



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

Derby City PDU

The Probation Service – East Midlands Region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2025

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Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Hannah Darby 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.

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

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

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This publication is available for download at: <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk>

ISBN: 978-1-916621-94-7

Published by:

HM Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

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Foreword

Derby City Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) was last inspected by HM Inspectorate of Probation in 2023, when it was rated as 'Requires improvement' overall. Since then, the PDU has experienced a sustained period of instability, with high sickness rates, workload pressures and staff vacancies, including significant turnover in senior leadership.

At the time of this inspection, it was pleasing to see some stability across the PDU and a staff group engaged and motivated to do what was best for people on probation. However, it was disappointing that not enough progress had been made against the previous inspection recommendations. In our inspection of casework, we found that the quality of work to keep people safe and the quality of management oversight remained insufficient. Several important factors contributed to this, including an inexperienced practitioner group, whose learning needs were not fully understood, and ineffective management oversight, especially in relation to keeping people safe. As a result of our findings, the PDU has been rated as 'Requires improvement' overall.

Despite the challenges, we saw some promising work on desistance across our casework inspections, including use of interventions to support the needs of people on probation. These were the strongest results seen in our recent probation inspections. Both the interim head of service and deputy had been in post less than eight months at the point of inspection, but their strong and impressive leadership were widely acknowledged across the PDU. We saw evidence of this in the PDU's strong relationships with partners and in the feedback from staff across all grades.

The head of service and deputy shared an ambition to do what was best for the PDU, its staff, partners, and people on probation. This had led to an open, professional culture that embraced, and acted on, feedback from people on probation and staff. Learning and development were promoted across the PDU and quality assurance activity was being undertaken. At the time of the inspection fieldwork, workloads were becoming more manageable. Managers were taking a proactive approach to addressing staffing vacancies and sickness absence. The PDU offered a variety of services, and leaders ensured these were promoted and co-located to meet the needs of people on probation.

Given the challenges on the ground, I am encouraged to see that many of the building blocks for success are in place at Derby City. I have no doubt that the PDU can build on these results to continue to make improvements.



Martin Jones CBE

HM Chief Inspector of Probation Ratings

Ratings

Derby City PDU

Fieldwork started February 2025

Score **7/21**

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership

Good



P 1.2 Staffing

Requires improvement



P 1.3 Services

Good



2. Service delivery

P 2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



P 2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



P 2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



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.

Derby City PDU should:

1. improve the quality of the work to assess and review risk of harm, ensuring that practitioners obtain and use all available information
2. provide effective management oversight to enhance and sustain the quality of the work with people on probation and keep people safe
3. conduct a learning analysis to understand the skills and knowledge of the practitioner group and implement a system to address any gaps
4. use management information to identify any gaps in service provision and any inequities in the quality of service delivery to people on probation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds
5. improve the use of interventions and services for people on probation with protected characteristics.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Derby City PDU over a period of two weeks, beginning on 24 February 2025. We inspected 18 community orders and 16 releases on licence from custody where sentences and licences had commenced during two separate weeks, between 29 July and 08 August 2024 and 19 August and 25 August 2024. We also conducted 31 interviews with probation practitioners.

The city of Derby is in the south of the county of Derbyshire and has an estimated population of 266,460. It is a unitary local authority area and is served by Derbyshire Constabulary. Derby is ethnically diverse, with 26.2 per cent of residents identifying as being from an ethnic minority background. It has varying levels of deprivation. The proven reoffending rate across Derby between April 2022 and March 2023 was 27.2 per cent.

Derby City PDU is one of six PDUs in the East Midlands probation region. The PDU has one office, the Derwent Centre, based in the city centre and a magistrates' court. Derby has a Crown Court managed as part of Derbyshire PDU. There is one approved premises in the PDU, which is managed regionally. Derby City PDU manages a caseload of approximately 1,325 people on probation and in custody.

Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) for accommodation support were provided by Nacro; services for personal wellbeing, and finance, benefit and debt advocacy were provided by Ingeus; and services for women were provided by Women's Work. The PDU had commissioned a mentoring service for people on probation who identified as Black, Asian or minority ethnic. Local services were in place for those requiring support for substance or alcohol misuse.

The Probation Reset policy was operational at the time of the inspection. This meant that individuals' contact with their probation practitioner was 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. Where contact had been suspended within eight weeks or less, we used an adjusted set of standards. Nine of the 34 cases we inspected were subject to Probation Reset, and we applied the adjusted PDU standards in five.

