods. This included regular contact with staff being onboarded, ensuring that ICT equipment was in place and identification cards were ready for newly recruited staff to the service.
- Persistent and innovative approaches had been driven by the region to improve recruitment. This included targeting local universities, social media and other media outlets. Successes were evident at PSO level, where the region had taken the approach to overrecruit in this area in order to 'grow their own' future POs.
- Clear governance arrangements were in place to enhance the offer for staff returning to the organisation. Pathways for experienced staff to rejoin at a higher pay scale were transparent and implemented appropriately.
- 'Fundamentals First' training had been delivered to staff of varying grades across the region. This included practitioners, middle managers and case administrators. The programme was largely delivered face to face in response to staff's desire for more classroom-based learning.
- Staff regularly received supervision across the region, with 79 per cent of staff reporting that this was beneficial in improving the quality of their work. Given the workloads and pressures facing leaders in the region, it was positive that supervision of staff remained a priority.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Overall staffing in the region was precarious, specifically for staff delivering frontline services. At PO grade, the overall regional staffing was at 70 per cent. However, this was more acute in specific parts of the region, with West Kent PDU having 59 per cent of their targeted POs and Surrey having 54 per cent.
- The region was too reliant on agency staff, which accounted for 14 per cent of all PO roles, due to unsuccessful recruitment and significant resourcing difficulties. In addition, some agency staff were working fully remotely in non-case management roles, despite leaders escalating concerns at a national level with practitioner roles being delivered in this way.
- Workloads for POs were too high. The regional average on the workload measurement tool was 123.8 per cent and as high as 142 per cent in one PDU. Although the PF had been applied in PDUs, it provided limited relief for some staff working at a stretched level for a prolonged period.
- Recruitment of PQiPs had been a substantial challenge in the region. Consistently, the national recruitment model has failed to provide the region with their required allocation of learners, with many applicants for the programme coming from existing KSS staff. Limitations with the national recruitment approach were having an impact in the region, with a strong desire to have more local autonomy over this issue.
- The high cost of living in the region and poor pay to counteract this was having a significant impact on the region's ability to recruit. Proximity to London and a buoyant job market meant that probation was finding it difficult to compete for staff in various roles. Although a geographical allowance was in place in the Staines office in Surrey, this was not applied to other neighbouring offices which introduced unfairness and made them less attractive offices to work in.
- The national training delivered to trainee members of staff was not sufficiently equipping learners for the role. Concerns regarding the sequencing, large volume of online delivery and limitations on skills-based practice were clear.
- There were insufficient levels of experience and confidence across the region, with 22 per cent of the staff in KSS having been in the service for under a year. In addition to this, due to resourcing challenges, formal mentoring arrangements were not in place in order to support newer members of staff with consistent shadowing and learning opportunities.
- Further support was needed for newly qualified members of staff. Caseload protections were in place for a period of nine months post qualification, but practitioners were often exceeding 100 per cent on the workload measurement tool soon after being in post. Continued support and development for these members of staff were required to improve the quality in practice and the confidence in the work of practitioners.
- Staffing in serious further offences (SFO) teams had been hampered significantly by high levels of staff sickness. This coupled with a high workload has led to an ongoing backlog in this area of work, with limited options available to address this. This meant that critical learning when a serious offence occurs was not in place and a potential delay in victims and their families being informed about the outcome of the reviews.

- The span of control for leaders was variable with individual leaders' spans being too large, particularly those leaders with oversight of large geographical areas, which require multiple partnership commitments. Consideration could be given to the geographical design of the PDU structure to ensure frontline leaders can deliver their role and the work of PDUs effectively.
- The national programme facilitator job evaluation process was lengthy and detrimental to the morale of the programmes team. With the process taking approximately two years and yet to be formally implemented, there was concern for staff members about the potential impact the outcome may have.
- Management oversight was ineffective in all five PDUs, with figures as high as 47 out of 50 cases having insufficient oversight in one PDU. In unpaid work, 36 out of 44 cases inspected had insufficient, ineffective or absent management oversight. This highlights the concerns about the high spans of control of middle managers.



