



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:
Nottinghamshire
The Probation Service – East Midlands Region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2025

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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

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Foreword

This was the first inspection of probation services within Nottinghamshire since the unification of the National Probation Services (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) in June 2021. Work has taken place to establish a positive, healthy culture for staff, and to stabilise the workforce. However, the overall quality of work to assess and manage people on probation against our four standards for casework was not sufficient, which resulted in an overall rating of 'Inadequate'.

Staff wellbeing was being prioritised by leaders across all sites and staff grades which meant the Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) had a strong identity and a cohesive team spirit. Morale was positive in most areas of the PDU despite the pace of change and challenges staff were facing. A well-established senior leadership team had forged good relationships with strategic partners and was well regarded. It was pleasing to see the PDU driven by the needs of people on probation, including through strong commissioning of health initiatives to improve quality of life and stability.

Despite recent stabilisation of the workforce, the PDU was still understaffed. The overall vacancy rate at the time of inspection was five per cent, but much higher for qualified probation officers (POs) at 18 per cent. Consequently, workloads were not always manageable, with staff having to cover work for colleagues either off work with sickness, or to compensate for vacant posts. Staff were also struggling with the impact of large scale, time pressured changes to process, which meant they were often fatigued and overwhelmed.

Although staff were positive about the support they received from managers, this was not always translated into sufficient work to manage people on probation and keep communities safe. The ratings across the cases we inspected were disappointing. Improvement was needed in the quality of work to keep people safe, which was insufficient across assessment, planning, implementation and review. Practitioners did generally understand the needs of people on probation and the factors which underpinned their offending behaviour but more needed to be done to consider, set out and deliver work to safeguard actual and potential victims from harm.

Nottinghamshire will be disappointed with the overall findings of this inspection, given its strengths in leadership and the transparent, cohesive staff culture. However, the PDU has strong foundations in place and with a focus on quality of assessments and casework, I am confident that the PDU will be able to deliver an improved level of service to people on probation in future.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Nottinghamshire PDU
Fieldwork started March 2025

Score **3/21**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership Requires improvement



P 1.2 Staffing Requires improvement



P 1.3 Services Requires improvement



2. Service delivery

P 2.1 Assessment Inadequate



P 2.2 Planning Inadequate



P 2.3 Implementation and delivery Inadequate



P 2.4 Reviewing Inadequate



Recommendations

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

Nottinghamshire PDU should:

1. ensure domestic abuse and safeguarding information is complete and analysed sufficiently in all cases to inform the quality of assessment, planning and management of people on probation
2. ensure all Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) cases are identified, appropriately managed and reviewed by managers
3. devise and implement arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of sentence management work delivered by practitioners with people on probation
4. review senior probation officer (SPO) tasks and responsibilities to ensure they have sufficient capacity to focus on the quality of work by practitioners to keep people safe
5. ensure that facilities to interview people on probation are safe, private and conducive to engagement.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Nottinghamshire over the period of two weeks, beginning 10 March 2025. We inspected 42 community orders and 18 releases on licence from custody where sentences and licences had commenced during two separate weeks, between 22 July 2024 and 28 July 2024 and 02 September and 08 September 2024. We also conducted 49 interviews with probation practitioners.

Nottinghamshire is one of six PDUs in the East Midlands region. It is predominantly rural and people on probation report to offices in Mansfield, Worksop, Newark and Nottingham city, with satellite reporting in Retford.

There are elevated levels of deprivation and unemployment in parts of the county, which are higher than the regional average. The county is not ethnically diverse, with 87 per cent of the population being white. The community is served by Nottinghamshire Police and the rate of reconviction mirrors that of the regional average.

The PDU comes under the governance of seven local authorities. Staff employed within the PDU provide a service to the magistrates' court in Mansfield, and the Crown Court in Nottingham. There are four prisons: HMP Lowdham Grange, HMP Nottingham, HMP Whatton and HMP Ranby, which is the local release and remand establishment.