Derby City PDU was previously inspected in February 2023, when it was rated 'Requires improvement'. While we saw some encouraging practice that focused on engaging people on probation and addressing factors likely to contribute to their offending, the quality of the work to keep people safe was inconsistent. The PDU's progress against previous recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

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.

Good

Strengths:

- The PDU was led by a strong senior leadership team. While the interim head of service had been in role less than six months at the time of inspection fieldwork, her positive footprint had been felt across the PDU by staff and partners. Staff described her as visible, pragmatic, approachable and compassionate; she was also realistic and informed about the key pressures and areas of improvement for the PDU, and the impact of the pace of change on staff and middle managers.
- The PDU's priorities and ambitions had appropriate links with the regional and area executive director's priorities of protecting the public, reducing reoffending, enabling people to be their best, having an open learning culture, transforming through partners, and modernising their estates. Fifteen out of 20 respondents to the staff survey indicated that the PDU's vision and strategy drove the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation always or most of the time. The PDU intends to create a local business plan, which will set key priorities and provide clear direction to staff.
- Clear governance structures were in place. Leadership meetings were held regularly, which provided an opportunity to communicate key operational messages and focus on the PDU's priorities. This facilitated two-way communication between leaders and staff. The deputy head held monthly performance and accountability meetings with senior probation officers (SPOs). These focused on practitioners' performance and delivery, and had driven up the PDU's performance across key performance indicators. There was a clear feedback loop to the regional accountability meetings. This helped to ensure that performance and delivery priorities were aligned, both strategically and operationally.
- The PDU had strong strategic and operational relationships with partners and key stakeholders across Derby City. The head and deputy head of service sat on several boards to drive improvements in service delivery for people on probation. These included the Safer Derby Board, Criminal Justice Board, and Youth Justice Board. Partners had confidence in the PDU's leadership and the contributions it made under these arrangements.
- The PDU's culture was warm and promoted openness. Staff across all grades felt able to suggest ideas to managers and senior leaders about change and to provide constructive challenge when they didn't feel things were working well. In our survey, 13 out of 20 respondents indicated they considered that the culture of the PDU promoted openness and constructive challenge. The use of cross-grade forums promoted ownership and engagement of staff in developing the PDU.

- PDU leaders had taken a deliberate, strategic and informed approach to meeting diverse needs in relation to some protected characteristics. For example, semi-specialist practitioners were working with people who were subject to alcohol and drug treatment requirements or to Integrated Offender Management (IOM). A practitioner was seconded to the youth justice service to support children who were transferring to adult probation services. The PDU had also sustained a partnership with the Women's Work CRS provider. There were services to support people on probation with mental and physical health needs, through the health advocacy service Reconnect, and the Intensive Integrated Risk Management Service (IIRMS) hub, which supported the resettlement of people with complex mental health needs.
- Leaders paid appropriate attention to staff wellbeing. Mental health allies were available for informal peer support, and supervision routinely included discussions about personal wellbeing. Both practitioners and SPOs had access to reflective practice sessions, which were run by the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) clinical lead. A service was also available to support staff who had experienced trauma. Twelve out of 19 respondents to the staff survey indicated that sufficient attention was paid to their wellbeing always, or most of the time.
- Engaging people on probation (EPoP) activity was strong and embedded. The PDU had established EPoP forums and recruited people with lived experience through Going Forward into Employment (GFIE) and the Probation Employment Programme (PEP). People in prison serving life sentences were able to attend their community lifer panels. There were plans to use the EPoP forum to identify how the PDU could better support Black, Asian and minority ethnic people on probation. EPoP activity was driving improvement in service delivery; for example, feedback from a female EPoP forum was being used by leaders to develop a specialist women's team.
- PDU leaders were strong advocates of co-location and collaborative partnership working. This had driven up referrals, delivery of services and positive outcomes for people on probation. This was reflected in our casework data.
- The senior leadership team understood the key risks to service delivery, reviewed them regularly, and put appropriate mitigations in place. They had taken action to address the most prominent risks to operational delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- The strengths evidenced in the leadership approach across the PDU were not translating into the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation. This was shown in our case inspection findings for keeping people safe, especially across assessment and reviewing activity. The quality of this work was affected by factors including ongoing learning needs, an inexperienced practitioner group and ineffective management oversight.
- Leaders were focused too much on driving up performance targets, and too little on the quality of work to keep people safe from harm. This was reflected in our casework and discussions with practitioners. Whilst there was an embedded process to share domestic abuse and safeguarding information, it was not always being used by practitioners.
- While the PDU had access to needs analysis data for people on probation, activity to discuss solutions to gaps in service provision and to consider any disproportionality in the quality of service delivery was in the early stages of