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## Feedback from people on probation

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User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 360 people on probation across KSS as part of this regional inspection. Of these, 48 per cent reported they were subject to a community sentence and 48 per cent were being supervised having been released from prison. The remaining individuals did not specify their sentence type. The respondents were largely representative of the caseload demographics in terms of ethnic diversity; however, they were slightly over representative of the caseload in terms of gender, with 15 per cent of the respondents being female compared to nine per cent of the caseload.

People on probation overwhelmingly felt safe accessing probation offices within the region (90 per cent). Additionally, over three quarters of individuals viewed the distance to travel to appointments as reasonable. This was a positive response given that estates in the region had been a challenge.

Relationships between people on probation and their practitioners were strong, with three quarters of respondents viewing this positively. There were areas in the region where there was a frequent changing of practitioners, therefore it is positive that relationships remain well regarded. Enhancing what support can be given to people on probation effectively reduces the likeliness of further offending.

Overall, nearly two thirds of people on probation reported being happy with the support they received. Given the resourcing challenges in the region, this was positive to see.

*“I feel like whatever I go to my probation officer with we will find a solution too and that in itself means that I am in the best place I ever have been, where I can get the support I need.”*

### Areas for improvement:

Appointments for people on probation were often very short. Of respondents, 91 per cent reported that their appointment was 15 minutes or less. This raised questions regarding the value of certain appointments between practitioners and people on probation.

Too many people on probation were not involved in the creation of their sentence plans with their probation practitioners. There were occasions in the region where initial sentence plans were completed as overtime, which may have contributed to this. This missed a key opportunity to include individuals fully in their sentence to enhance their engagement with probation services.

There were individuals who were not able to access services they needed, such as FBD services, which the region did not have a CRS contract for.

*“The financial support is what I need most help with. I pay child maintenance from universal credit so by the end of it I don’t have enough to survive. I just don’t see enough support out there for financial difficulties.”*

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## Diversity and inclusion

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### Strengths:

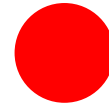
- Of staff in post, 11 per cent across the region were from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background, which was comparable to the 12 per cent of the caseload who were from this demographic.
- The 'step wise relationships' intervention was targeted to those people on probation who have a domestic-abuse-related offence from a male-to-male relationship, which was a positive approach. This provided a specified intervention to those individuals who may not have been suitable for a generic domestic abuse programme intervention.
- In recognition of the demographic in the region, training was commissioned around working with those from a Gypsy Roma Traveller background, with specific sessions on working with women in this cohort. This offer had also been extended to neighbouring regions, where there was also a sizeable demographic of this cohort.
- In Brighton and East Sussex, the 'Spiel' mentoring intervention was commissioned to work with those from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background. This service also had the benefits of being led by those with lived experience.
- The projects offer for unpaid work was varied and supported the compliance and engagement of people on probation from diverse backgrounds. This included nine different women's groups and the offer of indoor projects for those who may have physical health issues.

### Areas for improvement:

- Although there were several pieces of positive work regarding Equality Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) across the region, this was inconsistent and largely aligned to the response to demographics in certain areas.
- Robust evaluation of work completed around ED&I was required to measure any impact and effectiveness it had on practice.
- The delivery of women's services was varied. Although there were 'breakfast clubs' in place across the region, capacity for some women's services was at times extremely stretched, with waiting times of up to three months.
- Tracking and addressing issues around disproportionality needed further development. Although there had been dip sampling and a push to increase reports on priority cohorts in court, further exploration was required.
- Diversity surgeries were in place across the PDUs in order to support practitioners working with cases with diverse needs, facilitated by the regional equalities lead. However, attendance levels were inconsistent and low in some areas, with this offer not being fully utilised.
- Appropriate governance arrangements, such as an equalities board, were in place along with an understanding of the importance of ED&I from leaders. However, as a consequence of the number of pressures facing the region, the priority of ED&I needed to be raised.

