



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:  
**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU**  
The Probation Service – East of England region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, July 2024



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## Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Dave Argument, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the Inspectorate. We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible.

## The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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## Foreword

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This was the first inspection of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) since it was established after the unification of probation services in 2021. We were deeply concerned to find major issues with the leadership of the PDU and the quality of work it was delivering. That led to the PDU being rated 'Inadequate' overall.

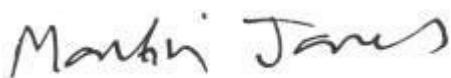
Nowhere near enough attention was being paid by leaders to the quality of risk assessments and management plans. Almost all the assessments we inspected were insufficient in relation to keeping people safe, and many of those had been overseen by Senior Probation Officers (SPOs). Findings from internal audit had not been properly acted on. Systems and processes that should have been controlling the quality of risk assessments were having no effect in practice. As a result, practitioners were often not accurately and completely identifying the risk people on probation posed to others in their lives and communities.

Poor practice in relation to safeguarding children and managing the risk of domestic abuse was widespread. Too often we found that practitioners were not correctly requesting information from children's services and the police. And practitioners were not sharing information about the behaviour and circumstances of people on probation when it was important to do so. Leaders needed to do more to ensure practitioners were routinely doing enough to protect vulnerable people from harm.

SPOs in the PDU were overstretched and unable to carry out their duties effectively. Alarming, some were carrying caseloads, and many were completing assessments on behalf of practitioners. They were doing so because there were too few practitioners employed in the PDU, and very high sickness rates meant that capacity was reduced even further. The situation was unsustainable and counterproductive. Senior leaders had not acted quickly or decisively enough to address the causes of sickness absence, manage people appropriately when they were off work or outline a strategy for returning to a sustainable level of service.

At a senior leadership level, the PDU was well-regarded by its strategic partners. We were impressed by some small-scale schemes the PDU was contributing to. That included a multi-agency stalking intervention programme and a domestic abuse panel with the police. There were strong operational and strategic links with police officers which involved the management of men who had committed sexual offences and with the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) approach for people who offend prolifically.

There is a great deal to be done to steer this PDU back to an acceptable level of service. However, some of the staff we met, from administrators to probation practitioners and middle managers, were passionate about their work and committed to supporting people to change and protecting others from harm. That was to their great credit, especially considering the challenges they have been facing. Senior leaders should build on that foundation by focusing on the quality of risk management and enabling SPOs to lead their teams effectively.



**Martin Jones**

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

# Ratings

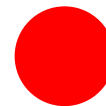
## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU

Fieldwork started April 2024

Score **1/21**

### Overall rating

**Inadequate**



### 1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



P 1.2 Staffing

Inadequate



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

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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.

### **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU should:**

1. devise and implement a strategy for returning to a sustainable level of service in which SPOs are focused on leading their teams and monitoring the quality of work produced by practitioners.
2. ensure that work is undertaken with other agencies to manage domestic abuse, such as the police and children's social care services, to ensure that actual and potential victims are sufficiently protected.
3. devise and implement a system for reviewing high risk and multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) level-one cases.
4. conduct an analysis of skills, knowledge and experience within the practitioner group and implement a system for checking that learning has been consolidated into practice.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU over the period of two weeks, beginning 15 April 2024. We inspected 34 community orders and 25 releases on licence from custody where sentences and licences had commenced during two separate weeks, between 04 September and 10 September 2023 and 02 October and 08 October 2023. We also conducted 47 interviews with probation practitioners.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU is one of eight in the East of England region of The Probation Service. People on probation report to offices in Cambridge, Huntingdon, Peterborough and Wisbech. The PDU provides pre-sentence reports to Crown and magistrates' courts in Cambridge, Huntingdon and Peterborough. There is one approved premises in Peterborough but that is not managed by the PDU. HM Prison (HMP) Littlehey, HMP Peterborough and HMP Whitemoor are all in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, but probation staff at those prisons are not managed by the PDU.

The PDU covers the area governed by Cambridgeshire County Council and the unitary authority of Peterborough, which has a combined population of 906,814. The PDU supervises 1,734 people, of which 1,132 are serving community sentences and 602 are on release from prison. The proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic people on the caseload is seven per cent, which is slightly lower than the regional average.