development. Services for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people on probation were limited. At the time the inspection was announced, approximately 13 per cent of people on probation identified as Asian or Asian British. PDU leaders had not explored whether existing services needed to be adapted or new services needed to be commissioned to meet the needs of this group of people.

- Not enough progress had been made against previous inspection recommendations. Our inspection of casework found that the quality of assessment and management oversight to keep people safe remained insufficient.

P 1.2. Staffing



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Since the last inspection, the PDU had recruited a deputy head of service. The deputy head was previously an SPO in Derby City. The introduction of this role had been invaluable in reducing the workload of the PDU head and in bringing consistency and local knowledge during a period of instability in PDU senior leadership.
- At the time the inspection was announced, 99 per cent of staff were in post across all grades. The PDU was fully staffed at SPO grade and had 99 per cent of probation officers (POs) in post. The PDU had received approval to recruit four staff to fill probation services officer (PSO) vacancies.
- The PDU's workload at the time of inspection fieldwork was reasonable. At the time of the inspection announcement, POs were at 89 per cent of capacity on average, with PSOs at 98 per cent and Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) staff at 47 per cent. In our staff survey, 13 out of 19 respondents indicated that their workload was manageable. Of the practitioners we interviewed, 78 per cent felt that their workload was manageable.
- PDU leaders focused appropriately on workforce planning, performance management and ensuring a proactive approach to address sickness absence. Regular attendance management meetings between the head of PDU, SPOs and a HR business partner ensured that formal attendance processes were robustly managed. Sickness absence was improving. At the point of inspection fieldwork, there had been a significant reduction in long-term sickness cases.
- SPOs had been provided with HR clinics to support them in addressing performance, understanding reasonable adjustments and managing attendance. This helped to ensure decision-making was balanced and fair. Most staff we spoke to told us that reasonable adjustments were made when required, and this was also confirmed by respondents to our staff survey.
- The PDU promoted a learning culture. Protected learning time (PLT), where the office was closed for half a day a month, provided space for professional development and learning and the quality development officer (QDO) provided one-to-one support for practitioners. A shared document was accessible for all staff. This included information and links to PLT sessions, mandatory learning and priority learning. Over 80 per cent of staff had completed essential core training, including training on safeguarding, domestic abuse and Prevent.
- The PDU had increased its focus on the quality of risk assessment through Quality Reset (QR). QR identified deficits in practice, for example where practitioners had not identified all victims or analysed risk of harm as part of their assessment. This aligned with our casework inspection findings. In response to emerging themes from this activity, the PDU had used PLT to focus learning. For example, they

focused on Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA), as QR indicated that only 10 per cent of SARAs were being completed in full.

- PDU leaders were actively managing workloads in response to local pressures. SPOs had a local weekly meeting where they made decisions on case allocation. This included considering the volume and type of cases practitioners could manage with their experience and skills. All respondents who answered the question in the staff survey indicated that they were allocated cases for which they had appropriate knowledge, skills and experience, always or most of the time. The recent decision to allocate case administrators (CAs) to sentence management teams was seen by most CAs as positive. They felt this had supported a more even distribution of workload tasks across the team. This was a positive decision given that at the time of the inspection announcement only 88 per cent of CAs were in post.
- A local decision for the designated PQiP SPO to manage new PSOs for their first nine months in post meant the progress and learning needs of this staff group could be monitored closely. In addition to the regional offer, trainee POs and new PSOs were given additional shadowing opportunities, inputs from local partners and local briefings delivered by the PQiP SPO. Examples of this include attending lifer panels and receiving input from CRS providers and IIRMS.
- People with lived experience of the criminal justice system were routinely deployed in the PDU. They provided feedback and ideas through the EPoP forum and contributed to staff training and induction. They also delivered pre-programme sessions for structured interventions; attended peer-to-peer symposiums, where people with lived experience who had subject matter expertise shared their experience with people on probation; and 'Transition and Hope' sessions, which were created to promote positive attendance, engagement and compliance from people on probation.