## 2. Service delivery

### R 2.1. Public protection



High-quality, personalised and responsive services are delivered to protect the public.

Inadequate

The<sup>7</sup> percentage of cases judged satisfactory lead to an overall rating of 'Inadequate'.

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</b>	24%
<b>Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</b>	32%
<b>Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</b>	25%

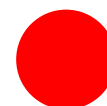
In every PDU inspected, the quality of work relating to keeping people safe was rated 'Inadequate'. Regional leaders recognised that there were deficits with the level of confidence staff had in analysing information to inform risk of harm assessment, plans and the delivery of interventions. In addition, management oversight capacity and workloads impacted on the resource and space for staff to reflect on learning and embed into their practice.

- There was an extensive OPD pathway across the region. This included the Intensive Intervention and Risk Management Services to support individuals being released from long-term custodial sentences. Although referrals to the OPD pathway could be improved, having these services in place ensured appropriate expertise was in place to work with challenging people on probation effectively.
- MAPPAs quality was of concern. Limited experience of some SPOs meant that confidence in chairing MAPPAs was variable, despite support being in place from the region. Timeliness and quality of MAPPAs referrals were inconsistent, with too many referrals sent close to release dates of people on probation. This impacted on the adequate planning for individuals who pose a risk to keeping people safe.

<sup>7</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the aggregate scores from PDUs for 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.](#)

- There was a backlog of electronically monitored curfew tags that had not been fitted by the provider. This had been escalated nationally due to being an issue in other areas of the country. Actions to address the issue were already in motion; however, it was a concern that requirements were not routinely in place for individuals who had been assessed as needing enhanced monitoring.
- Processes to gather domestic abuse and safeguarding information varied across the region; however, even when the information was received it was not routinely used to analyse the factors relating to risk of harm as part of assessment. The limitations with training and levels of experience in the workforce were having an impact on practitioners' understanding of the critical public protection factors that could impact on keeping people safe.

## R 2.2. Desistance



High-quality, personalised and responsive services are delivered to promote desistance.

Inadequate

Our rating<sup>8</sup> for desistance is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against four key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?</b>	62%
<b>Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?</b>	53%
<b>Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?</b>	35%

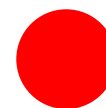
Supporting desistance of people on probation in implementation and delivery, and reviewing of their sentence or order, was rated 'Inadequate' in all PDUs inspected. There was an understanding of what people on probation needed to reduce further offending, but the services to implement this were not always available or used appropriately. Resourcing of interventions and services had impacted this, with this being felt by some areas more than others in the region.

- Assessment was the strongest area of desistance work. Practitioners identified the offending-related needs of people on probation in 71 per cent of inspected cases. This highlights that practitioners recognised the key factors to address to support individuals from re-offending; however, this deteriorated when implementing and reviewing sentences.
- Delivery of accredited programmes across the region was inconsistent. There were high levels of completion for sexual offending programmes, with rates as high as 89 per cent in certain PDUs. However, for general offending programmes, there were areas of very poor completion rates as low as 13 per cent. This was largely due to resourcing and ability to facilitate programmes to support individuals to address issues related to their offending.

<sup>8</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the aggregate scores from PDUs for 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.](#)

- Accommodation support for people on probation were varied. The CAS3 accommodation provision was delivered well with very high occupancy rates; however, the CRS accommodation provision faced challenges from inappropriate referrals and high demand levels.
- There was a strong drive to improve the use of CSTRs and some progress had been made in this area. However, further understanding and confidence of interventions to support issues such as substance misuse was required by practitioners to improve the use of this longer term.