The head of the PDU was well established and was in post prior to reunification. The deputy head of PDU joined the team eight months ago and was leading on performance work. The PDU was 95 per cent staffed overall, with a surplus of SPOs. This reflected some positive stabilisation of the workforce in recent months. The PDU was under probation prioritisation framework arrangements for two years due to understaffing, having come out of this in September 2024. These measures directed practitioners to deliver work with a reduced intensity and frequency, with some people on probation. However, improved overall staffing levels were masking some pockets of continued understaffing, for example, only 82 per cent of POs were in post when we announced this inspection.

Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) were provided by Nacro for accommodation support; Ingeus for personal wellbeing; and Nottingham Women's Centre for women's services. Services were provided by Change Grow Live (CGL) to support those with drug and alcohol needs.

Nottinghamshire PDU had a caseload of 1,053 people on probation who were subject to community sentences and 548 people who were being supervised on licence from prison. In total, 547 individuals were being managed in custody before release.

The Probation Reset policy was operational at the time of inspection. This meant that individuals had contact with their probation practitioner suspended for the final third of their supervision period. In cases where contact had been suspended after more than eight weeks' supervision, we applied our core standards and took a proportionate approach in making inspection judgements. We used an adjusted set of standards where contact had been suspended within eight weeks supervision or less. Of the 60 cases we inspected, 12 were subject to Probation Reset, with seven having the adjusted PDU standards applied.

1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1. Leadership



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The PDU culture was healthy. Its vision was to drive a culture of openness, fairness, and transparency. The head of the PDU was an exceptionally compassionate leader who embodied the vision, and this was reflected by staff across all grades. Belonging was incorporated into equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives to include staff from all backgrounds. A sense of fitting in was universally felt by staff. They described feeling valued, able to challenge and be challenged.
- The positive culture was fostering many of the qualities needed for effective probation work, including respectful challenge, sensitivity to individual needs, transparency and maintaining resilience.
- The PDU had a clear delivery plan, and staff were broadly aware of their responsibilities. There were clear routes for sharing information from the PDU and regional leaders and how this should be translated operationally. There was a focus on accountability and dealing with poor performance. Accountability meetings and effective practice meetings ensured senior leaders were sighted on what was working well and what required attention.
- The PDU was focused on the individual needs of people on probation. Semi-specialist practitioners for some groups of people on probation, including young adults and women, were working in teams known as pods. Leaders were commissioning services for people on probation from diverse backgrounds, based on an awareness of the social history of Nottinghamshire and how that was reflected in the profile of offending behaviours.
- Strategic partnerships were being harnessed appropriately. Senior leaders had for instance worked closely with the region to address relatively higher numbers of women on probation, and to increase access to alcohol treatment requirements, which was a key area of need in the local area.

Areas for improvement:

- Not enough people on probation were receiving support to resolve issues related to their offending, and work to manage risk of harm to others was not always sufficiently effective. Disappointingly, the strong culture of support for staff and priority cohorts of people on probation was mostly not reflected in our casework data as sufficient practice. Leaders needed to do more to improve work relating to keeping people safe and ensuring practitioners had the necessary confidence to address risks.
- The PDU did not have sufficient governance arrangements in place to oversee the quality of work delivered to people on probation and determine whether risks and needs were being managed sufficiently. Information from internal audits, performance data and accountability meetings mirrored the gaps found during our

inspection of casework. Staff required more support to understand what they should be doing to facilitate Rehabilitation Activity Requirements (RARs) and conversations with people on probation to manage their individual risks. Information disseminated to staff focused largely on the expected frequency of contact, structured interventions, and referral to other agencies.

- PDU leaders had not ensured that their expectations were being carried out by practitioners. Not enough was being done to improve low referral rates to partner agencies. Leaders had been unable to manage widespread fatigue related to national policy changes or to resolve a common feeling among staff of being overwhelmed with work. Those problems were contributing to insufficient delivery of work and management of risk. Communication to staff was regular and frequent during this transition but did not specify how practitioners should work differently with people on probation following a stabilisation and improvement in the number of staff working in the PDU.