The PDU has 11 SPOs and one deputy head of PDU, all of whom are line-managed by the head of PDU. The SPOs lead 25 probation practitioners in Cambridge, 17 in Huntingdon, 42 in Peterborough and Wisbech, and a team who provide services to local courts. There are 25 people training to become Probation Officers (POs) in the PDU, by completing the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP).

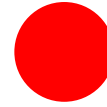
Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) are available for people on probation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU. The providers are Interventions Alliance for accommodation, St Giles Wise Group for women's services and The Forward Trust for personal wellbeing. Services for finance, benefit and debt support is delivered by NACRO via a grant agreement. Primary Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTRs) are delivered with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust. Alcohol Treatment Requirements and Drug Treatment Requirements are delivered by Change Grow Live.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough PDU was categorised as being 'amber' on the prioritisation framework (PF) at the time of the inspection. That status had been triggered by the PDU being at least 20 per cent over its capacity for four weeks and meant that practitioners were not required to complete some routine activities. The PF is a national document produced by The Probation Service to provide PDUs with clarity about what to pause when there is insufficient capacity to deliver services fully.

# 1. Organisational arrangements and activity

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## P 1.1. Leadership



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

Inadequate

### Strengths:

- At a senior level the PDU was engaged with the local safeguarding partnership, the Serious Violence Partnership, High Harms Board and other strategic forums. Partner agencies valued the regular attendance and contribution of senior leaders from the PDU.

### Areas for improvement:

- Senior leaders were robustly holding SPOs to account on timeliness and performance priorities but that meant assessments and plans were being countersigned with minimal attention paid to their quality. Almost all the assessments we inspected were insufficient, especially in relation to keeping people safe.
- Not enough strategic attention had been paid to the quality of assessment, planning and delivery of work with people on probation. Findings from internal audit had not been acted on sufficiently. A Quality Matters Board was meeting periodically but was not doing enough to respond to poor practice and drive improvements.
- SPOs were spending too much time carrying out work on behalf of practitioners. That meant that they were chronically overstretched and unable to carry out their leadership duties. They were routinely completing assessments and plans, which should have been done by practitioners, and without having met the person on probation. Some SPOs were holding caseloads and others were doing casework for practitioners who were off work. Many were exhausted and understandably concerned that there was no clear strategy for returning to a sustainable level of service.
- Leaders had done too little to ensure that probation practitioners were effectively working to safeguard children. Far too many assessments were based on incomplete or missing information about children, and analysis of risk to children was often poor. Not all practitioners had access to systems to check whether children were known to the local authority and referrals were not always being made where the probation practitioner had important information to share with social workers.
- Not enough leadership attention was paid to ensuring practitioners were requesting information in relation to domestic abuse and that they knew how to do so. Enquiries were not always being made and were sometimes directed

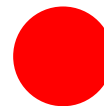
to the wrong police force or the wrong address. That meant numerous risk assessments were incomplete and lacked sufficient depth.

- Business risk planning and management was generally ineffective. A corporate risk register was held by the PDU, but it did not fully reflect the organisational issues it was facing. Where senior leaders had been made aware of problems with partner agencies, there was limited evidence this had led to material improvements in service delivery.



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## P 1.2. Staffing



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

Inadequate

### Strengths:

- The PDU had nearly enough administrative staff in post following sustained efforts to recruit, including into receptionist vacancies. That meant administrative staff were often able to support practitioners through the integrated Probation Operational Delivery model.