## R 2.3. Court work



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

Inadequate

Our rating<sup>9</sup> for court work is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against one key question:

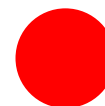
Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to the court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?</b>	<b>14%</b>

Delivering a sufficient standard of court work was a major challenge in the region. The difficulties of insufficient staffing and meeting the demands of HMCTS were evident. In addition to this, there were challenges in obtaining and the appropriate use of safeguarding and domestic abuse information for pre-sentence. Arrangements were in place to address the issues courts faced, but this remained a sizeable task.

- There were concerns with the quality of court work across the region, with significant deficits in all PDUs. The lowest score for a PDU in the region for overall judgements around sufficient court work was just six per cent, with the highest score for court work in a PDU being 24 per cent. These highlight that issues around quality of court work are region wide and not specific to certain PDUs.
- Regional leaders prioritised improving court work strategically, with leads in place for court and enforcement that sat outside of the TOM. The aim was to ensure quality improved across all areas of court work, but with a recognition that this was a challenging task, and it will take time to see the impact.
- The voice of probation did not have the influence it required to ensure that court work could be completed to the quality needed to keep people safe. Engagement forums with sentencers were in place, with relationships between probation and other court staff viewed as positive. Although there was an understanding of the pressures facing probation staff, limited action was taken to address this, leaving probation staff feeling like 'the poor relation' in the court arena.
- As with many other areas of the region, staffing and resources in court were extremely stretched with only 66 per cent of target staffing in place. Similarly to sentence management teams, court teams suffered from having high levels of inexperience. Overreliance on agency staff, predominately working remotely to complete reports, reduced shadowing and learning opportunities for newer members of staff to improve their skills and confidence.

<sup>9</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the aggregate score from PDU and unpaid work case inspections, 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.](#)

## R 2.4. Unpaid work



Unpaid work is delivered safely and effectively, engaging the person on probation in line with the expectations of the court. **Inadequate**

Despite an overall 'Inadequate' rating<sup>10</sup>, there were a number of strengths in this area. This was further highlighted by the unpaid work team being awarded 'Team of the Year' at the Probation Awards 2023.

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Is the assessment and planning of unpaid work personalised?</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Do arrangements for unpaid work maximise rehabilitative elements and support desistance?</b>	59%
<b>Is unpaid work delivered safely?</b>	57%
<b>Is the sentence of the court implemented appropriately?</b>	63%

The quality of assessments for unpaid work was rated 'Inadequate', leading to the overall rating for this area. The strengths in unpaid work were clear, with a focus on ensuring backlogs were addressed and that people on probation could complete their hours. There were achievements in the unpaid work teams across the region, but improvements to assessment would have ensured a higher overall rating for this area.

- A wide range of projects were on offer to people on probation, including the offer of nine women's groups, weekend groups and indoor projects. This enabled people on probation to complete their hours promptly and to not disrupt protective factors in their lives, such as employment.
- A high level of delivery of unpaid work hours had taken place in the region. The region was delivering at 118 per cent of hours, with initiatives such as 'boost weeks' in place where high levels of over instruction were implemented, including those who may have had previous medical certificates, to increase attendance. This resulted in reductions in dormant case numbers and reduced unpaid work backlogs.
- Deficits in the unpaid work cases were largely with the assessment and planning to address factors related to risk of harm. This was assessed as sufficient in less than a third of relevant cases. Domestic abuse and safeguarding information were too often missing or not used appropriately, therefore questioning the accuracy risk assessments.
- To address long-standing issues with enforcement, the enforcement of all new unpaid work requirements have been moved to the unpaid work teams.

<sup>10</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, from unpaid work cases inspected during regional fieldwork, 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.](#)



Additionally, compliance officers are in place focusing on completion of reports on breaches and applications for extensions of orders. The process has only been in place for a short period, but the impact was already being seen in improvements in appropriate enforcement and quality.

## R 2.5. Resettlement



Resettlement work is timely, personalised and coordinated, addressing the individual's resettlement needs and supporting their integration into the community. **Inadequate**

Our rating<sup>11</sup> for resettlement is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against one key question. In total, 72 resettlement cases were inspected with 18 of these being recorded as OMiC cases. Therefore, the majority of cases inspected were short custodial sentences.