P 1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The PDU had seen a stabilisation of the workforce over the past year and was operating under business-as-usual arrangements. This stabilisation was starting to have a positive effect on capacity, particularly around implementing new initiatives and training opportunities. Temporary deployment of practitioners had also been used appropriately by leaders to support pockets of staff shortage in particular offices.
- Appropriate allocation of cases was supported by detailed management oversight which identified the risk concerns and complexities at an early stage. Practitioners we spoke to felt they had the skills and experience to manage the cases we were inspecting.
- Senior leaders had worked to develop a diverse and integrated workforce. There was access to a range of staff networks and inclusivity was part of the fabric of the PDU. The staff group was representative with the local community areas across all individual characteristics except for gender.
- There were opportunities for staff to take part in recruitment activity and mentoring to enhance their professional development. Senior leaders were seeking feedback and coaching from junior staff under a scheme known as reverse mentoring, to support professional development for both front line and management staff.
- Poor performance was being managed effectively. Senior leaders were aware of gaps in performance in sentence management teams and were using well-established processes to drive more accountability.

Areas for improvement:

- The recent workforce stabilisation was not always leaving staff feeling that they had more capacity. New ways of working with cases needed to be underpinned by a strategy to upskill less experienced practitioners who had only worked under an exceptional delivery model. Their confidence to address risk in conversations and deliver interventions needed to be enhanced.
- Middle managers had high workloads. They were required to spend time dealing with administrative issues relating to human resources and other matters, which was reducing their availability to support and lead their teams. Administrators were also under resourced within their grade and needed more support and direction.
- The average annual working days sickness absence, particularly for POs, remained high and a source of strain on resources at both practitioner and middle-manager grade. No sickness absences were due to work-related stress, but the issue needed to be better managed because of the impact it was having on capacity overall.
- Aside from consistent oversight at allocation stage, management oversight of casework overall was poor. Only a third of inspected cases were found to have effective management oversight overall. Practitioners were not reading and actioning

tasks flagged by middle managers at allocation stage, and leaders were not checking that they had been followed up.

- Not all practitioners had access to good quality reflective supervision and case discussion. Some practitioners received inspection interviews warmly and wanted more in-depth discussion of cases with their managers. Reflective discussion opportunities were available in limited circumstances through the Offender Disorder Pathway and some SPOs were setting time aside for case discussions with practitioners, but these were not always being used.
- Practitioners were understaffed by 18 per cent for POs and 14 per cent for probation services officer (PSO) grades, which affected workload and capacity through decreased resilience in dealing with sickness absence, duty cover and the mandatory expectation that home visits needed to be carried out in pairs.

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:

- The PDU had a strong understanding of the needs of people on probation which included their social history and how those were linked to the types of offences commonly committed in the area. Services had been commissioned according to data and needs analysis, as well following Serious Further Offence (SFO) learning. Examples included a suite of support for staff under a stalking initiative which had recently been launched.
- Leaders had built strong links with the regional health and justice coordinator, which was enabling meaningful work on addressing health inequalities for people on probation. This included a recovery service for people from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, who were experiencing substance misuse. Work to improve ADHD and gambling assessments was ongoing, with an emphasis on those being principally health matters.
- Young adults were able to access partnerships seamlessly, with clear transition arrangements for children transitioning from the local youth justice service, and DWP employment support for integrated offender management (IOM) cases.
- PDU leaders had improved access to information about safeguarding children by drawing upon a strong strategic partnership with the local authority following a high profile SFO. The PDU deployed a case administrator to support the resources within the Safeguarding Children Information Management Team (SCIMT) and planned to second a probation officer to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) for more complex enquiries and conversations. This was only possible due to the recent stabilisation of the workforce.
- Strong working links between senior leaders, operational staff and the women's strategic lead were being used to understand why women were overrepresented among the Nottinghamshire caseload. Work was taking place with education professionals within the local authority to address the number of women receiving community sentences for not ensuring their child attends school.