Areas for improvement:

- At the time of the inspection announcement, the PDU had significant gaps in staffing at PSO and CA grade. Only 77 per cent of PSOs, excluding PQiPs, and 88 per cent of CAs were in post. This had resulted in some PSO-eligible cases being managed by POs. There had been a high turnover of reception staff.
- At the time of the inspection announcement, the number of days lost to sickness for staff was high, and higher than the regional average. Staffing shortages at PSO grade were made worse by the long-term sickness of some staff. The average number of working days lost to sickness each year for PSOs in the PDU was 33.
- Senior leaders and middle managers indicated that a higher level of day-to-day support and oversight was required to compensate for lack of staff experience. However, the existing level of supervision and management oversight was not improving or sustaining the quality of the work with people on probation or keeping people safe.
- In response to a high-profile serious further offence, the majority of SPOs had adopted an approach where they discussed every case in every supervision. However, this did not provide enough time or allow for depth of discussion to identify gaps in safeguarding and public protection practice. This was reflected in the casework we inspected, where management oversight was insufficient,

ineffective or absent in 62 per cent of the cases. SPOs were not always checking whether instructions given to practitioners had been carried out.

- PDU leaders did not fully understand staff's learning needs. They had carried out a staff learning needs analysis, but this was ineffective because only a small number of staff participated. Understanding the learning needs of staff was important, as the PDU had an inexperienced workforce, with most practitioners having accumulated less than four years of service.
- Administration and reception staff reported a less positive experience with induction and learning opportunities. Most of this group felt they were often the last to know about changes that affected their role and were uncertain about what learning and development opportunities were open to them.
- While PLT was in place, practitioners were sometimes using this time to complete administrative tasks or catch up on operational tasks, rather than using it for learning. PLT was not easily accessible to court or administrative staff.

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.

Good

Strengths:

- Across all aspects of our case inspections, we saw a consistent focus on supporting people on probation to stop offending. Probation staff and external providers were delivering work to address factors related to offending and build on strengths and protective factors.
- People on probation benefited from a range of innovative services to reduce their risk of reoffending and harm. The PDU co-commissioned the High-Risk Offender Accommodation Support (HiRO) project, a specialist service that provided supported housing to the people on probation assessed as posing the highest risk of harm who were at risk of homelessness. The Reconnect service provided continuity of care for people with physical and mental health needs who were due to be released from prison. It offered advocacy, signposting, and engagement with community health and support services.
- We saw examples of effective collaboration and joint working between probation and other service providers. Probation staff regularly attended Multi-Agency Rough Sleeping Hub (MARSH) meetings. This multi-agency approach brought together partners and practitioners to develop a tailored, person-centred response to rough sleeping. Probation staff supported information-sharing and release-planning for those at risk of homelessness, following the introduction of SDS40, the government's early release scheme.
- The PDU had a positive relationship with the Derby City Youth Justice Service (YJS) at board and operational level. This ensured there was an effective and timely system for identifying children and transferring them to adult probation services. This was supported by an SPO lead, seconded YJS staff and semi-specialist practitioners who had been identified in the sentence management teams.
- IOM partnership relationships between the police, probation and other agencies were strong. This was supported by the IOM hub, which was a 'one-stop-shop' supervision arrangement for the fixed cohort, who commit persistent serious acquisitive crime offences. Information-sharing was consistent and timely. A semi-specialist model was largely in place, with IOM practitioners managing the majority of cases.
- Core OPD pathway services were well established. Probation practitioners were able to consult OPD staff for advice on cases, and to work with some cases jointly. The IIRMS hub was also well established, and delivered individually tailored and psychologically informed interventions directly to people who satisfied the criteria for the OPD pathway. The IIRMS hub worked with men and women on probation, and both PDU staff and people on probation were positive about the support it offered.