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Is resettlement timely, personalised and coordinated, and does it address key resettlement needs and support the individual's integration into the community?</b>	<b>44%</b>

Although there were variations across PDUs, the overall work inspected to address key resettlement needs across the region was rated 'Inadequate'. Resourcing played a major part in the region's ability to deliver sufficiently, meaning the region had to think innovatively about how to address this. There was stronger delivery in some areas, with effective working with prison colleagues, but this was inconsistent.

- Despite the overall rating, there were strengths in resettlement work, with three of the five PDUs receiving 'Requires improvement' ratings. Information sharing between prison-based staff and community practitioners was strong in these PDUs, thus improving planning arrangements for those individuals being released from custody.
- There were significant challenges with OMiC, largely due to resourcing, described as 'close to a car crash'. Some custodial estates could not be staffed at all or had been staffed with very limited probation staff. This impacted on the ability to deliver effective resettlement work and a reliance on prisons to provide prison offender managers from their staffing group.
- In response to staffing difficulties, and to improve the training offer to PQiPs, four-month placements for training staff were in place. This provided learners with valuable opportunities of working in the custodial environment, improving their knowledge and experience of resettlement work and improving the likelihood of wanting to work in OMiC teams post qualification.
- Relationships with prison staff were positive. Leaders in the custodial estate valued probation, describing probation as 'the critical friend'. Joint recruitment between the two services had taken place in recognition of the importance of probation's role in the custodial arena.

<sup>11</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the aggregate data from resettlement cases in PDU inspections, giving a score for the key question, 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.](#)

## R 2.6. Statutory victim work



Relevant and timely information is provided to victims of a serious offence, and they are given the opportunity to contribute their views at key points in the sentence.

Outstanding

Our rating<sup>12</sup> for victim work 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'
<b>Does initial contact with victims encourage engagement with the victim contact scheme and provide information about sources of support?</b>	100%
<b>Is there effective information and communication exchange to support the safety of victims?</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Does pre-release contact with victims allow them to make appropriate contributions to the conditions of release?</b>	100%

A high standard of statutory victim work was delivered across the region, with an overall rating of 'Outstanding'. The stability, experience and expertise in the staffing group led to the high quality of services provided for victims. Additionally, there was a desire for victims teams to work closer with PDUs to continue to enhance the quality of work further.

- All key questions on victim work received an 'Outstanding' rating, illustrating the quality of the work delivered to victims in the region. VLOs viewed that being part of public protection raised their service's priority and recognised the importance of victim work in the region.
- The victim liaison teams had stable staffing at both VLO grade and manager level. Staff had substantial experience, with some having been in the service in excess of 20 years and reported excellent working relationships between VLOs, middle managers and senior leaders. This provided stability in teams, but also expertise to deliver crucial services to victims across the region.
- Workloads were moving to more manageable levels. Although some improvements in VLO caseloads, the complexity of work required on Victim Notification Scheme cases for those sentenced to under 12 months was not always recognised. Despite these pressures, the region did have an 81 per cent opt-in rate from victims, which was the highest rate nationally.
- Relationships with sentence management staff were inconsistent. There were occasions where staff in PDUs did not fully understand the role of VLOs or share pertinent information about individuals they were managing, impacting on keeping victims updated when required. Further training on the importance of victim work would likely enhance understanding for PDUs

<sup>12</sup> The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, from eligible cases inspected as part of regional fieldwork, 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.](#)

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## Learning from Serious Further Offences

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The staffing total for the SFO team in KSS is 4.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members; however, this includes 2.2 FTE staff working on complaints for the region. The targeted SFO staffing was 2.2 FTE but the region had 2.6 FTE staff in place. Unfortunately, the SFO team has had long-term sickness for non-work-related health issues.