Areas for improvement:

- Practitioners were not using commissioned services to support people on probation as much as they should have been. Referrals to CRS and to initiatives such as Reconnect were too low which meant information-sharing opportunities were being missed, and practitioners were not getting respite from high workloads. The head of the PDU was aware that staff were fatigued with change and dealing with systems that involved duplicating information. However, both our case inspection data and needs analysis work by the commissioning team suggested there were many unmet needs relating to personal wellbeing, and finance benefit and debt.
- MAPPA arrangements did not have the capacity to meet demand in a timely way, resulting in delays to cases being scheduled at Level 2. There was a reluctance from

key stakeholders to agree on the lowest level of management required, meaning cases were kept at Level 2 and 3 for long periods. Partners were holding additional meetings to address the delays, but numbers had not been significantly reduced.

- Arrangements to support the SCIMT team with safeguarding enquiries were not sufficiently resilient. The deployed staff member from probation was not able to meet the volume of requests for information and this intensified during periods of annual leave. There were insufficient contingencies in place to ensure that outstanding enquiries were actioned.
- Women on probation did not have equitable access to CRS women's services. The provider was based in Nottingham city centre, meaning that some women had to travel over 40 miles to access services. Co-location was happening successfully at the Mansfield office, but women in the north of the county received a service remotely. The Newark office was unable to provide women-only reporting due to their base in a municipal building.

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

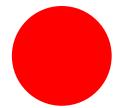
- Many local communities within Nottinghamshire had been deeply shaped by coal mining. Huge fluctuation in economic and employment opportunity impacted the county's identity as large numbers of families with a mining heritage had to seek alternative employment and training. Some of those communities now faced challenges such as substance misuse, community division and economic deprivation. The PDU was keenly aware of this history and how it impacted people on probation. It had recruited people who formerly worked in the coal mining industry. Senior leaders, along with the health and justice coordinator were building links with local health providers to address health inequalities in the most deprived communities.
- The healthy, inclusive culture and focus on staff wellbeing was a strength in this PDU. The PDU had trained three staff members in Trauma Risk Management (TriM) which is designed to identify and support staff members who have been exposed to traumatic events. It was being used as a response to SFOs and traumatic events outside of work.
- The PDU was made up of a diverse workforce which represented the local community in all areas aside from gender. Services had been commissioned for the small number of people on probation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, including a culturally sensitive substance recovery service called Bac-In and a semi-specialist team of practitioners working with foreign nationals. This ensured that although a relatively small cohort, they were still acknowledged and considered in how services were shaped.
- Staff were receiving reasonable adjustments they needed to remain safely at work, including assistive technology. Staff felt safe to discuss their neurodiversity. Strategic partnerships with CGL also facilitated ADHD assessments for all people on probation using the substance misuse service, which accelerated access to treatment in a way that was responsive to their needs.

Areas for improvement:

- Although the PDU had a clear awareness of the local community's history and current needs, this had not extended to a focus on shoplifting at the time of inspection. Shoplifting was associated with economic deprivation, substance misuse and chaotic lifestyles, and the PDU had some of the highest recorded offences of shop theft in the country. Funding had recently been secured through the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) office for increased routes to residential rehabilitation for this group of people on probation, which was encouraging but should have happened sooner. The PDU also has relatively high rates of breach, and this was reflected in case inspection, particularly in cases of shop theft, causing destabilisation and feeding into revolving-door short-term custodial sentences. Teams and practitioners would have benefitted from a clearer stance on managing these cases.