- The PDU had seen significant improvements in its CRS referral rates. The number of people on probation with an identifiable need who had an appropriate referral had doubled between September 2023 and October 2024 across accommodation; finance, benefit and debt; and personal wellbeing. This was reflected in the case inspections, where CRS had been offered in 22 out of 28 relevant cases inspected. This had been achieved through strong co-location arrangements, CRS probation link workers, and promotion of services, driven by PDU leaders. The PDU had a sustained partnership with Women's Work, which provided support, advice, and interventions to women with complex needs. The CRS providers felt that the co-location arrangements improved relationships and information-sharing, and had increased the quality and number of referrals.
- Services were delivered in an appropriate and accessible location in the centre of Derby. The probation office was co-located with staff from St Andrew's House, who provided alcohol and drug treatment, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and IOM police. Other providers who attended the probation office regularly included Reconnect, Ingeus, Women's Work, the IIRMS hub, and Creating Future Opportunities Evolution, which provided employment advocacy for people on probation with complex needs.
- Completion rates for accredited programmes had improved over the last 12 months. The rate for accredited programmes for individuals convicted of a sex offence was 85 per cent, compared with 71 per cent in the previous 12 months. The rate for programmes other than those for individuals convicted of a sex offence was 65 per cent, compared with 56 per cent in the previous 12 months. These were both higher than the regional completion rates.
- The PDU had staff based in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), who had access to information on child safeguarding, and a dedicated PSO who had access to information on domestic abuse held by the police. This ensured that information was shared in a timely manner, which was evidenced in our casework inspections.

Areas for improvement

- Diversity factors and issues of disproportionality were not sufficiently addressed in the way that services were delivered. The PDU had commissioned the English Football League to offer mentoring for people on probation who identify as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. However, referrals to this service were minimal. Although meetings were taking place with commissioning managers to discuss potential solutions to gaps in service provision, and to consider any disproportionality in the quality of service delivery, this initiative was at an early stage.
- The PDU did not offer a female-only reporting time at the probation office, although there was a designated supervision space for women. PDU leaders recognised that there were gaps in service provision and were working to create a more bespoke probation offer for women. For example, they were establishing a women's team that would support future co-located working at the Women's Work premises.
- Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTRs), Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs) and Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) were available. However, the PDU did not have access to ATR or DRR data to monitor referrals, engagement, and successful completions. Active ATR and DRR figures were low

compared with the drug and alcohol needs of the caseload. Waiting lists for MHTRs meant that there were delays for people on probation in accessing these services.

- While the Reconnect and OPD services were available to support people on probation with mental and physical health needs, these were underused. The OPD team acknowledged that there was a two-month waiting list for a case consultation for people on probation with an identified need.

Diversity and Inclusion

Strengths:

- The PDU had relevant data to understand the profile of people on probation and its workforce. At the time of the inspection, 26 per cent of the population of Derby identified as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. In Derby City PDU, 21 per cent of the workforce identified as being from a minority ethnic background, and 29 per cent of people on probation did so. Therefore, in terms of ethnicity, the workforce was representative of the caseload and population in relation to this demographic.
- The PDU workforce was also representative of the caseload in relation to declared disability.
- Children transitioning to adult probation services were supported by an established probation officer based in the local YJS. This ensured there was an effective and timely system for identifying children and transferring them to probation services.
- A range of services were available to meet the diverse risks and needs of people on probation. These included services for women, services to support people with mental health needs and physical disabilities who were being released from custody, and accommodation services for high-risk people on probation.
- Services for women were provided by Women's Work. These included access to safe spaces, counselling and OPD pathway interventions to meet complex needs. Creche facilities for children were also provided.
- The PDU had established a cross-grade diversity and inclusion group, called 'Better Together', which was run jointly with Derbyshire PDU. It was positive that this group was due to be split, enabling the PDU to focus on the needs of Derby City and support the creation of a local diversity and inclusion plan. This group sought to represent staff and improve their experiences, and promoted shared ownership of the diversity and inclusion agenda.
- The unpaid work service provided female-only placements and was responsive to the cultural calendar. For example, it made provision for people on probation to pray and considered the needs of those who may be fasting for Ramadan.

Areas for improvement:

- Apart from the English Football League, there were no other specialist services available for Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities. The English Football League service was significantly underused.
- Diversity was not considered consistently across casework. While practitioners often identified protected characteristics, they did not consistently analyse them or consider them across assessment and planning activity.
- The gender balance of the workforce was disproportionate, compared with the gender of people on probation. 84 per cent of staff identified as female compared with 11 per cent of people on probation. The PDU did not have a designated young adults' or women's team. There was no women-only reporting time, although there was a women-only supervision space. PDU leaders had recognised the gaps in service provision. They were establishing a women's team, and were intending to create a young adults' team.