### Areas for improvement:

- Almost all SPOs and practitioners had workloads which were too high. That was partly because there were not enough probation practitioners in the PDU to support manageable workloads. As a result, practitioners had insufficient time to properly analyse risk and deliver constructive work with people on probation.
- Staff sickness rates were very high and much greater than the civil service average. A considerable proportion of absence was linked to work-related stress and anxiety. Clear advice had been given to senior leaders about addressing the causes and managing sickness absence, but much of that had not been put into action. As a result, the overall capacity of the PDU to deliver good quality work was seriously constrained.
- Management oversight was insufficient or absent in 81 per cent of the cases we inspected. That was linked to poor-quality assessments being countersigned without challenge, an absence of manager intervention on cases where the practitioner was absent due to sickness and tasks not being followed up. Supervision with practitioners was having no impact on the quality of delivery. SPO workloads and their priorities were such that they were not able to oversee and maintain effective delivery of work by probation practitioners.
- An assessment of the culture within the PDU had recently been delivered, but the findings had not been acted upon in full. Disciplinary action had been taken in relation to some individual instances of unacceptable behaviour. But more needed to be done by leaders in relation to setting acceptable behaviour expectations in some offices.
- Not enough had been done by senior leaders in the PDU to analyse and improve the skills and knowledge of practitioners. Some SPOs were concerned about the competence of practitioners but lacked time and capacity to provide support and direction. Leaders were not effectively marshalling the use of Quality Development Officers to support training and development. That was concerning given that there were many inexperienced practitioners working in the PDU.

- Trainee probation officers undertaking the PQIP were often overworked and lacked opportunities to reflect and learn from other practitioners. There were more trainees than qualified staff in one office. Across the PDU, trainees had been allocated too many cases by leaders who were attempting to balance out workloads. That meant people undertaking the PQIP were at risk of being unable to fully develop their skills and knowledge.

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### P 1.3. Services



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

Requires improvement

#### Strengths:

- Work to engage with people on probation was well established. Coffee mornings were run for people on probation by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Peer mentors had been recruited. Feedback had been acted on by leaders, including a recent application to display artwork done by people on probation in offices. Two people who had previously been supervised in the PDU were now employed by it.
- Leaders had built strong strategic and operational links with the police in relation to IOM. In the cases we inspected, there were good levels of communication and collaboration on casework. Likewise, relationships between POs and police officers from the Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders unit were strong and supported information sharing.
- The PDU was contributing to initiatives aimed at supporting women who had suffered domestic abuse and challenging the perpetrators of that behaviour. Two practitioners were based in a multi-agency Family Safeguarding Team, to deliver work with domestic abuse perpetrators who had not been charged with offences. Support was being given to a multi-agency stalking intervention programme, which aimed to reduce risk and the impact of those crimes on victims. A practitioner was regularly meeting with the police in a domestic abuse panel to make joint decisions about responding to incidents.
- Practitioners were frequently referring people on probation to CRS to address needs relating to their offending, including the personal wellbeing service and women's services. In the casework we inspected, practitioners were generally engaging well with women. Most of the people who were referred to CRS started working with them, which meant people on probation had the opportunity to access help.
- The PDU employed a resettlement worker who provided valuable practical support to people released from prison. That included help with transport to their address upon release and maintaining continuity of healthcare between prison and the community.

#### Areas for improvement:

- MAPPA level one and high-risk cases were not being reviewed by SPOs. Worryingly, a lower proportion of the high-risk cases we looked at were assessed as sufficient in relation to keeping people safe than was the case

with the low and medium-risk cases we inspected<sup>1</sup>. Senior leaders had not set out minimum standards in relation to the reviewing of those cases, which meant it was not seen as a priority by SPOs or practitioners.

- Not enough referrals were being made to the Changing Future Outcomes (CFO) hub for people on probation who needed help to get into work and training, despite there being an impressive service on offer. That was disappointing because most of the caseload who were available for work were either unemployed or not in training.
- People sentenced to primary MHTRs were waiting too long for services to begin. Demand for the service was higher than expected, which meant some people were waiting up to nine months before receiving treatment. No liaison had taken place with sentencers to explain that the service was lacking capacity and no clear guidance had been provided to practitioners about what to do with people who faced long waiting times for treatment.
- Practitioners were not always able to access the records for sessions delivered by the treatment provider in relation to drug and alcohol misuse. As a result, they sometimes lacked full insight into progress being made by people on probation.
- The Peterborough office was too small to accommodate the sentence management team and lacked enough space to see people on probation. That meant not all practitioners could work from the office at the same time or even meet as a team. The building was unwelcoming for people on probation and a dispiriting place for staff to work in.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings relating to high RoSH 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.