2. Service delivery

P 2.1. Assessment



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

Our rating¹ 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?	55%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	60%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	32%

- Most case assessments (48 out of 60) were informed by a domestic abuse enquiry with the police. However, in over half of relevant cases, practitioners either did not use this information to inform their assessments or insufficient information was received. In 44 relevant assessments we inspected, 26 did not incorporate information from social care on children linked with people on probation. While administrators had direct access to safeguarding systems, the level of information they could obtain was too basic and lacking in detail. This meant practitioners in most cases needed to contact the MASH for further information in order to understand the history and risks. We found this was not always happening.
- Most cases (74 per cent) drew out and analysed the appropriate factors underpinning the offence for which the person on probation was serving a sentence. Assessment of desistance factors was an overall strength of casework, with two-thirds of cases doing so at a sufficient level. Consideration of diverse needs and protected characteristics, along with the impact on offending and engagement were also considered in most cases.
- Assessment of the risk factors towards potential victims was only completed fully in 23 of 56 relevant cases. Similarly, two-thirds of cases did not consider available information to strengthen their assessment of harm. That included examples of practitioners not always consulting pre-sentence reports, management oversight or youth justice reports associated with their case. This resulted in many cases having a partial view of the risks posed by the person on probation.

¹ 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.](#)

P 2.2. Planning



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

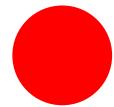
Our rating² for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	50%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	72%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	48%

- Planning to reduce reoffending and support desistance was strong and was a strength for the PDU. Three-quarters of cases had identified the work needed to address the person on probation's offending behaviour. Practitioners also identified work which would build strengths and protective factors in two-thirds of cases.
- Not enough cases set out how protected characteristics and diversity would be respected and taken into consideration when delivering the sentence. This was disappointing considering the positive work that took place at assessment to identify and analyse these characteristics.
- People on probation who were subject to Probation Reset within eight weeks of their sentence or licence commencing were more involved in planning than those subject to longer periods of supervision. Probation practitioners did so in nearly three-quarters of relevant cases. The PDU had resources well prepared, such as letters to the person on probation explaining how contact will change, lists of support agencies and a document listing circumstances which would require contact with probation to resume.

² 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

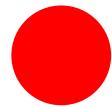
Our rating³ for implementation and delivery is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	52%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	45%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	35%

- Practitioners were fair, sufficiently demonstrating flexibility to personal circumstances in most cases when trying to engage people on probation. This included work to prepare for suspension of contact under reset and responsivity to diverse needs, such as home visits and travel warrants for people on probation with mobility issues.
- People on probation who were subject to reset arrangements, with shorter supervision periods were sufficiently prepared for their contact ending. Most relevant cases were clear on their responsibilities while their supervision was suspended, and sufficient services had been identified to provide ongoing support.
- The delivery of work to address desistance and reduce reoffending was low in most cases and a weakness for the PDU. The biggest gaps in provision were in relationships and thinking and behaviour. The majority of cases that needed it were missing this work, either through a lack of constructive, challenging discussions with their practitioner, or through accredited programmes not starting swiftly enough. Not enough cases were completing work to safeguard children and victims of domestic abuse. This mirrored some concerns at assessment stage. Some work was delivered, largely through CRS referrals, or practitioners themselves, but this was not happening in enough cases, or at the level required.
- Less than half of the people that needed it received sufficient help with alcohol and drug misuse. Although this area of need was more likely than others to be addressed in relevant cases, there were still too few cases receiving the substance misuse intervention they needed.

³ 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 rating⁴ for reviewing is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	63%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	52%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	39%

- Not enough cases involved a review of circumstances when new risk information became known. In 29 of the 55 relevant cases we looked at there was no consideration of these changes nor adjustment to the ongoing plan of work. This mirrored assessment stage, where we found probation practitioners had a partial view of the circumstances which limited the action that could be taken to safeguard victims from harm.
- Just under two-thirds of cases involved the practitioner sufficiently supporting compliance and engagement where there had been changes to circumstances. Cases subject to a shorter period of supervision prior to suspension under reset were also reviewed sufficiently in more cases. All relevant cases involved clear communication where changes to their contact arrangements were needed.
- Just over half the cases inspected had sufficient review of work to help people change. Practitioners were doing this as part of enforcement procedures, and upon arrest or reconviction. Arrangements to manage people with suspended supervision under reset also contributed to sufficient informal reviewing of circumstances.

⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table.

Annexe one – Web links

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

A glossary of terms used in this report is [available on our website](#).