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?	59%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	65%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	35%

- Practitioners were not always paying sufficient attention to the diverse needs of people on probation. People on probation were asked about their diversity characteristics in 27 out of 34 cases, but only 45 per cent of assessments analysed the protected characteristics of the individual and considered their impact on the individual's ability to comply and engage with the requirements of their sentence.
- We saw practitioners positively engage with people on probation when assessing them during their induction appointments. In more than two-thirds of cases (24 out of 34) the person on probation was meaningfully involved in their assessment, and it was evident that their views had been taken into account.
- Some PDU staff were based in the MASH, which ensured there was timely access to information on child safeguarding. Practitioners obtained sufficient child safeguarding information in 68 per cent of cases. Disappointingly, this information was only used to inform the initial risk assessment in 17 out of 30 cases. This meant that assessments did not always sufficiently set out and analyse the risks to all children.
- Similarly, while practitioners obtained information on domestic abuse in most cases (88 per cent), they used this to inform the initial risk assessment in only 20 out of 29 relevant cases. This meant that assessments did not always sufficiently set out and analyse the risks to all potential victims of domestic abuse.

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.](#)

- In too many cases, the assessment focused mainly on the risks and victims associated with the index offence. Past behaviours and convictions were not considered, nor were wider domestic abuse or safeguarding concerns. This resulted in assessments that did not consider everyone who might be at risk from the person on probation. In only 13 out of 34 cases did the assessment identify and clearly analyse any risk of harm to others. In only 11 of 33 relevant cases did the assessment analyse any specific concerns or risks related to actual or potential victims.

P 2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

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?	59%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	85%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	53%

- Planning activity consistently focused on the most important factors in reducing an individual's risk of further offending and building on their strengths and protective factors. Plans also clearly outlined how the requirements of the sentence would be delivered and by whom.
- Where planning was most effective, we saw examples of the person on probation being engaged in drawing up the plan with the practitioner. There were discussions about the work that would be completed during their sentence, and how this would be delivered. In 66 per cent of the cases inspected, the person on probation was meaningfully involved in planning, and their views taken into account. A similar proportion of people on probation who responded to our survey (11 out of 17) agreed that they were involved in creating their sentence plan with their probation practitioner.
- Disappointingly, in only 56 per cent of cases inspected did planning sufficiently address the individual's risk of harm factors and prioritise those that were most critical. We saw examples where practitioners had not considered how all victims would be safeguarded or identified interventions to address risk of harm factors.
- Plans to manage risk of harm did not draw on the knowledge, expertise and plans of other agencies, such as the police and social services. In only just over half of the cases inspected did plans make appropriate links to the work of other agencies involved with the person on probation.
- Contingency plans were not sufficiently robust in most cases. This was largely because practitioners did not always fully consider and analyse the risk of harm to others or identify appropriate actions to take if there was an increase in risk. In many cases where this information was absent, it specifically linked to inter-familial violence, domestic abuse and child safeguarding concerns, all critical to public protection.

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.

Requires improvement

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?	65%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	74%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	56%

- We saw practitioners focusing on developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with people on probation. In 72 per cent of cases practitioners worked flexibly with people on probation, taking account of their personal circumstances. This included being responsive to those with physical, learning and mental health needs or caring responsibilities, and those whose first language was not English, and adapting how they delivered the sentence. Twelve out of 17 respondents to our people on probation survey agreed that they had been able to have appointments with their probation practitioners at a time that suited them, taking into account factors such as work or childcare.
- In most relevant cases practitioners took appropriate steps to try to manage risks of non-compliance. This included engaging other services to support the individual, having joint appointments with other services working with the individual, engaging with the individual's family, and challenging non-engagement and poor behaviour. Where these steps failed, we saw appropriate enforcement action being taken.
- Assessing and planning activity was translating into sentence delivery. In 72 per cent of cases, practitioners delivered the services most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance. In 76 per cent of cases, delivery of services built on the individual's strengths and protective factors.
- PDU leaders had focused on collaborative partnership working through co-location arrangements and promotion of services. This was driving up the use of interventions delivered by external partners for Rehabilitative Activity Requirements. In addition to the one-to-one and group work interventions

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.](#)

delivered by the PDU, we saw 13 interventions delivered by CRS, 14 by partner agencies and two by voluntary providers. We saw interventions delivered by Reconnect, HiRO, the IIRMS hub and drug and alcohol services.