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## Feedback from people on probation

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User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 41 people on probation as part of this inspection.

- Most people (83 per cent) said probation practitioners had taken time to understand their needs during induction appointments. That reflected our inspection of casework, where we found 66 per cent of assessments sufficiently considered the personal circumstances of people on probation.
- People (83 per cent) largely reported that travel distances from home to their appointments were reasonable. That indicated that probation offices were well located in the communities where people generally lived.
- Almost everyone (98 per cent) reported that they felt safe when visiting probation offices. Reception areas in Cambridge, Huntingdon and Wisbech were modern and welcoming. In Peterborough, there was additional security provided because the probation office was situated in a court building.
- Only 46 per cent of people agreed they were involved in devising their sentence plan. That mirrored our inspection of casework, where we found people on probation had only been meaningfully involved in 54 per cent of cases.
- A third of people (33 per cent) who needed mental health support felt the service was good or very good. That was concerning because most of the people involved in the survey said they needed mental health support.
- Just over half (54 per cent) of people agreed that the PDU had been supportive and helped with their rehabilitation. One person said, for example, that their experience was 'non-judgemental' and that their probation practitioner 'helped me access services'. However, another person said:

*"They don't actually support me with anything, it feels like a tick-box exercise to me and I do not think they actually care whether I am rehabilitated or not."*

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## **Diversity and inclusion**

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### **Strengths:**

- A PO had been seconded into the local Youth Justice Service in Peterborough. That supported the risk management of children convicted of serious offences and their transitions from youth to adulthood.
- The PDU had established links with the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia to support the risk assessment and management of men who had committed sexual offences who wished to continue practicing their faith.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The PDU was not fully representative of the communities it served. Only seven per cent of staff in the PDU had declared themselves to be from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background, compared to 15 per cent of the local population. A considerable number of staff had not declared their ethnicity and there had been no work undertaken by leaders to explore what was causing that.
- Women on probation did not have dedicated spaces and times to report, except in Cambridge. That meant they were sharing waiting rooms and facilities with men present, which was not always appropriate or safe. The experiences of women on probation in the PDU had not been formally captured or acted upon, despite there being an established approach to engaging with people on probation.
- The PDU had not considered whether adaptations to its services were required for young people on probation and people of black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage. That meant the PDU lacked insight into whether the services it was delivering were suitable for all people on probation.

## 2. Service delivery

### P 2.1. Assessment



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

Our rating<sup>2</sup> 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?	54%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	51%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	8%

- Most of the assessments we inspected (71 per cent) sufficiently analysed people on probation's readiness to change. Assessments generally (73 per cent) identified people's strengths and factors which might reduce reoffending. Practitioners were routinely talking with people on probation about their personal circumstances and taking them into account.
- The overall quality of risk assessments in the cases we inspected was exceptionally poor. Far too many assessments were completed without enquiries being made to children's services or the police in relation to domestic abuse. Where enquiries had been made, the intelligence received was often not used in assessments. That meant assessments were almost always incomplete or inaccurate.
- Only one of the 15 high and very high-risk assessments we inspected was sufficient in relation to keeping people safe. That was very troubling because those cases presented the most immediate risk of harm to others in the community and should have been a high priority for the PDU.
- Just three of the 36 risk assessments we inspected which had been completed by POs were sufficiently focused on keeping people safe, despite them holding the highest risk cases<sup>3</sup>. Not enough was being done by leaders to check POs were applying sufficient skills and knowledge to their casework.

<sup>2</sup> 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.](#)

<sup>3</sup> The findings relating to cases by practitioner grade 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.

## P 2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating<sup>4</sup> 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:

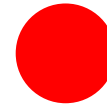
Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?</b>	44%
<b>Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?</b>	59%
<b>Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</b>	<b>37%</b>

- Many of the plans we inspected (68 per cent) appropriately identified which services might reduce the likelihood of people on probation offending again. Practitioners were often making plans to refer people on probation to relevant services, including accommodation support, drug and alcohol workers and help in relation to emotional wellbeing.
- In some of the cases we inspected (59 per cent), practitioners were setting out what could realistically be achieved with people on probation during their sentences. That was related to people on probation being engaged in conversations in what they wanted to change in just over half (54 per cent) of cases.
- Risk management planning was not setting out what was needed to control risk often enough. In some cases, people had been released from prison without the necessary planning having taken place in advance to keep people safe. There were further examples where risk management plans had not been completed at all, including in cases where there were concerns about safeguarding children from harm.
- Contingency planning was insufficient in 33 out of 57 relevant cases of the cases we inspected. That included cases where people on probation were a risk to people they were living with. Not enough planning was being done in some cases relating to changes of circumstances of people on probation, including domestic abuse perpetrators starting new relationships or losing their housing.