HM Inspectorate of Probation have quality assured six SFO reviews between 17 October 2022 and 17 October 2023, with one of these being rated as 'Good' and five others rated as 'Requires improvement'.

In terms of any deficits in practice, common themes included the need for more professional curiosity, enforcement and improved multi-agency liaison, linking with some deficits seen in areas of our casework. The management of risk related to domestic abuse and safeguarding enquires was assessed as 'Insufficient' in nearly all reviews undertaken.

- Learning and accountability panels were in place for every case that was subject to an SFO review. With a wide range of attendance, including senior leaders, this panel set the appropriate actions targeted at PDU, regional or national levels. The secondary part of the panel considered whether targeted action needed to be undertaken, with the region responding to this when required with examples of action being taken against staff of various grades, including leaders.
- Various methods of disseminating learning were in place. At a strategic level, there were quarterly SFO learning forums to look at themes or reviews. Operational SFO learning was built into 'Fundamentals First' workshops and quarterly briefings as well as through frontline leaders in PDUs. It was recognised that this may not always land with staff and therefore an appropriate need exists to ensure that the message is continued to be consistently delivered.
- The culture around SFO remains a challenge, with some staff needing to understand that the process was driven towards learning and not blame. The region had looked at this area carefully, making adjustments to things such as language, but national input was needed to progress the culture around SFO, particularly against the backdrop of working in PF.
- There was a backlog of SFO reviews that had yet to be completed. Resourcing issues and the volume of work had impacted the SFO teams' ability to manage this workload, additionally impacting on critical learning and causing potential delays for victims being informed of the outcome of any SFO reviews. Overtime for appropriately skilled members of staff was on offer to help reduce the backlog, but this remained an area of concern.

## Progress on previous recommendations

Previous recommendation	Action taken and impact	Categorisation	Improvement still required?
<i>From previous probation inspections</i>	<i>Summarise action taken and impact</i>	<i>Sufficient progress/Some progress/No progress</i>	<i>Yes/no – If yes, consider repeating the recommendation</i>
Ensure that staffing and workload management data, as reported to HMPPS, accurately reflects true vacancy rates and practitioners' workloads.	Closer working with workforce planning was in place and the region was confident that the data reflects vacancy rates and workloads.	Sufficient progress	No
Determine the priority of intervention delivery, allocate resource accordingly and communicate expectations clearly to probation practitioners.	The region has four out of five areas in the PF, and is therefore working to exceptional delivery models across the region. Expectations have been communicated regarding what 'must be done' but this is not having the fully desired impact.	Some progress	Yes – To ensure that public protection work is prioritised to keep people safe.
Prioritise quality assurance of sentence management.	Quality assurance activity was ongoing and the QDO team do undertake regular RCATs; however, management oversight was seen to be overwhelmingly insufficient. This was largely due to the spans of control of middle managers.	Some progress	Yes – Repeat recommendation.

Support senior and middle managers to manage and prioritise both their individual and their team's workload across the PDU.	Senior managers were given clear priorities about what to prioritise at the cost of other areas of work such as commissioning and partnerships. Although there was support for middle managers, the ability to manage their workload was limited.	Some progress	Yes – Recommendation to be considered in the context of the PF.
Offer additional administrative resource to expedite outstanding reasonable adjustment requests.	Administrative staffing had increased and 83 per cent of staff who required reasonable adjustments have had these made.	Sufficient progress	No
Share the target staffing data with the PDU so they may undertake appropriate workforce planning and support the PDU to promptly improve staffing levels.	PDUs had target staffing data and can make business cases to the people board for additional staffing resources. Workloads of PDU heads and managing their priorities mean that this was not happening on a regular basis.	Some progress	No – The data is available and the opportunity to work with workforce planning WFP and people board is there – it just needs more take up from PDU heads.
Engage with people on probation to inform service delivery.	In unpaid work this had been more successful in improving inductions; however, it was limited in other areas of service across the region.	Some progress	Yes

## Annexe one – Web links

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Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection [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)