- However, while interventions were being delivered, practitioners were not consistently engaging with external partners to discuss and understand the progress of the person on probation. The involvement of other organisations in delivering services was sufficiently well coordinated in only 16 out of 25 relevant cases.
- Practitioners gave enough attention to protecting actual and potential victims in only 18 of 32 relevant cases. They did not always act on information about outstanding further offences, disclosures made by people on probation about their relationships and contact with children, or other activities that should have caused concern, or report this information to relevant agencies such as the police and children's services.

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?	61%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	66%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	35%

- People on probation were meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement in nearly two-thirds of the cases we inspected. This included collaborative discussions about the individual's progress during and on completion of interventions. In 18 out of 28 relevant cases, reviewing was informed by input from other agencies working with the person on probation.
- In most cases, reviewing activity sufficiently focused on supporting the person on probation's desistance. In 17 out of 28 relevant cases, practitioners identified and addressed changes to factors linked to further offending. This included practitioners referring individuals to services to address accommodation instability and homelessness, financial hardship, deterioration in mental health, and substance misuse.
- Practitioners did not pay enough attention to reviewing risk of harm to keep people safe. Reviews identified and addressed changes in factors related to risk of harm in only 10 of 28 relevant cases. Practitioners did not carry out timely or effective reviews of the individual's risk in response to disclosures about, for example, substance misuse, contact with children and new relationships, or information from the police about risk of harm.
- Where other agencies were involved in managing the person on probation's risk of harm, reviewing activity was only informed by the necessary input from them in 14 out of 30 relevant cases inspected. This included substance misuse services, accommodation services and social services.

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.

Progress on previous recommendations

Previous recommendation	Action taken and impact	Categorisation	Improvement still required?
<i>From previous Probation Service inspections</i>	<i>Briefly describe action taken and impact</i>	<i>Sufficient progress/ Some progress/ No progress</i>	<i>Yes/no If yes, consider repeating the recommendation</i>
Improve the quality of risk of harm assessments and analysis, ensuring all available information is accessed and utilised	<p>Quality assurance activity had been conducted on cases through Quality Reset (QR) activity. This work included looking at the quality of risk assessment practice. In response to emerging themes from this activity, PLT had been used to focus learning. For example, the PDU had focused on Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA), as QR indicated that only 10 per cent of SARAs were being completed in full.</p> <p>However, our inspection of casework found that the quality of work to keep people safe in assessment remained insufficient.</p>	No progress	Yes
Improve the quality assurance and management oversight arrangements of all casework, ensuring practitioners apply professional curiosity	<p>All established SPOs had attended SEEDS2 for managers.</p> <p>Quality assurance activity had been conducted on cases through QR activity. The impact of this activity had not yet been determined.</p> <p>However, our inspection of casework found the quality of management oversight remained insufficient.</p>	No progress	Yes

Ensure that interventions necessary to improve desistance and reduce reoffending and risk of harm are provided in all case	<p>The PDU had seen significant improvements in its CRS referrals rates. Across accommodation, finance, benefit and debt, and personal wellbeing, the number of individuals with an identifiable need having an appropriate referral had doubled between September 2023 and October 2024. This was reflected in the case inspections, where CRSs were being offered in 22 out of 28 relevant cases inspected. The PDU had achieved this through strong co-location arrangements, CRS probation link workers and promotion of services, driven by the leadership. The PDU had a sustained partnership with Women's Work, which provided support, advice, and interventions for women with complex needs. The CRS providers felt that the co-location arrangements improved relationships and information-sharing and had increased the quality and number of referrals.</p>	Some progress	Yes
Ensure appropriate management information is available to analyse and consider any potential disproportionality in the quality-of-service delivery to people on probation from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.	<p>The PDU had access to needs analysis data for people on probation. However, activity to discuss solutions to gaps in service provision and to consider any disproportionality in the quality of service delivery was at an early stage.</p> <p>Services and pathways for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people on probation were limited. The PDU had commissioned a service from the English Football League (EFL) via the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF). This offered mentoring, action-planning and ongoing support around mental and physical health for people on probation who identify as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. However, referrals to the service were minimal.</p>	Some progress	Yes

Annexe one – Web links

- Full data from this inspection and further information about the methodology used to conduct this inspection is available [on our website](#).
- A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website using the following link: [Probation Inspection - Glossary of terms](#)