<sup>4</sup> 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.](#)



### P 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

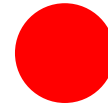
Our rating<sup>5</sup> for implementation and delivery is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
<b>Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?</b>	54%
<b>Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?</b>	34%
<b>Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?</b>	<b>25%</b>

- Work to engage with women on probation was sufficient in most cases we inspected (80 per cent). Likewise, work with women to support change was mostly sufficient (70 per cent) and much better overall than equivalent work with men. Practitioners were often effectively and sensitively building trust with women on probation and coordinating work between agencies.
- Practitioners were maintaining effective working relationships with people on probation in most cases we inspected (75 per cent). That included responding to diversity needs, including by booking interpreters and offering flexibility to people with mental health conditions.
- The services of other agencies were not drawn upon in 27 out of 46 relevant cases we inspected. Not enough people on probation in the cases we inspected were being provided with sufficient support in relation to education and employment. Support to resolve drug and alcohol misuse was insufficient in too many cases, often underpinned by poor information exchange between the provider organisation and the PDU.
- Not enough attention was being paid to protecting victims in 40 out of 55 relevant cases we inspected. Information sharing in relation to safeguarding children and domestic abuse was insufficient in most cases. Home visits were not being carried out often enough. Too often, practitioners were not corroborating their understanding of risk to others or taking action to reduce it.

<sup>5</sup> 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.](#)

## P 2.4. Reviewing



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

Our rating<sup>6</sup> 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'
<b>Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?</b>	58%
<b>Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?</b>	42%
<b>Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</b>	<b>29%</b>

- Practitioners were sometimes reviewing progress and adjusting how sentences were being delivered. People on probation were involved in discussions about their sentences in just over half (51 per cent) of cases we inspected. Some practitioners had sought to re-engage with people on probation following recall to prison or enforcement action.
- Practitioners were not seeking information often enough from other agencies in relation to the compliance and engagement of people on probation. That meant practitioners often lacked opportunities to support and challenge people on probation.
- Written reviews of progress were not being completed often enough. When reviews were being documented in writing, they were not sufficiently reflective about how effectively the sentence was being delivered and what needed to change.
- Concerningly, practitioners were very often not responding swiftly or effectively to changes in the risk of harm posed by people on probation. In some 37 out of 50 relevant cases, adjustments were not made to plans of work in response to changes in risk. That included instances where children's services should have been notified about men being in contact with children who were at risk. In other cases, assessments and plans were not reviewed after people on probation were arrested for further offences. Risk levels of people on probation were sometimes being reduced and signed off by SPOs without reasonable grounds for doing so.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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## **Outcomes**

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### **Strengths:**

- Sufficient compliance was being achieved in 59 per cent of the cases we inspected. In principle, that meant people on probation in those cases were seeing probation practitioners often enough for their progress to be monitored and for support to be offered to them.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- None of the cases we inspected had fully improved factors related to their risk of harm. That was a consequence of poor-quality risk assessments and generally ineffective work to manage and respond to risk during the delivery of sentences.
- Insufficient progress had been made in most (69 per cent) cases on factors related to people's risk of reoffending. Too few cases were delivered with enough support to promote change and build on the existing strengths of people on probation.
- Marginal increases in the number of people in settled accommodation and employment or training took place. Practitioners were referring to the accommodation CRS provider, but most of those were cancelled without an outcome and there was widespread dissatisfaction with the service on offer. Not enough use was being made of links to the CFO hub to provide people on probation with practical support in relation to finding employment or training.

## Annexe one – Web links

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

A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website using the following link: [Glossary \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/glossary)